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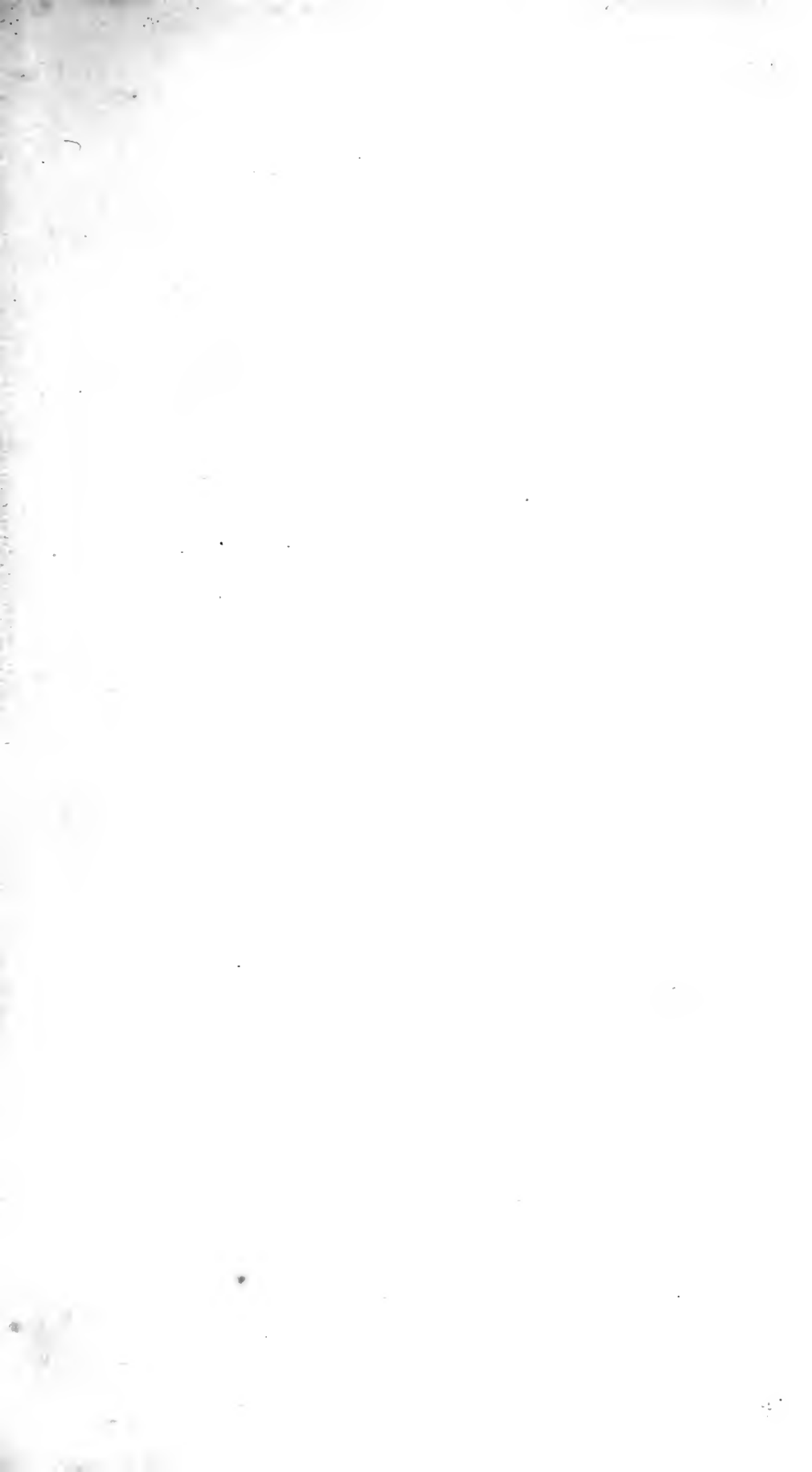
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would have opened it, and welcomed him within its gloomy walls! Ay, welcomed him to the darkest cell they had, and the heaviest fetters they could place upon his limbs!

"What now?" said a rough voice, as Claude tapped at the wicket in the outer door of the prison.



THE SCUFFLE WITH THE OFFICER AND SERVANTS NEAR THE LODGE.

"A letter for the sheriff."

"Oh, is that it? Who is it from, eh?"

"The sheriff will find out that when he reads it, perhaps; and as it is not for you, it don't matter."

"Oh, indeed, that's the way you come it, is it, stupid?"

"Yes, idiot!" said Claude.

The man as he opened the wicket to admit him, looked as though he would uncommonly like to knock him down ; but when he found that the stranger was about a head taller than himself, he thought it would be as well to let that part of his desire rest.

"The sheriff won't be here yet awhile," he growled.

"Oh, won't he, Jem !" said another man, who was sitting yawning upon a stone bench. "You forget that Dick Turpin is to be scragged this morning, and that he will be here early on that account."

"Do I forget it ?" said the surly gate-keeper. "It would be no fault of yours if I remembered nothing else, for I do not think you have spoken of nothing else since the trial. What is to you, I wonder, about his being scragged, that you are so highly interested about it ?"

"It's nothing to me personally," said the other turnkey, "only I'm sorry for the poor fellow, that's all."

"You are ? And pray, why ?"

"Because, to tell the honest truth, he hasn't had fair play, and that's a fact. They have hung the poor fellow, or are going to hang him, because he has a bad character, and not for what he has done, and that's what I don't like. It ain't English-like, and it won't stand the thinking of, in my opinion."

"In your opinion ?" screamed the other. "Ha ! ha !—In your opinion ! That's a good idea ; your opinion is of a vast deal of consequence, I daresay. Hilloa ! here's the sheriff's carriage already. Look alive all of you. The sheriff !—The sheriff ! Ring the Governor's bell at once, and tell him. It is time to look about us now, and the less you saw about your opinion, old chap, and about what you think is fair and what ain't, the better for you."

"I don't care," said the other, "who knows my opinion. What's fair is fair, and what ain't, ain't, and I sharn't say black's white to please anybody, no not if all the sheriffs in England were to be railing at me for it. They can but give a fellow the sack, and that I don't care a straw about."

A rattling knock at the door of the prison now announced that the sheriff's footman was determined his master's presence should be known with *eclat*, and according to custom.

The whole door was thrown open, and the sheriff, with his gold chain of office round his neck, made his appearance. He looked in a great fluster, did that sheriff, for he detested the job of being present at a hanging. It distracted his equanimity for the rest of the day.

"Come—come," he said. "Is everything ready now ? Don't be behind-hand with anything. Let it be all done as soon as possible. A coldish raw kind of morning, too, it is. Come—come, be quick all of you."

"A letter for you, sir," said Claude, stepping forward and presenting the hangman's mission to the sheriff.

"Now really, my man, how can I be troubled with letters now ? Here am I roused up in the cold upon a most disagreeable office, and people push letters into my hand the moment I get to the jail. Upon my word it is too bad—too bad, indeed. I really cannot attend to it."

"But, sir—"

"Poh ! poh ! Don't trouble me—go away. Leave the letter, or come to my office after the execution, for I cannot be troubled with such an affair just now really. Dear me, who is it from that they send to me at such a time as this, eh ? Who is it from ?"

"The executioner !" said Claude.

## CHAPTER CCI.

THE EVENTFUL MORNING COMES TO AN END.

WHEN Claude communicated the word, executioner, everybody looked rather aghast ; and above all the others, the sheriff appeared to be rather staggered.

"What do you mean ?" he cried. "What nonsense is this that you tell me

that the executioner has written a note when he has to be heard directly? and, indeed, bless me, he ought to be here now."

"Yes, sir," said a turnkey, "so he ought."

"And pray, sir," said the sheriff, who was quite prepared now to quarrel with everybody upon the smallest possible notice, "and pray, sir, who requested you to make a remark?"

"I beg pardon," said the turnkey.

"You beg pardon, sir? How dare you beg pardon, I should like to know?"

This the turnkey found to be rather unanswerable, and he got out of the way as quickly as possible.

"Ah!" continued the highly indignant sheriff. "A pretty thing, indeed, that I am to come here at such a time in the morning as this, upon the most troublesome and onerous duties, and then to be spoken to in such a way. Come, you fellow, are you quite sure this is from the executioner?"

"He gave it to me himself," said Claude.

"Bless me. 'Tut—tut! what can it be about?"

"He is very bad."

"Bad—bad? I know he is bad. What do you mean by that? You don't mean ill, do you?"

"Yes, sir. Confined to his bed. Dying, it is thought."

"The executioner dying! The devil! Pray, sir, what right as he to die until he has done his duty here to day? I ask you or any reasonable man, if you are a reasonable man, which you don't look like, what right a low person has to die, when he is wanted to do something that nobody else likes to do as is likely to like to do?"

To this question Claude made no reply, and the sheriff bustled off with the letter in his hand, crying—

"Where is the governor—where is the governor? I must speak to the governor. Gracious Providence, where is the governor? Here's a pretty to do. I shall have to haug Dick Turpin myself, I suppose. Goodness gracious!"

Claude had the greatest possible difficulty to keep his countenance while the sheriff made such an undignified appearance, and when he had left the vestibule of the prison and some of the turnkeys laughed, Claude could not help joining with them.

"Is Dennis really bad," said one to Claude.

"Yes," said Claude. Dennis, was the executioner's name. "Yes, he is so bad that you won't see him here to day."

Claude thought that it was just as well, since they were willing, that he should be on moderately civil terms with the turnkeys.

"That's a pretty kettle of fish then," said one of them, "for Dick Turpin must be hung to day, and the question will be who is to do the job? I heard the recorder say that if nobody else would, the sheriff was bound to tuck up the fellow."

"Yes, he will have to do it," said another.

"I think not," cried a third; and then pointing to Claude, he added—"I don't think you have brought Dennis's letter here for nothing, my friend. You have no objection to act as his substitute, this morning?"

"None in the least," said Claude.

In a moment the turnkeys drew back from the immediate vicinity of Claude. It was astonishing to see the look of loathing that came on even those coarse men, at the idea of anything like contact with a hangman.

"Yes," added Claude, "if the sheriff don't like the job, as poor Dennis is ill, I am willing enough to do it, as I am out of work, unless any of you have a decided wish for the little bit of occupation."

"Oh, no—no—no!"

"Very well. I only mentioned it because of course I should feel very sorry to interfere with any of you; but if none of you like it, why I'm willing to do it for a consideration."

"You may depend upon it, my fine fellow," said one, "that there will be no great competition for the job, and you will have it, as far as we are concerned. I suppose Dennis will let you have all the perquisites? The clothes, and so on?"

"Oh, yes, so he said, and as I am rather indifferently clothed, I mean to put 'em all on when I get 'em."

"You do?"

"Yes. They tell me that Dick Turpin is somewhat about my size, and that he dresses well. I only hope he will put on his best suit this morning, and then when I go out of Oxford I shall look like a highwayman."

"Well, you certainly do take the matter about as coolly as anybody that I ever heard of. But here comes somebody. Now, Jack, what is it?"

A man rushed into the vestibule in haste, and said—

"The sheriff and the governor want to see the man that brought the note from Dennis."

"I'm the person," said Claude.

"Follow me, then."

"Ha! ha! all's right. I do begin to think now that I shall really get the job. Ha! ha!"

With this, snapping his fingers as though he were in great glee at the idea of getting the job of hanging a man and his clothes to put on afterwards, Claude followed the man, who was called Jack, through some dreary windings of the prison until they reached the door of an apartment of a semi-official character, in which the governor, the sheriff, and the chaplain, were engaged in earnest converse.

Jack tapped at the door, and the voice of the sheriff, evidently in great trepidation, cried—

"Come in!"

Jack opened the door and ushered in Claude, who made a clumsy sort of half insolent bow. The governor and the chaplain regarded him alternately, but the sheriff was in too fussy a condition to take much notice of him.

"Well, my friend," said the governor, "of course you know the errand you came here upon?"

"Yes, of course I do, and I made up my mind to it, or else I should not have come; but I don't much care about it, and if you have any objection, only say so and there's no harm done."

"Oh, no—no," cried the sheriff. "No objection, quite the reverse, my good fellow; don't think of going."

"Pray," said the governor, "who, and what are you?"

"That's a wide question," said Claude, "and I answer by saying I am a bad character."

"A bad character?" said the chaplain; "oh, dear me!"

"Sir," said Claude, "do you think that any man of a good character, and who cared much about his fellow-men, and who had any character or standing to lose, would come here and be a deputy hangman? I don't want the job, if you are particular about me. Find some one with a good character to do it. Here I am, a man, who for what he can get by it, and I hope you will be liberal, consents to be a hangman. Don't bother me with any questions. Let me get through the job, and then go about my business: or else say you don't mean it, and good morning to you."

"Oh, no—no," cried the sheriff. "Stop him! stop him! It's all right; of course I will be liberal. You shall do it, my fine fellow, and be asked no questions at all; and I will give you an extra guinea out of my own pocket, and put it down to the county—a-hem! Mr. Governor, we will not ask this highly interesting young man any questions, for, as he truly says, it is not everybody who might like the little job that he comes about."

"As you please, sir," said the governor; "of course, sir, you have the decision in the matter."

"Well, well, it's all right, I dare say. A man will do for a hangman without



a character, I rather think. Now, Mr. Chaplain, how is your prisoner this morning?"

"I am very sorry to say that he laughs at me," said the chaplain.

"Does he really? How very odd! Well, Mr. Deputy Hangman, you will be so good as to take care how you perform your duty. I hope you will not make any blunder at the last moment."

"Lord bless you, sir, no," said Claude, as he untwisted a rope from round his waist. "I thought perhaps I might have the situation, so I brought this with me, sir, and if you will hold your head on one side for a moment while I put the noose on, you will see how nicely——"

"Me! me! Oh, gracious no! Keep off! Keep him away! knock him down, Mr. Governor. Oh, dear—oh, dear, I'm all over of a profuse perspiration at the thought of such a thing. How dare you, you rascal, propose to put a rope over my neck? Do you know, sir, who I am, I ask you, sir?"

"I am only going to show you, sir."

"You were only going to show me, you rascal? Why could you not hang the chaplain or the governor?"

"I am quite willing," said Claude, advancing towards the chaplain, who had indulged in a quiet smile at the sheriff's trepidation, but who now started to the further end of the room and cried—

"Murder!"

"Go and wait in the vestibule," said the governor. "You will be sent for when you are wanted."

"Very good," said Claude. "It's all right, I hope, and no mistake. I shall be ready, gentlemen."

' We're all hanging—hang--hang—hanging,  
And we're all hanging at our house at home.'

I shall be ready All's one to me as long as it's a good job. Come, I say, old chap, they call you Jack, don't they? Can you get such a thing as a pot of ale?"

"I tell you what it is," said the man, "you make too free by half—I don't want your company; and I don't exactly suppose there is any one here who does. I don't think you'll find any gentleman on the lock in this place, as we'll dip his nose along with yours in a pot of ale; so just keep yourself quiet."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Claude. "Well, when your turn comes to be tucked up and I have the job, I'll give you a twist in the wrong place by placing the knot a little on one side, you may depend."

"Oh, go to the deuce!"

"So I will, but not yet. Ha! ha! I've got the job, and you will see me go off like a jolly highwayman in Dick Turpin's clothes, that you will. Rare spot that will be; I don't know but that I may call myself Turpin's ghost and take to the road myself. They say that he made no end of money by it and lives like a prince; and now and then when I want a little change of occupation, I can come here to see if there's a little bit of a job doing in the hanging way, and who knows but there may be?"

Claude made these remarks in the vestibule in a general sort of way, but it was quite evident that the turnkeys during his observations had made up their minds to give him the cut direct, for they none of them answered him, and one of them pretended composedly to whistle as though nobody was speaking.

If anything could, in the state of intense anxiety for the success of his scheme that he was in, have amused Claude, it would have been the conduct of the turnkeys of the jail; but he could not laugh in reality, although he executed two or three mock-peals of merriment, which had the effect of greatly annoying everybody.

The prison clock struck eight.

Claude counted the strokes, and scarcely had the last one died away when a man called out:—

"Where's the executioner?"

"Here!" said Claude.

"Come this way, then; you are wanted."

It was morally and physically impossible for any human being not to feel some amount of trepidation at this moment. The only fear that Claude had was that Dick Turpin, knowing him so well as he did, might recognise him, notwithstanding his disguise; and in the surprise of the moment, utter some exclamation that might have the effect of ruining the whole scheme; and now that he felt he was about to be introduced to Dick, he shook certainly.

The man led him through several gloomy winding passages until they entered a stone vaulted room, in which there were a number of persons. The heavy strokes of a hammer came upon Claude's ears, and he knew that the prison-smith was knocking off the fetters of Dick Turpin prior to his being led out to die. Claude felt that it would not do for him to exhibit by word or look the state of his feelings, and therefore, with the most admirable self-control, he kept all outward show of feeling down. He whistled as he entered the room in which there were all the persons now who had official concern with the execution.

The chaplain walked up to him, and in a tone of great severity, said—

"How dare you whistle when a fellow-creature is so near to his last moments, you wretched man!"

"Oh, well, I won't then," said Claude.

The sound of the smith's hammer effectually drowned the tone of Claude's voice, or else Dick might have detected him by it, and Claude had a faint hope that he would. But as nothing resulted from the few words that he spoke, that hope dissipated.

"All's ready now," said the smith, as he gave the last blow, and the irons fell to the floor with a clinking sound. "Good by to you, Dick Turpin, I have done my duty."

## CHAPTER CCII.

### OFF AND AWAY.—BAD LUCK TO THE HINDMOST.

"Good-by, my friend," said Dick, "and if ever we meet again in this world, I will thank you for doing it so gently."

The smith shook his head as he gathered up his tools, and muttered to himself—

"That ain't a very likely thing."

The chaplain now went up to Dick, and in a canting sonorous voice, into which he threw, Heaven only knew why, a powerful nasal twang, he said—

"Richard Turpin, I now expect from you a full confession that you are a hardened sinner, and a complete admission of the justice of your sentence. It is to be hoped, too, that on the scaffold you will advise everybody to work hard and go to church regularly, for fear they come to your disgraceful end."

"Then," said Dick, in a clear, cheerful voice, "you expect what you won't get."

"What?"

"I say you expect what you won't get. I do not acknowledge the justice of my sentence, for I know perfectly well that a man ought not to be hanged for stopping another on the highway without any violence; and as for the advice you expect me to give on the scaffold, I shall not give it."

"Hardened wretch, have you no regard for your immortal welfare?"

"Yes, every regard, Master Parson, but you and I differ as to the mode of showing it. If I say anything on the scaffold, it will be to advise the rich and the great, as they call themselves, to pay more attention to the poor man's comforts, and above all things, to pray the people not to be robbed by the parsons in the way they are."

"Oh, this is truly dreadful. You abominable sinner!"

"Don't begin calling me names, you humbug," said Dick.

"Come—come," said the sheriff, "this won't do at all. There's the prison-bell beginning to toll, I declare. Now, Mr. What's-your-name, come and pinion your man, and let us get this very uncomfortable affair over as soon as possible."

Claude stepped forward, but Dick did not look up to him at all. Claude got at his back to tie him with a cord that he had, and then inclining his mouth to his ear, he whispered—

"Dick! Hope—hope!"

"Hilloa!" cried Dick. "Who—what—no—no—no!"

The governor ran up to them in a moment, but before he could say a word, Dick added—

"It's easier now. There's no occasion to cut a fellow's wrists with the cord, Mr. Hangman, confound you!"

"Oh, was that all?" said the governor.

"About it," said Claude.

"It can't much matter now, Turpin, whether a rope is a little too tight or not. Half an hour will settle all that."

"Yes, by settling me, you mean," said Dick.

The governor nodded.

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you for the friendly hint, but yet I don't agree with the reasoning, and if you and I meet again in this world, I will put you in mind of it."

"Oh, pho! pho!"

"Very good. Have you done all your tying and trussing me up, Mr. Hangman? Confound you, any one would think that I was a fowl about to be roasted."

"Yes,—all's right," said Claude. "I don't want you to slip through my fingers, old fellow!—Courage, Dick."

"Yes," said Dick Turpin. "Yes. That's it. There's many a slip between the cup and the lip. Now, governor, you have not behaved badly to me upon the whole, and before I leave I beg to thank you for many kindnesses. Will you give me a cup of wine now, and will you give one to the hangman here? for I always said that before I suffered, I would take a drop with the executioner, if I could get it."

"If the sheriff has no objection, Dick Turpin," said the governor, "I will give it to you, and welcome."

"Oh, dear no," said the sheriff, "not in the least, and—and Mr. Governor, I could take a nice glass of port myself, I think; so bring a bottle and some glasses."

"I protest against this," said the chaplain. "This Richard Turpin is such a hardened sinner, that he is entitled to no indulgences whatever. He called me a humbug."

"And so you are," cried Claude,— "a hardened sinner," he then added, turning to Dick.

The chaplain shook his head, for although that was a very good turn off, yet he felt, and so did every one else, that the first part of the sentence was evidently intended to refer to him. The governor smiled slightly, and whispered to one of the prison attendants, who left the room, and in a few moments came back with a bottle of wine and half-a-dozen glasses on a tray.

"Help yourself, Turpin," said the governor. "I don't grudge you a bottle of wine at such a time as this."

Dick poured out two glasses, and handing one to Claude, he said—

"Here, my friend, it ain't your fault, you know, that you are in this rather uncomfortable situation, and come what will, I shan't forget you—not if they were to kill me by inches, and however I may be *clawed*."

Duval perfectly understood Dick's pun upon his name, and taking the glass of wine, he said—

"Here's better luck still," and then he tossed it off.

"Really, a-hem!" said the sheriff, who by this time had supplied himself with a glass, "I wish you, Dick Turpin, a speedy release. Upon my life, this is a capital drop of port."

"Is it?" said the chaplain. "I don't mind if I take only one glass, just to show, in fact that you see, in a manner of speaking, how humble and unaffected I am."

"Don't mention it," said Dick, giving the bottle a joggle that upset it with a smash on to the stone floor. The chaplain gave a stamp of rage, and the sheriff cried—

"All ready—it's only twenty minutes to nine now. All ready. Now, Dick Turpin, we will settle this little morning's work."

"I hope so, sir," said Dick.

"So do I," said Claude. "Come on."

A hasty procession was formed, and Claude took care to keep close to Dick, lest any one should observe how very ineffectually he had bound him. Indeed, the cord was put on in such a way, that a touch almost would be sufficient to remove it from the arm of the condemned one.

The sheriff, as in duty bound, led the way, fretting and fuming as he went, for at the bottom that little fussy sheriff was not a bad-hearted man, and he did not like to herald anybody to death. Then came the governor of the jail, who at the gate of it was formally to deliver up to the sheriff his prisoner; and then came the chaplain, reading the prayers for the dead aloud; and then came Dick Turpin, with Claude hold of his right arm, as though he was quite determined that his victim should not escape him. After them, came about half a dozen officials of the prison, who attended the sheriff upon such an occasion, as a sort of body-guard.

It was strange to note the effect produced upon a large concourse of people outside the jail, by the appearance of the different parties. The sheriff, who was not unpopular in the country, was received upon this occasion in silence. The governor heard a groan raised against him, for what, nobody knew exactly. The chaplain was received in silence; but when Dick Turpin appeared, with Claude close by him, the shouts, groans, hisses, and bravoes, rent the air.

Of course, all the complimentary effusions of mob outcry were intended for Dick, while all the discordant noises were hurled at the supposed hangman. It had got brooded about among the crowd that the regular hangman was ill, or dead, and that the person who was about to officiate was a mere volunteer; so the populace were determined that he should not remain in ignorance of the kind of estimation in which his office was held.

The cries and groans were truly frightful.

"This won't do," said the sheriff, pausing.

"No danger, sir," said the governor. "It's only at the new hangman. The more noise the mob make, the less danger there is in the people. It is always better, sir, to let them have their say."

"Well—well, let us go on; where's my horse? Oh, there he is. Woa!—woa! Hold him while I get on, somebody. Oh, dear, there he goes again. Thank you; that will do."

The sheriff got mounted with some difficulty; and never was the versatile nature of a mob so completely shown as at that moment; for whereas it had been all indignation and fury at the new hangman, just because the sheriff's horse moved aside twice as he tried to mount, the explosions of laughter were tremendous, and everybody seemed to be highly delighted.

It was during this amusing state of the mob that Dick Turpin, and Claude, and the chaplain of the jail, took their places in a cart that was at the prison door, and which now, surrounded by half a dozen officers on horseback, began slowly to move off through the dense mass of people that upon all sides surrounded it.

In the cart, too, was a coffin, in which it was kindly purposed to place Dick after his demise.

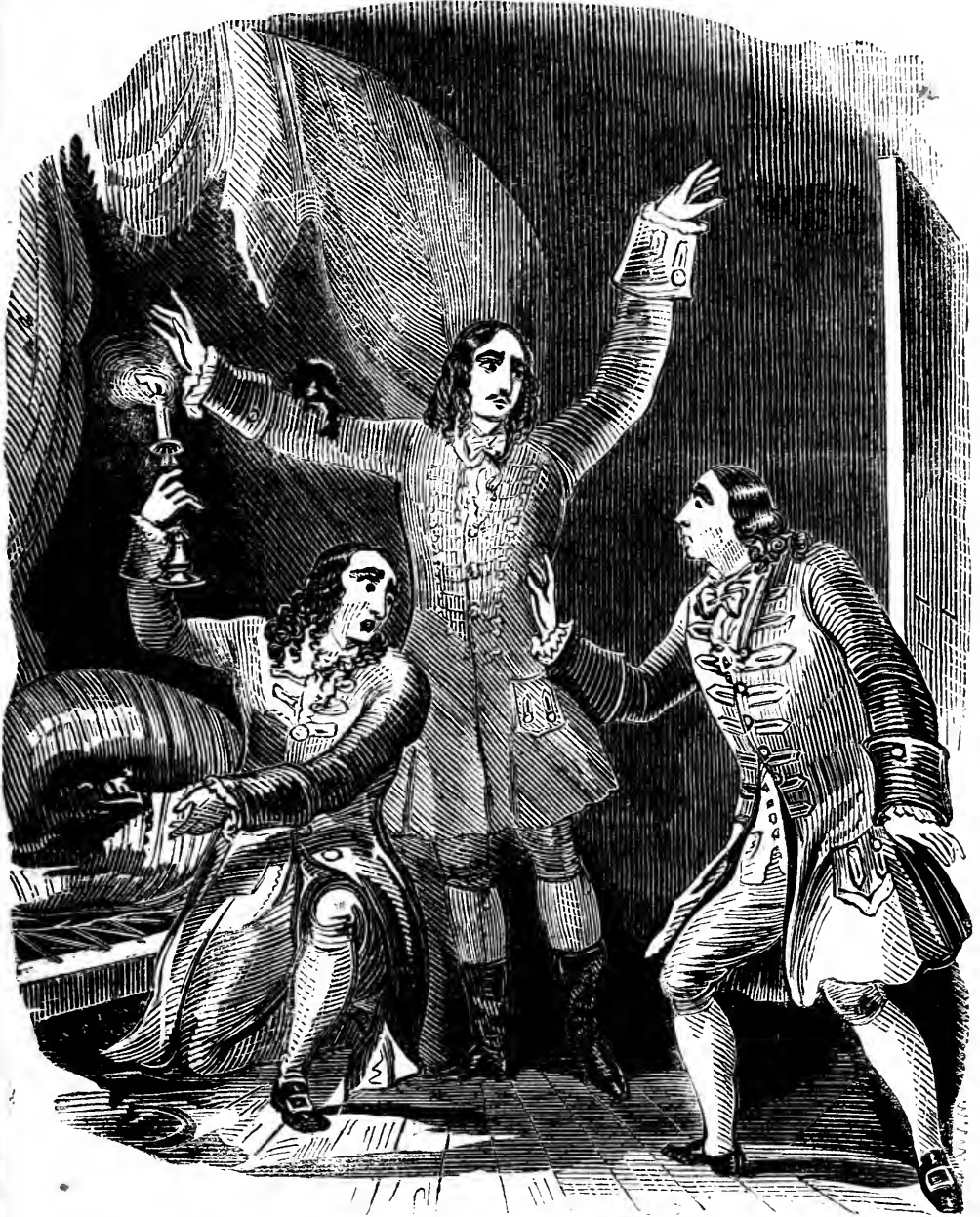
"That," said Dick, "is a lodging for a single man, that I would rather not take."

"Nor shall you," whispered Claude.

"Is it right, my dear friend?"

"Right."

Dick smiled, and drew a long breath. Amid the dim confusion that reigned, they might have freely enough discoursed, without any one being a bit the wiser, for the chaplain was very much discomposed by the jolting of the cart,



THE DISCOVERY IN THE ROOM OF THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

and was holding on to one side of it, with his teeth set in a manner that gave his mouth a kind of quiver that mightily amused the people. He then, as the cart-wheel next to him went over a large stone in the road, made a grasp at the coffin, to keep himself up, and down he went into the middle of the cart, with it upon his stomach.

This event produced a roar of laughter, and altogether, so highly comic an ex-



cution as that of Dick Turpin's promised to be, had not been seen to start from the jail at Oxford.

With no little difficulty the reverend gent aroused himself, and then he found that he had lost his book. Neither Claude nor Dick thought it prudent to say anything more to each other, notwithstanding these incidents seemed to leave them so much at liberty to do so, for they could not take upon themselves to say that the eye of some wary officer might not be upon them ; and, of course, now the slightest indiscretion would have upset the whole affair.

The driver of the cart found the parson's book for him, and he commenced again reading the burial service, to which Dick offered no sort of opposition, for to tell the truth he did not hear it, as his whole soul was absorbed in considering in what way Claude intended to attempt his rescue.

One of the mounted officers rode close to the side of the cart, and said to Claude in an imperious kind of tone—

“ I don't think you have pinioned the prisoner at all well.”

“ Haven't I ?” said Claude.

“ No. Don't you see ? Why one of his arms is almost, now, at liberty. You are a regular bungler, or else you are doing it on purpose.”

“ I'll soon settle that,” said Claude. “ If you don't like my way of doing things, come and hang him yourself, stupid.”

“ I shall keep an eye on you, fellow.”

“ Which one ?” said Claude ; “ the one that squints, or the green one ?”

The officer shook his head and moved off, a little in high dudgeon, and so the procession, which after all began to assume a melancholy aspect, went through Oxford. The people began to recollect that a man was being conveyed to death, and that it was not exactly the thing to laugh at it. Some cried out words of consolation to him, and more than one pressed up to the side of the cart, saying—

“ Turpin, do you wish anything done that we can do for you when you are no more ?”

“ Nothing,” said Dick. “ But I thank you all the same, and, dead or alive, I won't forget one kind word that is spoken to me on this day, by any one, let him be whom he may.”

Dick and Claude at this exchanged glances, and in the firm compressed lip and flashing eye of his friend, Dick read volumes of comfort and hope, and framed his spirit with the idea that he would yet live to see many a fair moonlight night, and to have many a dashing gallop upon his noble steed ; although how his rescue from all those who were intent upon his death, some from duty and some from inclination, was to be accomplished, he could not guess.

The windows were crowded along the line of the procession, and many a pitying tear fell from bright eyes, to see a human being in health and strength carried out to die ; and the crowd, each moment, increased in numbers until Claude wondered where on earth all the people could come from.

And still ever and anon, above all the sound of the feet of the people, and the tramp of the horses, and the rumbling of the cart, sounded the death-bell !

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### CHAPTER CCIII.

CONTAINS SOME VERY CURIOUS INCIDENTS.

CLAUDE kept his eyes well about him. Perhaps he hoped to get a glimpse of some friendly face amidst all the throng, but if he did so, he hoped in vain ; for most of the countenances he looked at, that happened to be close to the fatal cart, were actuated by curiosity more than by sympathy.

And so the cart went on.

Probably no malefactor had ever been led out to die through Oxford who had created such a sensation as did Dick Turpin ; and as the procession passed a large

hotel, the judge who had presided at Dick's trial, was seen at the open windows, taking a peep at the cortege. Dick's eyes happened, at the moment, to take that direction. Raising his hand, he pointed at him, crying out, with a loud voice—

"We shall meet again!"

The judge immediately retired from the window, but not before he had been seen and recognised by many in the mob, and the solemnity with which Dick uttered the words, made a deep impression upon many present. The chaplain turned to Dick, and said—

"What do you mean, you unhappy man, when you say that you and the judge will meet again?"

"Just what I say," replied Dick. "Did I not speak plainly?"

"Yes, as regards words; but where did you expect to meet the judge again, you miserable sinner?"

"On the road."

"The road to where?"

"To London, most likely."

The chaplain groaned, for he flattered himself that he was getting Dick into quite a religious discussion, and certainly he never was more mistaken in his life; for Turpin, with all the flutter of expectation in his breast that Claude and Jack would yet manage to save him even at the eleventh hour, was in a much worse mood than even if he had been listening to the chaplain's exhortations.

"It is to be hoped, that before you are turned off you will repent," he said.

"I promise you I will," said Dick.

Claude admonished Dick by a glance to be careful how he went too far in what he was saying, as in truth a very little more might have awakened serious suspicions that he had some hopes of a rescue, and in such a case the authorities might have made some move that would have effectually destroyed all Claude's plans and projects.

Turpin was silent, and pretended to hang down his head in deep thought; and soon now the procession came in view of the spot destined for the execution. It was a strange sight then to see how most of the crowd that had attended the cart through the streets from the jail, set off at a mad sort of gallop towards the scaffold, in order to get good places, so that, with the exception of the official persons, the cart was nearly deserted. Perhaps, if Claude could have foreseen such a thing, which it was quite impossible he could do, he would have thought that a better opportunity for the rescue than any other that could possibly occur, but as all the arrangements with Jack were made differently, he could not take the advantage of that favourable moment.

"Get on quicker," said an officer to the man who was driving, or rather leading the horse that was drawing the cart. "The road is even enough now, and we are behind time."

Upon this remonstrance, the man quickened his pace, and in the course of a few minutes the cart was stopped under the gallows, the mode in which Dick was to hang being the barbarous one of suspending him by the neck to the gallows as it overhung the cart, and then drawing the vehicle away from under him.

The crowd was intensely closely packed, but within six feet of the gallows' fool was Jack with the horses. He looked ghastly pale, and the moment his eyes fell upon Claude and Dick in the cart, the former saw him perceptibly tremble. It was not for any want of courage that Jack shook, but it was from his deep anxiety for the success of the plan.

"Now, Turpin," said Claude, as if speaking in his professional capacity. "Look up, will you?"

Dick started to his feet, and his eyes fell upon the horses and Jack. His own gallant and well-trying steed he knew in a moment, and a cry escaped his lips.

"What's all this about?" said one of the mounted officers.

"Ay, what's all this?" said Claude.

"It's rather a hard thing to die in such a way, in broad daylight!" said Turpin.

"Oh, stuff. Come, Mr. Hanzman's deputy, do your duty. It's high time you got you job over."

"Do you wish to say anything to the people?" said Claude to Dick, and he said it in such a tone of voice, that Turpin felt that it was a kind of invitation to him to do so. For the moment he could not very well make out what Claude wanted him to make a speech for, but then it suddenly struck him that it must be for the purpose of propitiating the crowd, so that the less impediment might be offered to his escape, the mode of conducting which, since he had seen Jack with the horses, was no longer a mystery to him.

"Yes," he said, "I should like to say a few words to the people."

"Stuff!" cried the officers. "Stuff! It can't be."

"Hear him! hear him!" shouted the people. "Let the poor fellow have his last say in this world! Hear him! hear him! Down with the bloodhounds!"

The officers looked a little alarmed at this demonstration upon the part of the crowd, and the sheriff turned quite red in the face, while the chaplain turned quite pale.

"Let him speak," said the sheriff. "It's usual enough. Let him say his say. Come, Turpin, speak if you will."

"Yes," said the chaplain, "and tell the people that ~~it~~ was bad company, and not attending your parish church, that have brought you to this disgraceful end."

Dick advanced to the side of the cart.

"Hold him," whispered the chaplain to Claude.

"All's right, sir," said Claude. "He shan't get away from me, you may depend upon that. I wouldn't now lose sight of him for a hundred-pound-note."

"My friends and fellow-countrymen," said Dick, "God bless you all, and your wives, and your little ones, and your pretty sweethearts that I hope you will be all happy with."

"Bravo!" cried the people. "Hear him! hear him! Down with the bloodhounds! Let him go! let him go!"

"Cut it short," said the sheriff.

"I have only to say," added Dick, "that I make a full and free confession that I have taken many a guinea from a rich man with no heart of compassion in his bosom, and given it to a poor one to buy food for his wife and his little ones that were crying in their wretched home from hunger. But God bless you all, my friends; you have come to see me hanged for it—hanged like a dog!"

The yell that burst from the throats of the crowd was perfectly terrific. If Dick Turpin had spoken for an hour he could not have said more to the purpose than he did. There was surely not a person present whose feelings and sympathies were not deeply enlisted in behalf of the prisoner; and some women who were at the outskirts of the crowd got quite desperate in their rage at the idea of his being hung, and they called loudly upon the men to rescue him.

The sheriff, chaplain, and officers all got alarmed; and Claude was called upon to proceed with the execution. Jack pressed forward with the two led horses close to the scaffold.

"Keep back, you fellow with the horses," cried the officers. "Keep back. Do you want to get into the cart?"

"No," said Jack. "But the duke don't like anything said to me, old fellow: I'm his own groom."

Such is the slavish submission of rank among all official persons in England, that even the groom and the horses of a duke were held something sacred, and no more was said to Jack.

"Now Mr. Whats-your-name," cried the sheriff to Claude. "Be quick—look alive there! Don't you see the people are all in a ferment?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Very well, then, turn your man off, and let me get back to Oxford as quickly as I can."

"This won't do," said the officer who all along had interfered so much in the affair. "This won't do. I am convinced now of what I have suspected all along,



and that is, that there is something wrong. I will shoot the first person who interferes with the due course of the law. Let them take the consequences."

As he spoke, this active officer took a pistol from his coat-pocket, and deliberately placed it at full cock.

Claude went to the edge of the cart and very mysteriously beckoned to this officer, saying—

"There is something amiss. I will tell you, but I don't want all the world to hear."

The officer inclined his head towards Claude, as he said—

"Well, what is it?—what is it?"

"This," said Claude, as he snatched the pistol from his hand, and then struck him from his horse with the heavy but-end of it. "This is what's wrong, and this is what's right."

To turn then and release Dick Turpin from his bonds was the work of an instant, and then taking him by the hand, he cried—

"Jump—jump!"

They both cleared the side of the cart and alighted outside of it among the people, while Jack made a sudden dart forward with the horses; and now a struggle ensued of a most fearful character, for the officers made an attack upon Claude and Dick with their short cutlasses, and two or three pistol shots were fired. The battle, however, did not last above a minute, for then with a roaring shout the mob made one rush, and cart, and gallows, and officers, and Dick, and Claude, and Jack, were all mixed up in one pell-mell of confusion.

By great good fortune, Jack kept the horses on their feet, and Claude would have been killed if Dick had not thrown his arm round him, crying—

"He is not a hangman. He is my friend, Claude Duval!"

"And I'm their friend, Jack!" shouted Jack, "and this is Dick's mare, Bess, and this is Duval's horse. A rescue—a rescue!"

The mob raised a delirious shout of satisfaction, and in a moment or two they fairly lifted Dick Turpin and Claude Duval to the saddles of their respective steeds.

"Off and away!" cried Claude, as he raised his hat in the air, and then flung it fifty feet above his head.

"Bless you all," shouted Dick. "I don't know how to thank you, but if I live I won't forget the men of Oxford, nor the pretty girls either."

The officers made a desperate attempt to rally, but they were beaten down, and disarmed, and, half dead, they were thrown into the cart one upon another. The sheriff had, upon the very first commencement of the row, turned his horse's head towards the city, and set off at full speed, and no doubt he would have got back first if his horse had not thrown him into a ditch.

"Clear the way!" cried Jack.

A hundred voices immediately added—"Clear the way!—Clear the way!" and then, as if by magic, a lane was made for the three friends to gallop through. Dick, with his face flushed, rode on, calling out his thanks to the people. Claude came next, laughing and waving his hand, and Jack was the last, and not a little pleased did he look.

When they all three got clear of the vast throng of people, Dick turned in his saddle, and gave a wild sort of shrill "Hurrah!" which was echoed by the mob in tones of thunder, and then off they went like the wind.

The moment they were gone, the people made another mad sort of rush at the cart and the gallows, and pulled both fairly to fragments in a few moments. The chaplain had his gown torn to shreds, and was glad to get back to Oxford as fast as he could; and the officers, whose horses had all been let loose in the fray, likewise fled the best way they could.

The only one who seemed to have received rather a serious hurt, was the one who had been so officious with his pistol, and who had been knocked down by Claude at the commencement of the riot. He was unable to walk, so the people very considerably propped him up against the road-side and left him.

There was a person hovering about the outskirts of the crowd, who, when the affair was all over, and the mob went streaming back to Oxford, was heard to say—

“Dear me. Well, who would have thought of such a thing as this happening? I really was never so much surprised in all my life. The idea of Dick Turpin not being hung, after all! Do tell me how it could possibly happen, somebody?”

The person who thus spoke, was no other than Mr. Zadoc, and having got hold of one of the well-shaken officers, he treated him to something warm and comforting at the first public-house they came to, and heard the account of the whole affair, to which he listened without once changing countenance.

Of course, Zadoc’s wish was to find out what the impression of the officer was concerning the rescue; but really this one that he had pitched upon was in such a state of mental and bodily confusion, that he could tell him nothing. In the meantime, our three friends were miles from the ancient city of Oxford.

## CHAPTER CCIV.

### ▲ PLEASANT RIDE TO LONDON.

“HALT!” said Dick.

Claude and Jack both drew up immediately. “What’s the matter?” said Claude; “anything amiss, Turpin?”

“No; but now that we are far enough from Oxford to set pursuit at defiance. I do not see why I should not shake hands with my best friends, and try, however inefficiently I may do it, to thank them.”

“None of that,” said Jack. “We don’t want to be thanked, Dick.”

“Well, but—but—”

“Come, come,” said Claude, “we have just done for you what we know very well it would give you great pleasure to do for us; and it’s such a grand thing to have succeeded in it, that that is quite congratulation enough for us; so don’t say another word about it, Dick.”

“Well,” said Turpin, “you may stop me for speaking about it, but you can’t stop me from thinking; and to my dying day I shall see how nobly and how gallantly I have been rescued from death.”

“There you go again,” said Jack. “He will have his say, Claude, do what we will, or say what we will.”

“I am done now,” said Dick.

“And a good job, too,” laughed Claude; “for Jack is evidently getting into a perfect fever. And now, tell me, Dick, if you knew me when I first came into the press-room of the prison?”

“Not a bit.”

“Then I was well disguised, and Zadoc did his part of the affair, after all, most admirably.”

“Ah,” said Dick, “Zadoc was in it? Then, I don’t wonder that everything went well. But you, both of you, forget that it is all guess-work to me, and that beyond the result, I really know little or nothing of the affair.”

Upon this, Claude briefly related to him the whole particulars of the proceedings after their failure in the attempt at escape from the prison; and Dick, shaking his head, said—

“Ah, I gave it all up as a bad job, when that rascal of a governor knocked me down in the prison-yard with the ladder.”

“He didn’t get much by that, though,” said Jack.

“He got what has perfectly satisfied him,” said Dick; “and so completely so, that he will not ask the justices for his next quarter’s salary. You shot him dead, Claude.”

"And he would have it," said Duval. "I did not use my pistol until he played the coward."

"Don't apologise, Duval. It was all right. But what do you both think of doing now?"

"Why, here is a very convenient spot," said Jack, "for opening the large valise at my back, and getting out some of our own proper clothing, for I don't like the idea of Claude and I going much further in this sort of costume, which can be described by so many people."

"Right," said Dick; "and if out of your stock you can lend me a coat of a different colour to that which I have on, I shall not be sorry to wear it, for you may depend that the hue-and-cry will be after us sharp and fast, before many hours are over our heads."

Claude fully agreed in these remarks both of Jack's and Dick's; and as they were close to a little clump of trees, where they would be quite hidden from any casual observation, Jack opened the valise, in which a number of articles of apparel were very closely packed, and in a very short time, they all three, by changing their coats and cravats, altered their appearance amazingly.

Dick Turpin was accommodated with a handsome scarlet coat belonging to Claude; and when they were all three mounted again, Claude cried out with a laugh—

"I think now that we might call upon all the world to stand and deliver!—Don't you, Dick?"

"It would not be a trifle that would stop us," said Dick.

"But," said Jack, "it would be anything but prudent just here; so come on, and let us get further off from Oxford; for you must recollect that any of the officers would know us in a moment, notwithstanding, by the alteration of our coats, we may not be described by people on the road."

"A carriage! A carriage!" said Dick Turpin, "by all that's good! A carriage!"

"Where?" said Claude.

Dick pointed in the direction of across-road, and there, sure enough, came cantering along one of those immense old-fashioned vehicles called a family coach—which, by-the-by, despite all the ridicule that has been cast upon them, are comfortable things. The coachman had a formidable wig on, and the footman the same, while both of them were too fat to dream of offering any resistance to anybody on the road. The horses were sleek and in capital flesh, and the whole equipage moved on at about the rate of five miles an hour.

Dick looked at Claude and laughed; but Jack interfered, saying—

"I cannot help thinking that it will be very imprudent to stop that carriage now, and so keep up a kind of ferment on the road. Of course, it will be the effect of pointing out exactly which way we have come. I would not think of it."

"Come—come, Jack," said Turpin, "withdraw your opposition, I beg of you, for I really want to see whether my imprisonment in Oxford jail has done me any harm, and I can't find out until I stop something or somebody on the highway."

"Well—well," said Jack, "if you must, you must. But let us all go, and then the affair will be sooner over. I will stay at the horses' heads while you two go to the carriage windows, and let me beg of you to be quick about it."

"All's right," said Claude. "Come on."

They then all three trotted along the cross-road so as to meet the carriage, and Jack, when they got sufficiently near, increased the speed of his horse, and cried to the coachman—

"Pull up, unless you want your brains blown out."

The coachman dropped his whip and turned purple in the face with the exertion he made to pull up the horses sharply.

"That will do," said Jack.

Claude went to one window of the carriage and Dick Turpin to the other, and

letting down both the windows at once they looked into the vehicle. It was full of young ladies, with the exception of one tall grim-looking female, with a pair of blue spectacles.

"Don't be at all alarmed," said Claude. "We are only highwaymen, ladies, that's all."

"Nothing more," said Dick.

The tall grim-looking female with the blue spectacles tried to rise, but struck the top of her head in a moment against the roof of the carriage, and then in a voice like a cracked trumpet, she screamed—

"Murder!—thieves!—murder!"

All the young ladies huddled together and uttered little shrieks, so that for a few moments it was quite impossible for either Dick or Claude to get a word spoken with a chance of its being heard. They quietly waited until the commotion had died away, and then Claude said in a bland tone—

"My dear young ladies, don't be alarmed. Where are you going to?"

"Oh, sir," said one, "to school; and this is Miss Blink, our governess, and so cruel to us."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes! yes!" cried all the girls, in a breath.

"And has she got any money?" said Dick.

"Not a farthing, as I'm a living sinner," said Miss Blink. "Not a solitary farthing; and if any young lady says I have, I'm afraid when we get to Minerva House Academy that something disagreeable will happen to her. I have not a farthing."

"Oh, dear!" said all the young ladies.

"Well," said Claude, "we, of course, want money, and however disagreeable it may be to you all, we shall have to search every one of you, and begin with your governess. Of course, if you hand us out something handsome, we shall be off in a moment."

"Oh, you cruel Miss Blink!" said one young lady, bursting into tears. "How can you have us all searched by two highwaymen, when you know pa paid you thirty pounds before you left the lodge."

"And my pa did the same," said another.

"Here's all I have," said another, as she tremblingly handed half-a-guinea through the open windows of the carriage.

"Keep it, my dear," said Turpin. "You don't suppose that we are going to take anything from any of you, surely, with your pretty faces? Don't begin crying, now."

"There's no danger to any of you," said Claude; "and only think what lots of letters you can write to all your friends and acquaintances about this adventure; you can all say how you saw Claude Duval!"

"Duval!" said all the young ladies, in a breath. "Oh, my!"

"Yes," added Claude, "I am that person. Jack! Jack!"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Get the large shears ready! The shortest way of searching an old lady here with spectacles, who has got sixty pounds, and won't give it up, will be to cut her skirts off."

Miss Blink uttered an ear-piercing shriek, and involuntarily laid hold of the lower part of her dress. "I'll give the money, you wretches!" she said. "I'll give the money! Here it is! Here it is!"

"That will do, madam," said Dick.

"And hark you," said Claude. "I have means of information about what I wish to know, that you little dream of; and if I hear that any one of these young ladies suffer any punishment or harshness in consequence of what they have said to-day, we will come to Minerva House, in the dead and still hour of the night, and make you remember it."

"Oh, thank you!" said all the young ladies.

"How good-looking he is," whispered one of them.

"Oh, very!" said another. "Black eyes!"

Miss Blink looked absolutely frozen with rage and terror. Her nose almost emulated the colour of her blue spectacles, and although she opened her mouth several times, like some expiring fish, she could not say another word.

"Good day," said Dick; and he closed the window, at which he had stationed himself. Claude smiled an adieu, and closed his window.



THE DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD BODY IN THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

"All over?" said Jack.

"Yes, Jack."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Coachman, the very bes' thing you can do is to move on as quick as is at all convenient to you and your laz' horses, to where you were going to when we met you."



"Hurrah! hurrah!" said a voice at some little distance behind the carriage. Hurrah! there are the rogues! Down with them! There they are! The squire will pay well! Come on! Charge at 'em! Never mind about hurting them! They deserve all they get!"

"What the deuce is all this?" said Claude.

"What, indeed?" said Dick.

"We forgot the footman," said Jack, "and he has run off and got a dozen of country fellows with pitchforks and hedge-stakes. By the promise of a heavy recompense, they had made good speed; and being told there were only three highwaymen, they thought that they could easily overcome them."

"Upon my word," said Claude, "we are going to be taken by storm by the yokels."

"It looks like it," said Dick. "What is to be done?"

"Frighten them, by firing a few shots over their heads. I don't wish to kill them, but if they give my horse a touch with one of their pitchforks, I won't answer exactly for what I may do then."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"Come on—come on," shouted the footman, "there are the rogues. You will have five guineas a-piece for taking them. Come on, and take the rogues. Lay hands on 'em. They are all cowards—Knock 'em down—down with 'em!"

"Will you be so good," cried Claude, "as to shut your mouth?"

"Ah! that's the worst of the lot. Stick him!" cried the footman.

Claude levelled a pistol at him, and fired. It would have been an easy thing for Duval to have hit him, had he felt at all inclined to do so; but he had no such intention, although he did not wish to run the risk of going so close to him as he did, for the bullet carried off his hat and wig.

The footman thought that he was shot, and he fell flat upon his back, crying out—

"I am a dead man!"

"Blaze away!" said Claude. "Kill them all!"

Both Dick and Jack now fired over the heads of the country fellows, who now lingered but just long time enough to enable them to throw down their pitchforks and hedge-stakes, and then, in a wild riot, head over heels, and impeding each other in their efforts to get away, off they set.

It was a decided defeat; and our three friends amused themselves by sending three more shots after them, which made them yell again with dismay; and there was not one of the party that did not in imagination feel the bullet running riot in his inside.

"Now," said Jack to the coachman. "Drive on."

He did so immediately; and Dick dismounting, took up the prostrate footman and threw him right into the middle of a stagnant ditch, where he came with a frightful splash, and then they left him floundering about, while they again sought the high road to London.

## CHAPTER CCV.

### MORE ADVENTURES ON THE OXFORD ROAD.

"THIS is not a very bad beginning," said Jack.

"Far from it," laughed Claude. "If we go on in this way, we shall soon make up the little expenses at Oxford."

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick Turpin; "but it would please me much better, if the whole of those expenses could be by any means got out of the Oxford authorities; and if it were to be years hence that I come across any of them, I shall insist upon it that they owe me the amount, and enforce payment."

"Yes; according to law," said Jack.

"The law of the road," cried Claude, "you mean. That is the best law for us. Its jurisdiction is undeniable, let the country be where it may, and the proceedings are all of the most summary character, and nobody is incommoded by any vexatious delays."

"That is true enough," responded Dick, "and I do believe it would save many a man many a heart-ache if, instead of being placed in the court of chancery, he would just put his money in his pocket, and come out on the road and have it taken from him by us, in a quiet and gentlemanly manner."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack. "It ought to be recommended in some of the public papers."

"Stop," cried Claude, "we are in luck's way surely to-day, as regards carriages, for here is another. Look, it will be in the high-road in a few moments."

They all looked in the direction that Claude pointed, and they saw a curricule, which was then a very fashionable description of carriage, coming rapidly on. Only one person was in it, and he was dressed up to the very height of fashion, and what was then considered to be elegance. The hat he wore was like that with which Mother Shipton is now accommodated, being the shape of a sugar-loaf, and the rest of his costume, to our present notions, was equally outrageous. The only things very natural about the whole affair were the horses, and they were as nature made them and intended they should look.

"Now, what do you think that fellow is?" said Dick.

"Can't say," replied Jack.

"Doubtful," said Claude; "but you two stay here while I go and stop him. It would perhaps terrify him to death, poor devil, if we were all three to appear at once upon him."

"Very good," said Dick. "Go on, Claude. We will consider this to be your adventure, now."

Claude did not wait to make any further remark, but trotting up to the corner of the lane, from which the curricule was about to emerge into the high-road, he cried—

"Pull up, sir, unless you want to be a dead man!"

At these words the dandified personage in the curricule at once dropped his reins, and slid off his seat on to the mat at the bottom of the curricule.

"Oh, spare my life!" he said. "Spare my life, my dear sir; do, if you please. Only spare my life! Oh, do!"

"Upon some conditions I will," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, anything, my dear sir. Anything in the world that you like. I suppose, my dear sir, that you are a highway-gentleman, are you not?"

"I am, and my principal pleasure is in cutting peoples' throats if they do not do as I wish them. In the first place, who are you, sir?"

"Oh dear. My name is Hannibal Popham, commonly called Hannibal Popham, Esq.; and I am going to the christening of a baby, I am, that belongs to Mr. Scatters, at the lodge about a mile on. They are new people in the neighbourhood, and have invited all the respectable people; and I am to be the godfather of the dear infant; and here's the silver mug that I have gone to the expense of four pounds ten shillings to purchase as a present for it."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. Here it is."

"Very good," said Claude, as he took the mug and put it in one of the capacious pockets of his coat.

Mr. Popham groaned.

"Now, tell me, sir," added Duval, "if you are personally known to the Scatters family?"

"Oh dear, yes; that is to say, they have heard of me, my dear sir, as a highly respectable resident in the county, but they never saw me, if you mean that."

"And what is the name of their place?"

"It is called Athens Lodge, and they do tell me that the Scatters have made it quite charming."

"Very well, Mr. Popham, now listen to me. I have nothing to do in this world, but to fulfil my promises, and I here solemnly promise you, that if you do not get out of your curriole and walk to Oxford, I will hunt you up if you be twenty miles in the bowels of the earth, and make your brains into a supper for a favourite cat I have at home. If you, however, do what I tell you, to walk to Oxford, and stay there an hour and then go home, your curriole will be restored to you, and I will give you a pass which shall for ever save you from being stopped on the road by any highwayman. Now, sir, which do you decide upon doing?"

"Oh, dear, can you doubt?"

"Decide, sir."

"I will go to Oxford, certainly; but I would rather ride, do you know, for I am not a very good walker. Perhaps you will let me have the curriole?"

"Decidedly not. There is a person, just at the entrance to Oxford, who will let me know if you pass his house, and if you do not, woe be to you. It is a red-brick house, with the name of Jenkins on the door, and as you pass you must throw a stone through one of the window-panes. Do you quite clearly understand that?"

"Yes, sir, quite—oh, quite clearly! But you have not given me the sign that is to carry me free and harmless from the attacks of all gentlemen of your honourable profession, sir."

"This is it."

"You don't say so?"

The sign which Claude gave to Mr. Popham was merely to place the point of his thumb upon the tip of his nose, and to spread out the rest of the fingers in the manner vulgarly called "taking a sight."

"Well," added the simple-minded Mr. Popham, "who would have thought it! And if there are two of them, sir, I suppose you do this—"

Mr. Popham perpetrated what is known popularly as a "double sight."

"Precisely," said Claude. "Nothing can be clearer, my good sir—nothing in the world can be more apt than your mode of doing it; and I can assure you that from henceforward you will have the singular and most unprecedented advantage of passing along the public roads free from the exactions of highwaymen; and for your readiness in coming to my conditions, I shall not ask you for your purse, but permit you to carry it with you, provided you set off at once to Oxford."

"I'm off, sir," said Mr. Popham, "I'm off! Thanks, Mr. Highway-gentleman, I'm very much obliged to you, sir! Good day!"

With this, Mr. Popham got out of his curriole, and summoning all his energies to assist him, he set off on his rather long walk to Oxford alone.

"Now, of all the idiots that ever I came near," said Claude, "this fellow is about one of the worst. This is too easy a triumph, and is hardly to be considered as one. There he goes! Poor devil! Now he gets to that turn of the road, and then he disappears. Ha! ha! Jack! Jack! Dick! Come here! It is as good as a play. Come here, both of you, I have something famous to tell you. Come on!"

Jack and Dick at once rode up full of curiosity to know how Claude had possessed himself of the curriole, and sent the owner of it off on foot, apparently so well contented. Claude could really hardly tell them the story for laughing; but he did, at length, manage to do so, and they were as highly amused as he was, and could not contain their laughter, which broke forth in vociferous peals.

"Upon my word it was almost too bad," said Jack, "to send the poor devil off on such an errand."

"Not at all," said Claude; "he will be wiser for ever after for it."

"But what do you mean to do," said Dick, "with the curriole? Here we are all mounted."

"Well, I tell you what I should like to do with it. We have had quite enough of gravity in Oxford, and I am inclined for a frolic, just for the purpose of knocking out of one's brains the recollection of the proceedings of the last few days. I should like very much to go to the christening."



"Oh, Claude," said Jack, shaking his head.

Dick said nothing.

"Yes," added Claude, "I own I should, and what I propose is that we put up our horses somewhere, and make what change we can in our apparel, and then all three get into the curricle, which you see is quite roomy enough, and drive to Athens Lodge, where I will personate Mr. Popham, and pass you off as two friends whom I have brought with me to do honour to the solemnity. What say you to that?"

"That it won't do," said Dick.

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Just because, although it may well happen that this Scatters family may not know Mr. Hannibal Popham by sight; if they have visited this neighbourhood to the christening, there will be many there who do, and detection would be immediate to our very great danger and discomfiture."

"Confound it, yes," said Claude; "that's true."

"Give it up," said Jack.

"No, there is no occasion to do that," added Dick. "If Claude has a fancy for the freak, and if we can find any really safe place to leave our steeds at, I think it may be done by representing that the captain is rather indisposed and cannot come, but that he has sent us, as three London friends of his in his stead, and lent us his curricle, which, most likely, he is well-known to come in."

"Yes, that will do," said Claude.

"With the difficulty of safely bestowing our cattle," said Jack. "That seems to me to be the point upon which all the affair ought to turn. If that can be done, I am as willing as possible to go into it, but it would, indeed, be a very serious thing if we were for the mere sake of a frolic to deprive ourselves of our horses."

"It would," said Claude, "but by a gallop of about three miles along the road, we shall come to an old public-house called the Yew Tree, and I will engage that there our cattle will be safe enough as long as we like to leave them."

"If that is the case," said Dick, "I have no objection; but I must own that it would cut me to the heart, now, to part with my bonny Bess, after having been deprived of her so long, and only again renewing the acquaintance for a few hours."

"Then I give up the scheme," said Claude. "If there should be any doubt lingering in your mind, Dick, about the safety of your steed, you would not enjoy the joke, so I would rather give it up."

"Not so, Claude—not so. I have no doubt when you say all is safe, you know the inn to which you refer."

"Well; and our horses will be as safe there as they are now, while we have our hands upon the bridles."

"Come on, then—I am for the frolic," said Dick.

"And I," said Jack.

"Then I will drive the curricle," said Claude, "and you be so good, Jack, as to lead my horse. The creature knows you, and will trot along by your side comfortably. Here we go."

This arrangement was speedily enough effected, and off they all went, Duval taking the lead in the curricle. The three miles he had spoken of was rapidly enough passed over, and there snugly ensconced among some trees in a very pretty situation, the old Yew Tree Inn was discerned.

"There is the house," said Claude, "and there is the landlord shading his eyes with his hand as he looks down the wood to see who is coming at such a dashing pace."

Claude drew up sharply at the door of the inn. The landlord lifted up his hand, and in a strong Scotch accent, said—

"Gude guide! is that you!"

"Yes," said Claude. "I have taken to travel the road on wheels, now, instead of on horseback. How do you think it will do?"

"Eh, sirs? not at all—not at all."

"Then I'll give it up, and all I want you to do now, is to let our horses stand in your stable ready saddled for the road at a minute's notice, while we go after a bit of fun in this curricule. Can you do it?"

"Can I? surely I can—surely I can, but just be taking care of your necks, my brow callants, or ye'll rue the day, but make yersels easy about the beasts. They will be all right enough. What will take a taste of?"

"Anything you like."

The landlord upon this rather general order, retired into the house and brought out a silver flagon, half full of brandy.

"Take a sup of this," he said, "it's only a strong kind of ale, if you look at it with the eye of philosophy."

"It just is a strong kind of ale," said Claude. "It's enough to make one wink again."

They all three took a drop of the brandy and then they rode the horses into the inn-yard, and left them up to the mid leg in fodder, after which they got into the curricule, and Claude waiving his whip as an adieu to the landlord, turned the horses heads on the route they had come, but before he started he called out—

"Do you know a place called Athens Lodge?"

"Do I know it? To be sure I do. You'll see it only a mile from here. It has the oddest crinkum crankums of chimneys that ever you saw in all your life."

"All's right," said Claude. "I saw the very chimneys as we came along, but did not know it was the place we sought. We shall be soon back, Sanders. Good-by for the present."

## CHAPTER CCVI.

### DETAILS SOME ADVENTURES AT A CHRISTENING.

"Now Dick," said Claude, "is your mind easy about your horse?"

"Quite. It was before, too, after your assurance."

"Some people, Dick, have a decided objection to my assurance."

"And well they may, in one sense."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack; "but only look—there among the trees a good way on, you may see the very chimneys that our friend of the old 'Yew Tree' calls crinkum crankums."

"To be sure," said Claude. "There they are, and here we are in a nice shady bit of road.—How do we all look for guests at a christening?"

"Well enough," said Dick, "we can make an excuse for not being in full dress, as we can say we only came down to see our friend, Popham, and did not expect the honour of being asked to represent him upon the auspicious occasion, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Capital," said Claude, "you shall make the speech."

"Not I," said Dick, "it is your joke, Claude, and you shall carry it out, I will have nothing of that sort to do with it, and if you try to let me in for any of the speech-making, I shall be off back to the 'Yew Tree' and there wait for you both."

"Well, well.—I'll do the speeches—I'll do all that, but mind you keep a sharp look out, both of you, in case any of the Philistines should be about, for we don't know exactly who may be invited to this affair at the lodge."

"Trust me for that," said Jack. "I know an officer by the look of his eye in a moment. They can never deceive me let them be disguised how they may. There is always a particular white wooden look about their faces that they cannot get rid of."

Both Dick and Claude laughed heartily at this odd idea of Jack's concerning officers, and then as the gates of Athens Lodge appeared in sight, they thought

it prudent to put on a grave aspect, and to commence playing their parts as they intended to play them.

Several vehicles of different descriptions were already at the gates of the lodge, and there was quite a bustling aspect about the servants who were lounging about. The moment Claude, who was driving, drew up at the gate, a servant came to him and touching his hat respectfully, said—

“I will take charge of the curricle, sir, if you please.”

“Very well,” said Claude. “I hope all the family is well?”

“Quite well, sir. They say that Julius Cæsar is a little fractious, this morning, that is all.”

“Who?”

“Julius Cæsar, sir, who is going to be christened to-day, but the nurse don't think it is anything serious at all, and master and misses, sir, believes that he will be able to go through the ceremony quite properly, sir.”

The man delivered all this with such an abominable stupid solidity that it was really quite dreadful to hear him, and it was only with the greatest possible difficulty, that Claude prevented himself from bursting into a general roar of laughing, but as that would have spoiled everything, he resisted the impulse to do so, and said with great gravity—

“Julius Cæsar then, I presume, is to be the name of the child?”

“Oh dear, yes, sir, that's quite settled.”

“Very good. We will go at once to the house, if you please.”

“Yes, gentlemen—certainly. You will find the whole family in the lodge, gentlemen. It's only round those trees, you see them right on a-head, gentlemen.”

“Thank you, that will do. That will do, we know the way. It is all right.”

The servant took charge of the curricle, and Claude—with Jack on one side and Dick Turpin on the other—deliberately walked up the trim and well-kept gravelled path that led to the lodge, which they soon came in sight of, and which they could not help admiring. It was a very pretty structure, indeed, built after the Greek model, and with a row of Corinthian columns before it, that lent an air of great grace and elegance to the whole structure.

“Upon my word,” said Claude, “our dear friends, the Scatters, are very well lodged here.”

“They are, indeed,” said Jack.

“It is not owing to their taste, though,” said Dick; “you may quite depend upon it. Money has purchased this place, which probably has been the abode of one whose taste has outrun his means.”

“Not a very rare circumstance,” said Claude.

“By no means. But who have we here?”

A servant out of livery came to meet them, for they had been seen from the windows of the lodge, and as everybody in the drawing-room had disclaimed any acquaintance with them, it had been thought advisable to send out for the purpose of ascertaining who they really were. The servant executed a bow, and then said—

“If you please, gentlemen, I will announce you names.”

“Very well,” said Claude. “I am Mr. Green, this is Mr. Brown, and this Mr. Grey.”

The servant bowed again.

“You can tell your master that we are all intimate friends of Mr. Popham, who was to have stood as god-father to Julius Cæsar; but as he is very much indisposed, and under medical advice, dare not leave his room, he hopes that I shall be permitted to officiate in his stead on this interesting occasion, and we have come here in his curricle.”

“Pray step this way, gentlemen. I will tell master directly.”

“Very good; you go on before and let him know the state of affairs, and we will follow you.”

Thus authorised to carry his news as quickly as he chose, the servant darted

off into the house, and Claude, with his two friends, purposely went on very slowly, in order that there should be time for the master of the house to be made acquainted with their pretensions, which would take off a great deal of the awkwardness of the meeting.

"Will it do, do you think?" said Dick.

"To be sure," said Claude. "What can they say?"

"Well," said Jack, "I don't see how they can get out of it very well; but here we are, and there are no end of eyes looking at us from the drawing-room windows. If there should be any there who know us it will be rather a treat, I think."

"We will not think such a thing possible."

"It will be quite sufficient if we do not think it probable," said Jack. "But here comes some one else."

A pompous-looking man now made his appearance in so remarkably stiff a cravat, that it was quite impossible he could look down or turn his head without turning his whole body at the same time. This was no other than Mr. Scatters himself, and as he advanced towards his guests he made a very condescending kind of bow, and said—

"Gentlemen, you are extremely welcome, indeed—I may say extremely welcome; and it is to me a source of very great regret that Mr. Popham is indisposed and cannot do us the pleasure of coming to the lodge upon this little, rather interesting, occasion."

"Sir," said Claude, "it is to us likewise a matter of great regret that our esteemed friend cannot come; but if my humble services, as his representative, will suffice, I tender them with pleasure, otherwise, sir, we will not intrude upon you any further."

"Don't mention that, gentlemen. Come in—come in, I pray you. I am very happy, indeed, to see you at my poor little place here. Ah!—hem! A nice little lodge, you see, with no pretensions. Some of these days I may, perhaps, take it into my head to build a mansion—A—hem!"

It was quite clear, that the weak point of Mr. Scatters was vanity; so Claude was quite resolved upon exhibiting a tolerably large dose of flattery, and he said—

"Sir, this place, to my humble judgment, is superb; and I can only answer, that it could have had its origin in the fine taste, and exquisite imagination of a Scatters."

"Then," said Dick to Jack, in a whisper; "if he will swallow that, he will stop at nothing."

Mr. Scatters bowed as he replied—

"Sir, I rejoice to find that Mr. Popham's representative, upon this little occasion, is a gentleman of so discriminating a character."

Upon this, Claude bowed; and all the bowing, and the movements of the arms were exceedingly interesting, no doubt, to the people in the drawing-room, who had not the smallest idea of what it was all about. It was with no small difficulty, that Jack and Dick kept themselves in a decorous state of gravity; and as for Claude, he was ready to burst with laughter at the antics, and the vanity of Mr. Scatters.

They all ascended the flight of steps that led under the columns with their Corinthian capitals; and then passing through a hall, paved with marble, they entered the drawing-room, where there was an assemblage of some twenty or thirty people, waiting for the ceremony to commence.

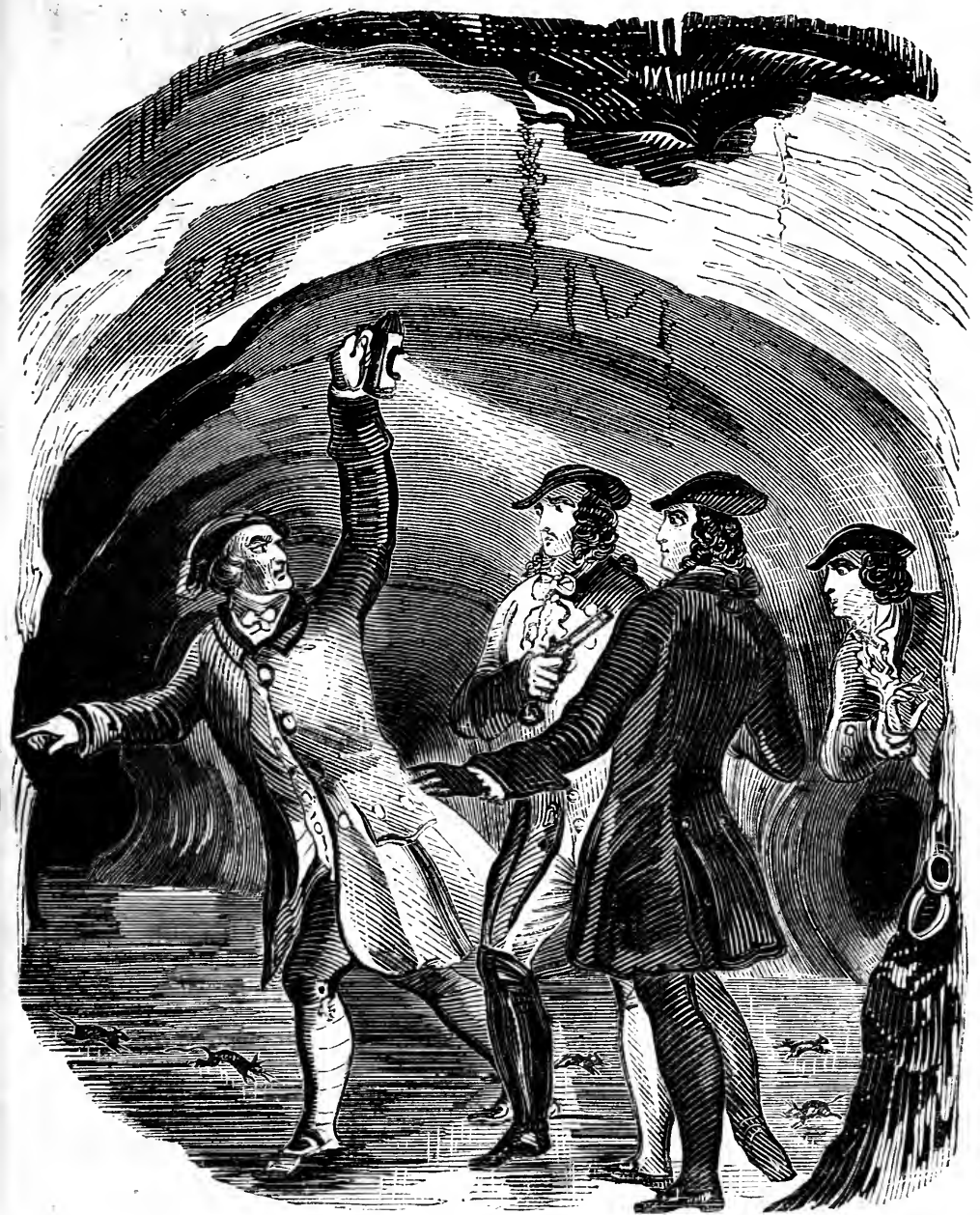
"Allow me to introduce," said Mr. Scatters, "the representative of our excellent neighbour, Mr. Popham, who is too unwell to attend upon this little auspicious, and interesting occasion. I beg, ladies and gentlemen, to introduce to you all, Mr.—a—a——"

"Brown," said Claude.

"Brown," said Mr. Scatters, "and this is his friend, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Green," said Claude.

“Green,” added Mr. Scatters, and then in like manner Jack was introduced as Mr. Grey; and then all the guests smiled, and bowed, and awarded, in a pleasant sort of smiling way, their satisfaction; and just as Claude was about to say something, a tremendous squall came upon the ears of the company, and Mr. Scatters exclaimed—



THE THREE ADVENTURERS FOLLOWING BOB THROUGH THE VAULTS.

“It is Julius Cæsar! Oh, it is Julius Cæsar! What are they doing to that adorable infant?”

“Here he is!—here he is!” cried everybody. “Here he is! Oh, the love! Come along! Oh, the duck!”

A succession of little howls and squalls now proceeded from the further end of the drawing-room, and, in a few moments, an amazingly fat nurse made her



appearance, carrying the baby, and the mother, no less a personage than the female Scatters, following closely, dressed up to the eyes in a profusion of satins, and laces, and flounces, and jewellery.

"He comes — he comes!" cried Mr. Scatters. "Oh, he comes!"

And then all the ladies surrounded the infant Scatters; and such a fussing, and kissing, and squealing was never seen.

"This is affecting," said Mr. Scatters.

"Very," said Claude.

"The man," said Dick, "who could refuse the sympathetic tear to a scene like this, would think nothing of sending his own father to be baked for a Christmas dinner."

"Where is Mr. Popham?" said Mrs. Scatters, in a sighing tone of voice. "Oh, where is Mr. Popham, who is to assist in placing Julius Cæsar in the pale of the church?"

"My dear," said Mr. Scatters, "calm yourself. Mr. Popham can't come, but he has sent a most elegant gentleman, of the name of Brown."

"Oh, gracious!"

"My love! My life! Be calm. Allow me to introduce Mr. Brown to you, and I am sure you will be quite pleased to find so very gentlemanly and appreciating a person. Mr. Brown, allow me to present you to Mrs. Scatters. My love, this is the representative of Mr. Popham."

Mrs. Scatters took a glance at Claude, and finding, as it was easy enough to find at a very transient glance, that he was decidedly well-looking, she bestowed quite a favourable regard upon him, and murmured out that he was very welcome.

"I am much obliged, madam," said Claude; "it is a pity that child is not a girl."

"Indeed, sir. Why so?"

"Because then there might be a chance that the world would have such another face and form as her mother's to gaze upon."

"Oh, sir."

The lady bestowed, now, upon Claude a very gracious smile, indeed, and it was quite clear that she was just as fond of flattery as Mr. Scatters, and, indeed, as all the world is.

"The most reverend, the dean," announced a servant, and then all eyes were turned towards the door, at which entered a clergyman with a very white placid, stupid-looking face, who was to perform the ceremony of christening; and who being the second cousin's nephew of a member of the government, was made a Dean in the church.

"Dear me," said Mr. Scatters, "this is very delightful. Here we are all, and Julius Cæsar quite quiet."

A terrific squall at that moment from the young scion of the Scatter's stock, contradicted the rash assertion, and several of the guests placed their hands to their ears to shut out the sound.

"Oh, Gracious!" cried Mrs. Scatters, "what is the matter with Julius Cæsar?"

"Nothing, mum," said the nurse. "It was nothing, mum. It's only one of his little ways, mum, bless his heart, that's all. There, now, he is for all the world just like a lamb again."

The dean was, now, the centre of a circle of ordinary ladies, who thought that in every stupid common-place sentence that came from his lips, there must be hidden some very proficient piece of wisdom, and so they admired it upon trust, accordingly.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" said Mr. Scatters, suddenly.

Every eye was turned at once upon him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the little interesting ceremony will be performed in this room first, and then when it is all over, there will be a *Dejeuner a la Fa-*

*chette* in the dining-room, and we shall all have the pleasure of drinking the health of Julius Cæsar. Are you quite ready, Mr. Dean?"

"Oh, dear yes; as I was saying, after the rain you generally have it a little fine, you see, in consequence of a change in the weather," said the sapient dean.

## CHAPTER CCVII.

### DUVAL MAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY SENSATION AT THE LODGE.

THIS announcement from Mr. Scatters appeared to give the most unqualified and general satisfaction, as such announcements seldom fail to do; for upon such occasions as that one, the good people who had come to the lodge, were rather more intent upon what they were to get in the shape of good things to eat and drink, than upon anything at all concerning the fate or prospects of Julius Cæsar.

Claude was close to the dean when that miracle of wisdom made the remark with which we concluded our last chapter, and he could not resist the very natural impulse to reply to him something after his own fashion.

"That, sir," said Claude, "is a very just observation of yours, and I have frequently remarked that when the wind is blowing in this country, it raises the dust, and that if any of it gets into the eyes, it has quite an effect, for the time, upon the vision, and in some constitutions induces a sneeze."

"Really," said the dean, "that is a remarkable fact. You are, sir, a most observing individual."

"I pride myself upon being so, sir."

"And you may with justice, sir. That last remark of yours about the dust strikes me as being both original and true. I will make a note of it when I get home."

"Oh, sir, you do me too much honour."

"Not at all. Not at all. But we are really the only persons conversing, and I see that our kind friend, the gentleman, is anxiously waiting for the christening of the baby."

"Do not let me interrupt you, my dear sir."

The dean and Claude bowed to each other very ceremoniously, indeed, and then the company assumed extremely decorous attitudes in which to witness the ceremony.

A silver mug of water was brought to the dean, by the aid of which he was to sprinkle Julius Cæsar, and then lifting up his eyes like a dying duck, he commenced the ceremony.

Several of the ladies, particularly those who happened to be the nearest to Mrs. Scatters pretended to be deeply affected at what was going on, and made considerable snuffling with their noses to indicate the extent to which their feelings were affected, and Mr. Scatters, with his eyes half shut, looked as though he fully believed that a choir of angels were invisibly assisting at the ceremony.

In a very few minutes it came to be Claude's turn to make the responses, and everything went smoothly enough, until, in a very bland kind of voice, the dean asked what name was to be given to the child.

Of course, everybody fully expected that it was as fixed as fate that Julius Cæsar was to be the name, and it was not for the moment imagined that any combination of circumstances could possibly occur to alter such a thing. The consternation of the whole assembly may therefore be imagined, but certainly not described, when Claude Duval proceeded to enact this most extraordinary part in the performance, and which no earthly consideration, connected with his own safety, could possibly have induced him to alter.

In a clear voice—alas! a world too clear for the peace of the Scatters family, Claude replied to the dean,—

"The name of this sweet infant will be Dick Turpin Jack Claude Duval!"

The dean very nearly dropped the hopes of all the Scatters on to the floor, and as he had his hand in the water, ready for the very polite sprinkle he had been going to give the child, he, on the surprise and the impulse of the moment gave it such a dash with the cold fluid in the face, that Julius Cæsar, who had for the last few moments behaved with the utmost decorum burst into a roar that was perfectly terrific, and made everybody wink again.

"Goodness Gracious!" shouted Mr. Scatters, trying to make himself heard over the cries of his infant heir; "what do I hear? This must be some terrible dream, surely?"

The dean looked aghast, and Mrs. Scatters would have fainted, only there was no one near to her but a very small gentleman, who looked as though he would be quite certain to let her drop if she ventured upon the very hazardous feat of falling into his arms.

Claude pretended to look astonished at the sensation he had created, and Jack and Dick had the greatest difficulty to keep themselves from bursting into a roar of laughter.

"My dear sir," gasped the dean; "you don't really mean to say that the child is to be christened in so many names?"

"I believe," said Claude, "that as the good father, I may name the child what I like."

"Yes; but—but—Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"And I further believe, sir, that you are bound to go on with the ceremony which is thus scandalously interrupted. I have given you the name, sir, and must beg you to be so good as to finish christening the child, and here's the silver mug that I intend to give it."

"No—no—no!" cried Mr. Scatters, rushing forward, "I can't have it christened Jack and Dick and all that sort of thing. It can't be done! Stop it—stop it, I won't hear it!"

"But my dear sir," said Claude, "are you aware that you are interrupting one of the most awful and serious ceremonies of the church? Really this is shocking conduct."

"Bother the church and the ceremonies, too. I am a man of ample means, sir, I can tell you, and as regards the church and its ceremonies, I am willing to uphold them, as all highly respectable people do, as long as they are convenient to me, but no longer, sir. Stop the christening—stop the christening! There is some horrid mistake! I can't have Julius Cæsar called such frightful names."

"If the dean," said Claude, "don't go on with the christening, and give the child the names I mention, I shall represent his conduct to the bishop of the diocese."

"That, sir," said Mr. Scatters, "allow me to tell you, will not be of the slightest consequence, for the bishop's wife's cousin's aunt is the twin sister of the dean's wife."

"Oh, ah, to be sure then," said Claude, "of course the dean may do just what he likes."

"Exactly so, sir. Therefore, Mr. Dean, I beg that you will be so good as to put an immediate stop to the christening."

"Very well then," said Claude, "I shall go, and my friends will go with me, I have no doubt. You may all say what you like, and do what you like, but that child's proper name now is Dick Turpin Jack Claude Duval, and that is the name he will have to go by in spite of you all. There is the mug that I brought to him, and which I scorn to take away again; and now, ladies and gentlemen, I and my friends bid you all good day, and when there is another christening here we hope to come again."

These words were scarcely out of Claude's lips, when a servant, with much less ceremony than the Scatters' family usually looked for in their domestics, rushed into the room, crying aloud—



"Oh, sir—oh, sir—oh, missus, oh!"

"What is it?" shouted half a dozen voices.

"Why, sir, there's come a mounted officer from Oxford, sir, and missus and he says that three notorious highwaymen, named Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and Jack Somebody, are on the road, and that everybody ought to be warned about them, and to go about with loaded pistols and all that sort of thing."

All the ladies present raised a simultaneous scream, and looked at our three adventurers.

"The game is up," whispered Dick to Claude.

"Rather," said Claude. "Jack, go to the door of the room, and don't let a soul out of it."

Jack did so, and then Claude, with one bound, sprang upon a table, and looking around him with an air of haughty defiance, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen—It don't matter much who I am, or who my two friends are. Let it suffice you that we are willing to leave this house in peace, and that it will be highly dangerous to prevent us."

The ladies gave another scream.

"Nothing," added Claude, "can possibly be to me more afflicting than to be a source of terror to the ladies. I sincerely hope [that among all the beauty and bright eyes and lovely forms that I see around me, I shall not occasion one pang of alarm; such is far, very far distant indeed from my intention.]"

"He is really a very nice man," whispered one lady to another, who was close to her.

"And handsome, decidedly so," said the other.

"And so discriminating," said a third, joining the conference, "such evident taste he has."

"Oh, great—great."

"But," cried Mr. Scatters, "goodness gracious, we cannot put up with this. I am a respectable man, and cannot think of it for a moment. Police—police! Murder!"

"Hark you, sir," said Claude. "The pattern upon this wall is very pretty, but I shall be compelled to alter it, if you make any more disturbance. Be warned, sir."

"Alter the pattern on the wall? What do you mean, sir? What do you mean, you low highwayman?"

"I mean that I will plaster one of the panels with the few brains you possess. Do you understand me now, sir?"

Mr. Scatters staggered back until he was supported by the wall, and then Claude said to Dick—

"Be so good as to shoot that young gentleman who is trying to get out of the room by yonder window."

"Certainly," said Turpin, as he drew a pistol from his pocket, and presented it at a lanky youth who had thought he might make an escape without being noticed, and who certainly would have done so if Claude had not been so elevated, from his position upon the table, that he could see everything that was going on remarkably well.

When the youth found that his clever device did not succeed, he rolled upon his back in an agony of terror, and sought for safety among the feet of the ladies.

"Oh, well, let him be," said Claude. "It is sufficient that he is stopped in his design; and now we will go."

With this Claude jumped from the table, but the dean came up to him, and in a mild voice, said—

"I sincerely hope that you and your friends will be so good as to give yourselves up to justice; and I beg to assure you that such a proceeding on your part, will be highly satisfactory to the authorities."

"You don't say so?" said Claude, as he lifted the silver ewer of water, that had been brought for the christening, from the table, and discharged the whole

contents into the dean's face. "You don't say so? There, now-I have christened you, and you may take the name of Tom Noddy, forthwith."

"Bless me," said the dean, as he went spluttering away. "How water does wet you, to be sure."

"Come," whispered Dick to Claude, "come. Every moment now is fraught with its own particular dangers."

"I know it. These people must all be locked into this room. Is there a key in the door?"

"Yes."

"Then lock it on the outside, and then we will make the best of our way to our horses and be off, for the neighbourhood of the lodge will soon be decidedly too hot to hold us."

"It is now."

"Come, then. Ladies, once more, adieu."

Claude made for the door, and in a moment they were all three on the outside of it; Dick locked it, and took the key away with him, and then they ran out of the house.

"Stop one moment," said Claude, as they halted within a side-view of the windows of the room. "Stop a moment."

"What for, Claude?"

"You will see directly. Some one will make an attempt to get out at one of the windows, and I want to put a stop to that sort of thing for the next ten minutes."

"I understand you."

The anticipations of Duval regarding what would occur, turned out to be quite correct, for in the course of half a minute the head and leg of somebody was projected from one of the windows that opened on to the terrace, that went partially round the house. Claude had a pistol in his hand, and he immediately fired, but he did not intend any mischief. All he wished was to give a salutary fright to the owner of the head and the leg, and through him a warning to the whole of the company.

The bullet flew past the window, and the head and leg disappeared into the room again in a moment, while a loud scream testified to the effect that the shot had had upon the nerves of the person to whom those members belonged.

## CHAPTER CCVIII.

### CLAUDE REDRESSES SOME GRIEVANCES ON THE ROAD TO LONDON.

"THAT will do, I think," said Claude.

"It ought," said Jack, "but the panic won't last very long, so let us be off at once. It won't do to have Mr. Scatters and all his guests yelping at our heels like a lot of curs, and Julius Cæsar, for all we know to the contrary, bringing up the rear."

Both Claude and Dick laughed at Jack's description of what might be, but they did not neglect the sound advice that his words contained, and they all made off now as quickly as they possibly could from Athens Lodge.

No doubt the servant who had brought the information into the drawing-room, of there being upon the road three such very desperate personages as Duval, Jack, and Dick Turpin, was not the only one of the domestics at the lodge entrance who had heard the tale of the mounted man from Oxford; and now when the three friends were seen advancing in haste towards the gates, it struck everybody there that they might be the very personages mentioned by the officer, who had got off his horse, and with the bridle of it hanging upon his arm, and a pot of ale in his hand, was listening with a

look of sharp suspicion upon his face to the echoes of the pistol-shot that Claude had just fired.

"Look," said Jack.

"At what?" cried Claude. "Which way, Jack?"

"To the gate—there is one of the Oxford officers. He was with us all at the foot of the gallows on a recent occasion, Dick."

"Don't mention it," said Turpin. "It gives one almost a crick in the neck to hear of it, but we must not allow him to be at all mischievous. I will run on."

As he spoke, Dick run on, but the officer saw that there was danger, and not probably feeling himself to be quite a match for three stout men, he threw down the pot of ale, and made a rapid and vigorous attempt to mount his horse again.

"Stop that!" cried Dick. "Stop that!" and then he just reached the officer in time to lay hold of his leg, and prevent him from mounting the horse, and not only did Dick do that, but he pulled the officer right on to the ground, saying—"Resistance will be madness. You may preserve your life by lying still."

"When I can't help it," said the officer, "I will, but not before. You are my prisoner, and I call upon all here to aid me in the king's name."

He then laid hold of Dick by the ankles and tried to throw him down, but as Dick resisted the first shock, the officer did not succeed in doing that. The servants who were about made a slight kind of movement, as though they fully intended in some sort of way to answer the appeal of the officer; but Claude stepping up with a pistol in each hand, cried out in a loud stern voice—

"If any man here present is tired of his life, let him only move hand or foot to interfere with us, and away goes the top of his skull, as sure as he now breathes, and that there are a couple of slugs in each of these barrels that will do that business for him most effectually."

This was a threat that had the desired effect, particularly as Jack appeared close to Claude similarly armed; and as Dick dealt the officer, who would not leave go of his ankles, a blow with his clenched fist, that sent him rolling over and over to some distance, where he lay insensible, or affecting, from prudential considerations, to be so; for by this time he must have seen that the only chance he had in the affair, was of a broken head.

Not one of the servants now ventured upon anything in the shape of interference; and our three adventurers passed out by the open gate into the roadway.

"Don't hurry," said Claude, "but the sooner we are on horseback, the better it will be for our healths, I think."

"Not a doubt of it, for if I mistake not," said Dick, "we shall have the whole parish up in arms in the course of another half-hour, and we may yet have a hard tussle to escape."

"Don't say that, Dick," added Claude, "or you will make me something worse than miserable, for I cannot forget that it was I who brought you both into this scrape."

"I forgot it then, Claude, or I should not have spoken; but let what will happen, don't you fancy that. It is true you suggested the affair, but it is equally true that we both joined in it of our own free will; so it is the special fault of no one in particular; and now I think, as we have got some distance from the lodge gates, we may as well take a run, and get to our steeds as fast as possible."

"Agreed," said Claude.

Upon this, they all three went at a good hard run towards the public-house, at which they had left their steeds; and it was rather ridiculous to see them all get there out of breath; but then they did not consider that to be of any consequence, as they knew that when mounted their fatigue would be over.

The landlord of the inn had kept a good look out, for he guessed that they might come back at speed, and the moment he saw them on the scamper, he got their cattle out, so that they really had nothing to do but to spring to their saddles; and then Claude burst into a hearty laugh, as he said—

"All's right. I feel as if every danger was all but over, when I am once fairly mounted."

"I am not good at such a sharp hunt as this we have had," said Jack, panting for breath; "but it was just as well, for a minute saved may be a life."

"Are they after you?" said the landlord.

"Oh, no," said Claude, "but they will be, without a doubt. Come on, Dick, we must try back a little way and get into some cross-road. Ah! well done! Here they are, and in some strength, too. Come, this is interesting. Keep together, and don't fire hastily, whatever you do. It may not come to anything serious after all, though they do show such a good front."

The occasion of these words from Claude's lips, was quickly and easily observable, for along the road, which they had so recently traversed at speed upon foot, came about a dozen horsemen, headed by the officer, who had thought proper, when his affairs did not look well, to be quite unconscious of what was going on, but who, the moment Claude Duval and his friends had turned their backs, and left the lodge gates, revived, and by the promise of large rewards, induced the grooms and others who were waiting for the guests at the christening, to mount and aid him in an endeavour to capture the highwaymen; and it was this party, so hastily got together, that had attracted the attention of Claude.

The officer having two pairs of pistols with him, kept one pair to himself, and divided the other between two of the grooms, so that there was the appearance of three men being well armed with pistols.

An old gun, too, had been brought out of the gate-keeper's little residence, and that made a formidable show. As for the rest of the party, they were armed with such desultory weapons, in the shape of pitchforks and shovels, as upon the spur of the moment the gardener's lodge afforded.

"This is too bad," said Dick.

"How do you mean by too bad?" asked Jack.

"Why, first, that we shall be obliged to do a mischief to some of these stupid fellows, and it's all owing to the officer, who won't let us three alone."

"We must protect ourselves," said Claude; "and if they will run their heads into mischief, it's their own look-out. See, they hang back already. The only thing to put them all into wonderful spirits would be for us to run away."

"No doubt. Keep a good look-out upon that fellow with the gun. He seems as if he were very much inclined to fire it at us. Look at him."

Claude did look at him, and then, as he held out his hand with a long highly-polished pistol in it, he called out,— "The man who fires the first shot dies, if he had as many lives as a cat."

Upon this, the valorous personage who had the gun reversed it so suddenly that he poked the muzzle of it into the eye of the person behind him, and gave a sound rap upon the back to one who was before him with the butt of it. Probably the officer did not think his party that he had so hastily collected was half so formidable as it looked, for waiving his hand, he advanced a few paces—they were very few though—and spoke—

"You are well-known, all three of you," he said, "and it is quite impossible you can get away. You know that by resistance and open violence you can only make your case much worse than it is, and bring down upon you the vengeance of the law; whereas, if you give in now at once, without causing any bloodshed, I shall be very happy to say all I can in your favour."

"You are very kind," said Claude; "but we beg to decline your good offices, my friend."

"Come—come, only consider. We must have you. I and my gallant fellows here, will have you."

"Where are the gallant fellows?" said Claude. "Since you are so fond of talking and giving advice, allow me to tell you that at the first shot that is fired by us, the gallant fellows will run away and leave you to any fate that you may provoke us to inflict upon you. For myself, I beg to say that I am very well as long

as I am in tolerable humour, but I won't answer for myself if you carry this affair too far."

The officer was a little staggered, and when he replied, there was a slight shake in his voice.

"Claude Duval," he said, "I know you; and I can well judge that it will be



THE THREE ADVENTURERS IN THE KEN IN THE OLD MINT.

no easy matter to get the better of you; but I am bound to try it if my death were certain."

"Well, try it then."

"I must. Will you surrender?"

"Certainly not."

The officer rode a little aside, and cried—

"Fire!"

Immediately he discharged one of his pistols at the party of three, and the two grooms, who had been by him supplied with fire-arms, likewise used theirs, but with so little judgment, that the bullets went at least six feet over the heads of Claude, Dick, and Jack. The officer took a better aim, and the bullet from his weapon went through Dick's hat.

The most extraordinary effect though was produced by the man with the gun, for when he got the order to fire, he managed to pull the trigger without caring in what direction the muzzle was, and accordingly, off it went, and nearly shot one of his own friends, at the same time that it burst, and the stock of it hit him a blow in the face that knocked him off his horse, sprawling in the road, and shouting "Murder!" at the top of his lungs.

"Now for it," cried Duval.

The words had no sooner escaped his lips, than the whole party took to flight, with the exception of the man who had had the gun, and who could not get up, and the officer, who gallantly kept his ground.

"Surrender!" he cried again, "surrender!"

"Are you mad?" said Claude.

"Perhaps so. Take that."

He fired his other pistol, or meant to fire it right in Claude's face, but it only flashed in the pan, and in an instant Claude now fired fairly at him, for he was put past all patience by the officer's pertinacity. The bullet hit him in the shoulder.

"You have killed me, Claude Duval," said the officer.

As he spoke he turned of a deathlike paleness, and hung partly over the neck of his horse. Claude rode up to him and held him by the arm to look where the wound was, and he at once saw that it was too high on the shoulder to be necessarily fatal to the man.

"Nonsense," he said, "you are not much hurt, and you and I may have a brush at some other time for all this."

"Then you don't mean to kill me outright?"

"No. I am quite content, if you are."

The officer tried to say something else, but he could not, for at this moment he fainted, and but for the aid of Claude's arm, he would have fallen from his horse to the ground; but Duval held him up, and cried—

"Jack, dismount a moment and help him off the saddle. Dick will hold your horse."

"Dead?" said Jack.

"Not a bit of it. It's only a faint—partly from pain and partly from vexation; but he is a brave fellow, and as such, I will do him no more harm than I can help."

Jack dismounted and assisted the officer from his horse, and placed him against the step of the van. They then all set off at a hard trot towards Oxford, but they took the very first turning they came to on their right hand, in hopes of getting by a round into the London-road again.

## CHAPTER CCIX.

### A STRANGE ADVENTURE NEAR THE METROPOLIS.

"SHALL we get to London with whole bones?" said Jack.

"Why not?" replied Claude. "I hope, for one, to be able to accomplish that feat. What do you say to it, Dick?"

"And I, for another," said Dick. "After what we have already gone through, I do think we may almost laugh at fate. For my part, I believe we shall escape all our perils, and in some comfortable ken in London, I shall live to tell how



you and Jack saved me from what looked as like inevitable death as anything could."

"If you do," said Claude, "I shall take it as the very worst return you can make me."

"And I," said Jack.

"Indeed? You surprise me."

"Say not one word about it, Dick, if you have any feeling for either of us, my dear fellow. All Jack or I want you to do, is just what we know you will do."

"And what is that?"

"Serve us as we served you if you hear that we are in the same predicament."

"Yes," said Jack, "that I will. So now let us push on, for the horses are in good trim, and there is now no reason on earth why we should not make a good twenty miles without a stop of any importance. Let me beg of you, Claude, not to engage in any fresh adventure just now, unless it should be forced upon us."

"Agreed, Jack."

"Amen, say I, to that," cried Dick; "so now let us do gently and comfortably as much of this twenty miles that Jack is so anxious to get over as we can."

With this, they left off conversing, and separating as much as possible from each other upon the road, so as not to impede each other's movements, they put the horses to a long trot that did not distress them, but really got over an amazing quantity of ground in a short space of time.

This they kept up for a good hour, at the end of which time they had actually done twelve miles of Jack's twenty, and Dick called out—

"Halt—halt!"

They all three at the moment drew up, and Claude cried out—

"What is it, Dick? Anything amiss?"

"Yes; my mare has fallen lame for the last mile or two, and I cannot press her on."

"Certainly not; it would be a sin, and a shame, and a pity, and a folly, and half a dozen other things."

"So it would, Claude," said Dick, as he dismounted, "and I will lead her for a dozen miles further, rather than distress her. She has done me too good service upon many an occasion, not to command my greatest affection."

As he spoke, Dick dismounted and began to examine the foot of his steed carefully.

"It's a thorn, but it has got so far in that I am afraid it will be no easy job to get it out without proper tools. Have you anything that will do it, Claude?"

"No, but Jack has."

"Rather," said Jack, as he dismounted. "I never travel without a few useful implements, for such little accidents by the way."

Jack took from his pocket a very minute pair of tweezers, and while Dick pressed the foot of the horse to make a very little bit of the thorn project from it, Jack laid hold of it and drew it out.

"That will do," said Dick. "It is not a quarter of an inch in length, and yet how lame it made her."

"I tell you what it is, Dick," said Jack. "If you don't give this creature a few hours' rest, now, she will have a bad foot, for dust will get into the little wound of the thorn, and you don't know what may be the consequence of it."

Dick looked rather perplexed, which Claude observing, induced him to say—  
"Don't put yourself out of the way, Dick; the day is disappearing, and there is no reason on earth why we should not put up somewhere for the rest of the evening. Suppose now we rest till about ten o'clock?"

"Agreed," said Jack.

"Of course I shall be very glad, for the sake of my horse," said Dick, "only I feel as if I were the cause of delaying you upon the road to, perhaps, your great peril; but that may be easily obviated by your going on without me, you know."

"Yes," said Claude, "but we don't mean to do it; so you may make your

mind easy about that ; Jack will bind up your mare's foot for her, as he is an adept at that sort of thing, and we will all put up quietly and respectably at the next inn we come to. You can lead her, Dick, and we, by walking our cattle, will keep by you."

"It's very kind of you both," said Dick, "and when I forget all your generous conduct to me, may I be—Well, well, it's no use talking; but the time may come some day, when I may do more in a minute than I could talk in an hour; so come on, rest we will, till ten o'clock, if that will be time enough for the mare's foot to rest."

"Lot's," said Jack. "Besides, I will get a bit of an old hat wherever we put up, and when we start again, I can cut it so as to wedge it in the shoe, and she won't tread upon the injured part at all next to the ground. Her feet are worth the taking care of."

"Truly they are, for I can assure you that, more than once, her heels have saved her master's head."

After strolling along, now, for about half a mile or so, they came to one of the prettiest little road-side inns that the eyes of man ever beheld. It was quite covered with roses and honeysuckle, and ivy, and looked as if it were embedded in a wood, so many well kept thriving trees and flowering shrubs, were all around it.

"That's the place for us," cried Claude. "We shall all feel, while there, like love among the roses."

"It's to be hoped," said Jack, "that while we do stay there, nobody will disturb our felicity."

They all stopped at the door of the inn, and soon made arrangement with the landlord to have the horses put up for some hours, and to have a repast got ready for themselves. There was a very pretty, well-kept garden at the back of this little inn, with a number of bee-hives, the tenants of which were in a state of the most industrious commotion.

"Two highwaymen!—Two highwaymen!" cried Jack, suddenly.

"Where?—where?" said Dick.

"There," said Jack. "Don't you see those two wasps have got hold of a bee laden with honey, and are robbing him of it in the most unmerciful manner before he can get to the hive?"

Both Dick and Claude laughed, but in a moment or two twenty bees came and attacked the two wasps; and after a sharp scuffle of nearly a minute's duration, killed them, and pulled them to pieces, scattering their fragments to the ground.

"Humph! that's sharp justice," said Jack.

"Very," said Claude. "I think it would take rather more than twenty officers to serve us in that way. But let us to dinner, for I feel, now that we have made a regular halt, that I could make some way into a round of beef, and you must recollect both of you that we missed the luncheon at Mr. Scatters, which I did hope would have stood us in good stead; and so it would if he had only had the sense to have it before the christening instead of after it. That arrangement spoils the whole affair, so far as our stomachs were concerned."

"It did," laughed Dick.

"But it did not spoil the joke," said Jack; "and if I mistake not, my nose will inform me that there is something very nice indeed getting ready for us in the inn kitchen."

Jack was not far wrong, for the people of the pretty inn laid before them a most enticing breakfast as the innkeeper called it, but it was certainly a time of the day for calling it a dinner. To their surprise, too, they found that some very choice wines were to be had from the cellar of the inn, and everything was very much better than could have been at all expected.

There was no guests in the house but themselves, so that they had no dread of any unpleasant interruptions, and the innkeeper told them that he seldom had any one there at odd times, but that the gentlemen members of several hunts were such good customers to him at times, that he was able to keep his house

open, and have a stock of every thing of the first quality, and they did not begrudge him his price for it.

This Claude thought was a kind of hint to them, that they would be expected to pay well for what they had, and he was determined to put the landlord's mind at ease upon that score.

"My friend," he said, "we don't care a straw what you charge, as long as what you lay before us is worth it. We want the very best of everything, and there is the money for it."

They staid drinking their wine and making themselves quite comfortable until half past nine o'clock at night, and then they thought of moving off, and Claude, as he rose from the table, said—

"We have taken a good medium of wine each of us, but somehow we are none the worse for it, I think."

"Not a whit," said Jack, "not a whit. Let us ring for the horses to be got to the door. Hilloa! what's that?"

"Rain, by Jove!" cried Dick, "and a dashing storm too. Only look at it against the windows, Claude."

"It is a rattle, indeed."

The noise of the rain splashing against the windows was incessant, and they looked at each other in doubt about proceeding. Dick had rung the bell, and the landlord made his appearance.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "what a night it is."

"Rain, we hear," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, sir—quite a water spout. The roads will be in a frightful state in a little while, and it don't seem at all likely to clear up either. There it comes again."

Splash came the rain against the latticed win'ow, with a force that seemed enough to storm it in.

"You will hardly like to ride throught such a storm," added the landlord, "surely, gentlemen."

"Why, no, hardly. It would not be very pleasant."

"Besides, there's a little stream crosses the road not above a mile from here, and it will be so swollen now, that it will be almost enough to carry a horse off his feet. We have the very best beds, I can assure you, gentlemen, and you will find every possible accommodation; so that I feel assured you will never regret passing a night at the Bunch of Grapes."

Dash came the rain again against the casement, and the landlord shook his head, as he added—

"Ah, this will last—this will last, I am very much afraid!"

"What do you say, Dick," whispered Claude; "shall we stay, or make our way through the rain? Jack, what is your opinion about it, eh?"

"Would it not be better to stay," said Dick, "until a very early hour in the morning? It will do none of us any good to get thoroughly drenched, as we shall get. There it comes again!"

"Well, let us stay, then," said Dick. "Can you show us a room, landlord? as we are old travellers, and always like to see where we are to sleep, before we remain anywhere for the night."

"Yes, gentlemen, with pleasure—with pleasure."

Upon this, the landlord took up one of the lights from the table, and opening a door in the wall of the room in which they were, and which had not at all been noticed previously, he said—

"This leads to two nice bed-rooms, indeed, and in one there are two beds, and in the other only one, and you will find them all amazingly comfortable, I can assure you. At least, we never had a complaint from any one who slept in them."

The rooms were rather dark and gloomy. They opened one into the other, and there was some old trees growing so close to the windows, that in daytime they must have been quite shaded. Before they went into these rooms, the landlord



had rung the bell in the other one rather sharply, which they did not see any occasion to do; but they had scarcely been in the first bed-room above a few moments, when dash came the rain against its window.

"Ah, there goes the storm again," said the landlord. "Dear me, I do, indeed, pity people who are forced to be out on such a night as this. How the wind blows, too."

"I must confess I don't hear the wind," said Claude.

"Not hear it, sir! Lord bless you, sir, there was a most terrific gust just then. I hope you like the bedrooms?"

"Oh, they will do very well—very well, indeed, and we will stay; but we must be off by the first streak of daylight, whether the rain is coming down or not; so take care that some one is up to get us our horses, and all that sort of thing."

"Depend upon me, sir, I will attend to you. Any more wine, gentlemen, if you please?"

"Yes, you can let us have another couple of bottles of the same Madeira. Where are you, Jack?"

"He has gone into the next room," said Dick.

"Oh, very good. The wine will do in the course of half an hour, landlord, as we have not finished the last bottle."

"Certainly, gentlemen; you may depend upon every possible attention at the Bunch of Grapes, I assure you. Nobody ever complains of the Bunch of Grapes; I can assure you, gentlemen. Dear me, how the rain does dash away, to be sure. I wouldn't turn a dog out on such a night as this, I declare."

The landlord, with this, bowed himself out of the room, and shut the door after him. The moment he was gone there came another dash of rain against the windows, and then Jack, who, while they had been talking to the landlord in the bedroom, had gone back into the sitting-room, held up his finger, and mysteriously beckoned to Claude and Dick to come close to him.

They did so in some surpise, if not alarm.

"Did you ever know it to rain in this desperate way," whispered Jack, "while the stars shone bright and clear?"

"Not exactly," said Dick.

"Well, did you ever know all the rain to come upwards against a window, instead of down from the sky?"

"Certainly not," said Claude.

"Then the rain which has induced us to pass the night, or to say that we would pass the night at the Bunch of Grapes, is of that very strange character, that it dashes away while the stars are shining brightly in a cloudless sky, and it comes all from below in the most remarkable manner, being strongly suggestive of being thrown up with a mug from a pail below."

"A mug!" said Dick.

"A pail!" said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack. "I don't know what it means, or what can be precise object of it; but we are humbugged into staying, on pretence that it is raining hard, when, in reality, the effect is produced by water being dashed against the windows, as I tell you."

Claude and Dick looked at each other in amazement.

"What can be the meaning of it?" said Claude. "I will then open the window at once and see——"

"No—no," said Jack. "Be careful. You don't know what we have to contend with yet; go into the front bedroom, Claude, and open that window, when you will ascertain, without any sort of doubt, if the night be a wet one or not. You go likewise, Dick; I am quite satisfied upon the subject."

## CHAPTER CCX.

## THE NIGHT OF DANGER AT THE BUNCH OF GRAPES.

DICK and Claude knew perfectly well that Jack would not have spoken upon such a subject at all, but upon the very best grounds; and his manner was sufficient at once to convince them both that he was not at all in a joking humour. Without a word Claude went into the bedroom, and when he returned, he said—

“It’s as fine a night as ever came out of the heavens.”

“I told you so,” said Jack.

“But, good gracious,” said Dick, “what could be the object of all this? Does he know us, and is he merely keeping us here until he can send for assistance to capture us?”

“That is the most likely supposition,” said Claude. “Let us go down stairs and be off at once by force.”

“No—no,” said Jack. “Do not be hasty, Claude, I beg of you. I do not think that that is the true solution of the mystery, for if it were so, have we not been here quite long enough for him to have carried out such an idea? and if he knew us at all, he would know us from the first, of course.”

“What is it, then?”

“There’s the mystery, and a mystery it is. Claude, you have very sharp ears. The landlord, and a woman, and another man, whom I saw hulking about as we came in, seem to make the room below this their common sitting apartment. There is a door, as no doubt you noticed, at the bottom of the stairs. If you will creep down to that and listen, you may hear something.”

“I will do it.”

“Be careful, though, Claude, and have your pistols ready. Dick and I will be just at the top of the stairs to render you immediate assistance in case you should require it.”

“Help me off with my boots, Jack; I will go down on my stocking-soles, and then, I know, they cannot hear me; but my boots will creak, in spite of me.”

Jack helped him off with his boots, and then Claude, after making a slight examination of one of his pistols that he chose to carry in his hand, tripped softly down the narrow flight of stairs which led to the room below, and at the foot of which was the door which had been noticed by Jack. Dick and Jack leant as far over the balustrade at the top of the stairs as they could to listen, and they could hear the hum of conversation in the room below, although they could not make out what was said.

Claude, however, had got his ear to the panel of the door, and he heard every word. The landlord was speaking.

“I tell you I saw it,” he said. “He has got a bag of gold with him—the youngest of the three, I mean, be he whom he may; but I suppose they are gentlemen travelling about for pleasure.”

“Well, then, do it,” said a woman’s voice, “only if they go to the window and look out, they will see that it is a fine night, and they will suspect something.”

“Oh, stuff! They stand it pretty well, but they have taken too much wine already to be very observing or scrutinising; and they are good judges, too, I can tell you.”

“And that,” growled another male voice, “I suppose, frightened you out of putting in the stuff?”

“I own I shrank from doctoring the wine to them while they were quite sober, and their taste was fresh. They might have found it out, for you know it does give the wine a taste, and particularly light wines. I they had called for port it would have been another thing; but they didn’t.”

“It’s safest, though,” said the woman. “Then there’s no bother about it, and down they go into the old well-hole, as nice as may be. How much money do you think there was, John?”

"A hundred pounds if there was a penny-piece! Whose to say that the other two may not have as much? I'd settle the whole three of them for half that money, to say nothing of the horses, which, you know, we can get rid of."

"True enough—true enough; and we don't have such a chance every day. Look at the last person we put out of the way. There was a disappointment! Only twelve pounds in all, and we thought by his appearance that he had plenty."

"Ah, and his watch was gilt, too."

"Yes, what a take in! Oh, I have no patience with such horrid swindling; but, as you say you have seen their money, John, why that is quite sufficient, you know."

"I have seen it; and I tell you what I'll do. I'll put some of the stuff into the two bottles they have ordered, and take the chance of it. If they go to bed upon that, they will sleep sound enough, I'll warrant; and then Ben and I will cut their throats quietly enough about the time of midnight."

"That will do," said the woman, "nicely; and now you, Ben, go and splash some more water against their window, for it all depends upon their not finding out that trick, which I'm quite in a fidget about."

"Why, how the deuce else was I to ask them to stay?" said the landlord. "You know it has answered before, and why shouldn't it now? People think they hear the rain, and they don't think of looking when they have got a good bottle of old Madeira before them, and have once made up their minds to stay where they are."

"Oh," thought Claude, "that will do. A pretty establishment we have dropped upon here."

There was some slight movement in the room now, and Claude, apprehensive that the landlord was going to open the door that led to the staircase, stepped up stairs again, and pulled on his boots.

"Well?" said Dick.

"What did you hear?" said Jack.

"Oh, it's all right."

"Is it, though? Well, I will never trust myself again," said Jack. "They are honest folks, are they?"

"As honest as a set of brutal cut-throats can be expected to be—that's all. Listen, and I will just tell you what a nice pleasant sort of predicament we have been very near falling into to-night. Speak low, and don't utter any exclamation of surprise at what I tell you, because, now that we know our danger, it vanishes."

Claude then narrated to Jack and Dick exactly what he had heard from the people below, after which they all three stared at each other in silence.

"Why, Jack, this affair," said Claude, "seems to have struck you all of a heap."

"It has—it has!"

"And you, too, Dick. I don't think you will ever shut your mouth again."

"Oh, yes, I shall," said Dick, closing it with a loud clap of the teeth; "but I never was more staggered in all my life, I must confess. I would—Ah! there goes our friend Ben with the bucket of water against the window."

Dash came the mock rain again, and then before any further remarks could be made, the landlord made his appearance with the other two bottles of Madeira that had been ordered by Claude, and he looked so meek and mild, and smiling, that no one could have supposed for one moment, without they really had the knowledge of the fact that our friends had, that he could be a deliberate murderer.

"I have brought the wine, gentlemen," he said, "and I hope you will find it to your liking."

"Not a doubt," said Claude. "How it rains yet."

"Oh dear, yes, it does indeed, sir. I should think that the Oxford coach would hardly get on such a night as this."

"Scarcely; but it's a good thing that we are housed. We will ring when we want anything, landlord, and we shall go to bed quite early to-night, as we intend to rise so soon. I hope you have properly attended to our horses?"



"Lord bless you, sir, if they had been my own from the first moment they set foot in the stable, I could not have been more attentive to them than I have been."

"That's right—thank you."

"Thank you, gentlemen ; and I feel quite sure you will never complain of your entertainment at the Bunch of Grapes."



THE PURSUIT ON THE THAMES.

The landlord retired, and when they had fairly heard the last of his footsteps retreating down the stairs, Claude said—

"Did you ever come near such a consummate villain as that, Dick? Really it is a mercy that we have stopped here, and found him out, is it not?"

"It is, for if we don't stop his career, he ought to be allowed to stop ours ; and

he shall, too, for I will not leave this place with the idea that any other people less wide-awake than we are, should fall into this fellow's snares."

"Good," said Claude. "We will consider that it is a duty we owe to society to put a stop to his villany, and it will perhaps be considered as a kind of set-off to some of our own little escapades in this world. Who knows?"

"Ah!" said Jack, "who knows, indeed? I very much doubt it, however, Claude. But what do you purpose doing?"

"Well, I was thinking of that all the while I was on the staircase listening. If the landlord had opened the door and seen me, I should have shot him without a doubt; but as he did not, he escaped. Would it not be better to pretend to go to bed, and see what comes of it?"

"Unless," said Dick, "we now sally down at once, and have it out with the wretches."

"I have only one objection to that," added Claude, "and that is, that as they may not be all in the room below, some mischief may come to our horses, and that would be about as bad just now as getting us to swallow that cursed Madeira and then comfortably cutting our throats."

"And putting us down the well-hole," added Jack.

"Precisely."

"Then let us do as you think, Claude," said Dick. "I, upon consideration, think it is the best plan. It is getting fast on to eleven o'clock now, but I should like to take a good look at the two bed-rooms, while we have the lights all ready here to do it with, and while we are not likely to be disturbed."

"Come on, then," said Claude, "it is what I was thinking of doing myself. Jack, place a chair against the door, so that if the rascal comes here while we are in the other rooms, we shall hear him, and catch him before he goes again."

Jack placed the chair in such a way against the door of the room, that if any one tried to open it from without, over the chair would go, and make sufficient noise on the floor in its fall to give them an alarm. They then took one of the two lights that were upon the table, and went into the next bed-room; and now, with the knowledge of how it had in all likelihood been the scene of many a murder, they fancied that they was something peculiar even in the very atmosphere of it.

They walked as noiselessly as they could, for they did not wish to give any alarm to the landlord or his myrmidons, by letting him think that they were making a search in the bed-rooms instead of drinking the drugged wine, and they only spoke in whispers.

"Here's a lot of clothes under this bed," said Jack.

"Is there? Pull them out."

Jack pulled some of them out, and it was quite evident that they had belonged to different individuals. No doubt they were the suits that had been worn by the unfortunates who had lost their lives in that room.

"Look here," said Dick.

They both approached Dick, who had turned one of the beds half over. The under side of it was one mass of gore!

For more than a minute they maintained the position into which they had been cast by this frightful spectacle; and then Dick let the bed drop again, and in a solemn tone, he said—

"This is indeed horrible. The people in this house must be fiends, not human beings. We are to lie down upon one side of a bed, after the horrible evidence of a recent murder stained the other. It is too terrible!"

"The villains!" said Jack.

"Hush—hush, both of you!" said Claude, holding up his hand in a warning attitude. "Let me implore you not to let your natural feelings now run away with you on this occasion. We can and will put a stop for ever to the frightful practices going on in this place."

"So help me Heaven, I will!" said Jack. "Oh, Claude, we are bad enough, and our mode of life perhaps won't stand much talking about; but we are angels compared to the people in this place."

"We are, I think."

"I can bear this no longer," said Dick, drawing a pistol from his pocket; "I will go down stairs and— and——"

"Make a mess of the whole affair," said Claude. "Be calm, Dick. The management of this piece of business is in our own hands, and it would be folly to mar it. Jack, lend me the light; I want to see what is in that cupboard over there. We don't know what horrible confirmation of what we already know well enough it may contain."

## CHAPTER CCXI.

DETAILS HOW THE FRIENDS SETTLED MATTERS AT THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

THE cupboard door was locked.

"Quite fast," said Claude. "But that won't detain us for very long, I take it, Jack?"

"Certainly not; I will open it, Claude. You hold the light so that I may see well what I am about, for it is rather a desirable thing to make as little noise as possible, as we intend to let the vagabond of a landlord here have his swing out. Now for it."

"You listen, Dick, if all is quiet in the next room," said Claude. "It would spoil all if they were to come up stairs just now, you know."

"All's right," said Dick, as he stood in a stooping posture between the two rooms; "I should catch the smallest sound that can take place below now. You go on with your inquiries; I will warn you in time if anything is amiss."

Jack always had a few well made tools about him, by the aid of which any lock could be readily opened, and he was not above two minutes in managing that one that belonged to the cupboard door in the bed-room.

"Here it comes," he said, and it did come with a vengeance; for bouncing open, evidently from the pressure of some weight on the inside, out fell, nearly upon Jack, a dead body, presenting a frightful spectacle from being covered with blood.

Jack had a difficulty in keeping himself from uttering a loud shout of alarm, and, as it was, Claude could not help exclaiming—

"The deuce!"

"What is it?" whispered Dick. "What's the row?—Eh?"

"Nothing very particular. Only just step here, and you will see, while I watch at the door."

Dick did just step there, and the sight he saw filled him with horror and amazement.

"Gracious Heaven!" he said, "this is a confirmation of our suspicions, even if they had amounted to nothing more. This is a frightful spectacle."

"It is," said Jack, "but it must be got back into the cupboard again, or else it will strike the eyes of those below the moment they come into this room, and put a stop to our plans of catching them in the moment that they think of committing new crimes."

"It's all very well," said Dick, "to talk of putting that into the cupboard again, but unless you do it yourself, Jack, I don't fancy that Claude or I will fancy much touching it."

"I? Oh, I could not touch it for worlds!"

"Hist!—hist!" said Claude.

"What is it?"

"Somebody coming. Let us all get into the other room. Come on! Quick with you both—come on. Somebody is creeping up the stairs; but let them be ever so slow over it, they must get here soon. Come this way."

Dick, upon the spur of the moment, with his foot, sent the dead body right far away out of sight under one of the beds, and then he followed Jack into the sit-

ting-room again. They all three sat down, and looked quite calm and contented, as though nothing had happened. The landlord slunk into the room with a faint smile upon his face.

"I have brought the wine, gentlemen."

"All's right," said Claude; "I hope it is equal to the last?"

"Oh, dear yes, gentlemen. It's from another bin, but, if anything, it's better, and the gentlemen who come here praise it quite wonderfully, they do. It's a very fine wine!"

"Thank you, landlord. Will you join us in a glass of it? Don't say no from any modesty upon the subject, now."

"Ah, gentlemen, it's so kind of you to ask a fellow, it is indeed; and if it wasn't for Dr. Jones, I would, with all the pleasure in the world—feeling what an honour it was, too, at the same time, you see, gentlemen."

"And who is Dr. Jones?"

"Oh, he is my medical man, and he says that I must not take wine, but spirits instead, if I take anything; though, to tell the truth, he tries to persuade me to take nothing."

"Oh, well, of course, you must not run contrary to the advice of your medical attendant."

"No, sir. Good evening, sir."

"What sort of a night is it, now?" said Dick.

"A little better; but it's gathering up again, and we shall have, I am afraid, the worst of it yet."

"So I think; good night. We shan't want anything else; and as it is getting late, I don't think we need keep you out of your bed, landlord."

"That's very kind of you, gentlemen. We are simple conscientious folks, and go early to rest with easy souls. Ah, dear, a clear conscience is everything, ain't it, gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes," said they all in chorus.

Turning up his eyes, then, as though he were repeating some mental prayer, the landlord left the room, and for a few moments our three adventurers could only look at each other in silence, they were so thoroughly disgusted by the cant and the hypocrisy of the landlord of that den of murder.

It was Jack who first broke the silence.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of our kind host of the Bunch of Grapes, now?"

"Think?" said Dick, in a loud tone. "Think——"

"Hush! my dear friend," said Claude. "We ought not be surprised that the man who can commit a murder should be an accomplished hypocrite. It is impossible that the landlord of this house can increase my abhorrence of him, let him say what he will, or do what he will."

"But the cant of the fellow——"

"Well—well, never mind it. Let us thoroughly settle what we mean to do."

"It is all in your hands, Claude; I am ready and willing to do whatever you please in the affair."

"Very well. Upon one thing you may depend, Dick, and that is, that I won't balk you of the proper amount of retribution, which, I see, you feel you would like to visit the landlord with; I think as keenly upon that point as you do. Now, what I propose is, that we go to bed—that is to say, that we pretend to do so—you and me, I mean Dick, while Jack hides in the room likewise, in such a place as will enable him to give us notice of anything going on. I will have a pair of pistols ready for action in my hands, and you can have the same."

"What then?"

"Why, I feel strongly inclined to shoot any one who intrudes into the room."

"And I most certainly will do so. All that I ask of you is, that you will let me have first pop at the landlord; I owe him a grudge, and I shall not feel at all satisfied until I have paid him in full."

"You shall then, Dick."



"I am satisfied ; and now as this wine is poisoned, of course, he took none of it ; but it will look suspicious to see the full bottle, so there goes a lot of it into the ashes ; and now let us to bed, for the very air of this place now to me after the discoveries we have made in the next room seems thick and full of the very aroma of murder."

"I don't care how soon I am on the road again," said Claude, as he rose.

"Nor I," said Jack ; "I will hide carefully behind the door in the next room, so as they come in they will only the more effectually conceal me by opening it upon me, and then I shall be ready to pounce upon them at a moment's notice ; but mind, both of you, if you begin pistol firing, and there is but a dim light in the room, don't mistake me for one of the murderers, and accommodate me with half an ounce of lead as a stomachic. Mind that."

"We will be careful, Jack."

They now all three walked about the room a little, and then they flung down one of the chairs, for this object was to renouer the belief that they had got tired of sitting over the wine, and were going to bed. Then they all three sallied into the bedroom, and after slamming the door of connection between the two rooms, so as it should be supposed below that one of them had gone there, they all stood in the front room, and listened attentively.

Not the smallest sound broke the stillness of the place. Claude went to the window and looked out. "The night is a lovely one," he said, "and I hope we shall soon be out in it. If the air of the sitting-room was full of uneasy feelings, what must this be ? Did you put the body in the cupboard again, Jack ?"

"Not I. Dick kicked it under the bed there."

Claude shuddered, but he made no further remark about it. They then hastened their preparations. Dick got just under the coverlid of one of the beds, and Claude under that of the other. They both had a pistol clutched firmly in the right hand, and they were neither of them men to miss their mark very easily when they chose to hit it. Jack got behind the door, and then Claude said--

"Is all right ?"

"All is right," they both replied.

"Out you go, then," said Claude, as he flung the pillow at the candle and upset it at once.

The room was even then not very dark, in consequence of the night being so fine ; and if the old trees had not grown so close to the windows as almost to make the effect of an outer blind to them, no doubt every object in that apartment, within whose walls murders had been done, no doubt, many a time, would have been distinctly visible. As it was, everything had a dim and spectral look, and a coat that hung upon a peg, with a hat upon it, looked so like a human figure, that Claude could hardly convince himself that it was not one.

It was not policy for any of them to speak now, but Dick did just whisper,—

"Jack ! Jack ! do you hear anything ?"

"Not a thing. But don't talk."

The stillness that ensued was most intense, and it lasted for nearly half an hour. It seemed really to be half a day to those who were waiting the denouement of that strange adventure. The patience of Claude was getting quite exhausted, and he was on the point of saying something, when all at once a footstep was quite plainly heard in the outer room, where they had sat at their wine. They now all three listened most intently.

The footsteps were quite plainly to be heard, and it did not seem as if the person or persons who were walking in the outer room were at all careful about the noise they made. Suddenly, then, some one came close to the door that separated the double-bedded room from the outer one, and the voice of the landlord, to the great surprise of Claude and his friends, said—

"Gentlemen, if you are not asleep, will you rise, for we are afraid that there are some thieves in the house."

It was a wonder that neither Jack, nor Dick, nor Claude, replied to this, it really seemed so very plausible ; but they did not. Ordinary men, unaccustomed

to the strange and adventurous mode of life which they led, must have been deceived by the manner in which this remark was made ; but they were not ordinary men, and they kept up the most profound stillness.

"As fast as a church," said the landlord, then. "How much have they taken of the wine, Wilkins, my boy?"

"Oh, about three parts of the bottle," growled another voice.

"Then that accounts very well for it. Half that quantity would make them sleep for a couple of days."

"Oh bother!"

"Why, what's the matter with you, now, Wilkins, my fine lad? What are you on the growl about, now?"

"Oh, it's enough to make a fellow growl when there's nothing but botheration in the world. I could easy have brought up the old blunderbuss and shot 'em all three an hour ago, you know I could ; but you are so precious frightened of a noise, and you must have your drugged wine first, and your pails of water thrown up against the windows, and all that sort of thing. Don't you call that botheration to a fellow, eh?"

"Well, but, my good lad, it is so safe."

"Oh, safe be hanged."

"Come, come, don't you be out of temper. I have let you have your pick of the three horses you know, and that ought to be something. I am quite certain that dark bay whom you have chosen, is worth a hundred guineas if it is worth a sixpence."

"Well, who said it wasn't?"

"Nobody, my good lad, only you didn't seem to be pleased ; but come, we can make short work of it now, and you know there's already one dead body in the cupboard to get rid of, so we can do all that sort of job at once, and clear off to night. Come on, it's all right."

"Well, who said it wasn't?"

"My dear boy, you really seem determined to be displeased at everything."

"No I ain't. Who said I was, eh?"

"Well, well, my good friend. Be so good as to come and assist in the cutting the throats of these people, and then that nice little job will be over."

"Well, then, come ; for' bless me, you are so precious slow. Mind, now, I'm to have half of all the swag, and the horse I picked out, and an extra five pounds for the job of putting the bodies into the old well."

"Yes, my dear boy, yes. Oh, yes, you are quite a model of contentment, you are, and it does one's feeling good to hear you talk. Come on, now, come on."

With a full confidence that their intended victims were in a sound sleep, this precious pair of worthies now made their way into the large bed-room in which were the two beds, without the smallest idea of the fate that awaited them within its precincts.

The landlord carried a light, and the "dear boy" came close upon his heels. As they entered the room they swung the door so wide open that they quite jammed Jack up against the wall ; but they did not notice that there was any obstruction to its coming wide open.

"Which will you settle, Wilkins?" said the landlord.

"Oh, I don't care."

"Yes, but you know, my lad, there's one in the farther room, and he has to be done for ; and you see we can't divide this little job if we would."

"Oh, you settle which one you like, and I'll do the job for the other two of 'em. Now be off with you, and settle it all. I don't like such shilly-shallying. Mind, I am to have the horse?"

"Oh, of course—of course."

Dick gave a loud snore.

"Ah! you may snore if you like," said the landlord, "its nearly about the last snore you will make in this world, my friend. I will just settle you, as you seem to be sleeping rather uneasily ; so here goes."



## CHAPTER CCXII.

THE FIRE AT THE INN.—THE ROAD AGAIN.—LONDON.

As the landlord spoke, he advanced towards the bed upon which lay Dick. He had placed the light that he carried upon the dressing-table in the room, so that he had nothing to impede him in his murderous plans.

The beautiful Mr. Wilkins stepped up to the bed on which was Claude; and our friend could perceive that he was armed with a knife. The landlord had a similar one; and such a systematic pair of murderers, surely, had never existed, as these two men, who made a trade of slaughter, and looked upon human life as nothing.

"Hold!" cried Jack, for as Dick nor Claude moved, he began to be afraid that they had fallen asleep in earnest, and would become the victims of the murderers.

"All's right, Jack," said Claude, sitting up in the bed, and pointing a pistol at the amiable youth.

"That's it," said Dick, as he likewise sat up in his bed, and levelled a pistol at the landlord.

For a moment or two, the two ruffians were evidently too much petrified with astonishment and dismay to move or speak, and then, with cries of terror, they turned to the door of the room, but there stood Jack, with a pistol in each hand.

"No—no," he said, "you don't pass here."

"Mercy!—mercy!" said the landlord, crouching down upon the floor, and huddling himself up into the smallest possible compass that he could. "Mercy!" The brutal comrade of this man shrieked back against the door of the cupboard, and then he screwed himself up as he said—

"You wouldn't go for to come to shoot a poor fellow, would you now? Oh, don't!"

"What do you want here?" said Claude.

"Oh, dear, gentlemen," said the landlord, "all we wanted was to see if you were quite comfortable!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, gentlemen, that is all, upon my honour! Wasn't it, my boy, ins—wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, upon my honour, too!"

"Dick?"

"Yes, Claude."

"You shoot the landlord, and I will shoot Master Wilkins, so we shall rid the world of two as awful rascals as Heaven ever permitted to crawl upon its surface. I do not feel that this is a murder. It is an execution founded upon the clearest evidence, for the benefit of society at large."

Upon hearing these words, Wilkins fell to the floor, where he lay howling and writhing about in the most extraordinary manner; and the landlord wept, and prayed, and shouted for mercy. Jack kept guard at the door of the room, and all he said was—

"Put them both out of their misery at once. I don't like bloodshed; but I have not a word to say in favour of two cold-blooded murderers!"

"When I cry 'three,' fire, Dick," said Claude.

"I will."

"One—two."

The landlord and Wilkins seemed both going mad, they rolled about so upon the floor, and dashed themselves against it in so terrible a manner. Surely this was a shocking scene; but if ever two human beings merited such an amount of punishment for their crimes, those two men did. They were, as Jack said, two cold-blooded murderers.

"Three!" said Claude.

Bang—bang! went the two pistols. Wilkins, with a cry of agony, bounded to

his feet, and then staggering back, he fell upon the landlord, who had been shot through the head by Dick, and who lay all but dead, shivering upon the floor. The bullet from Claude's pistol had hit Wilkins in the chest, and now he fell on the landlord, and they both drew their last breaths in that room, which no doubt had often echoed to the cries of their victims.

Jack had shut the door, and his back was against it, but now some one tried to get in from without, and a harsh female voice, cried—

"Haven't you done it yet? Where did you get the pistols from? Wilkins, my dear, haven't you done that little job yet?"

"No, ma'am," said Jack, suddenly moving aside from the door, and letting a most repulsive looking woman fall into the room upon her hands and knees. Both Dick and Claude had sprung from their respective beds by this time, and the latter caught the woman by the arm, and swung her right to the other end of the room, saying as he did so—

"Remain with your dear Wilkins, you disgrace to your sex. Come away—come away, my friends, and let us leave at once this horrid house."

With a shriek of dismay as she saw what had happened, the woman fell to the floor, and then our three adventurers hurried from the room, and descending the stairs, they caught up a couple of lights that were burning below, and proceeded to the stable, where they had the satisfaction of finding their three horses well looked to; for the landlord and Master Wilkins had paid all the attention they could to them, looking upon them as their own from the moment they first entered the stable.

The saddles were soon put on, and then the horses were led to the door.

"Stop a bit," said Claude, "I don't feel disposed to leave this place just yet."

"Oh, come away," said Jack. "What more would you do?"

"Wait for me. Hold my horse, Jack."

Jack did so, and Claude went into the house, in which he was absent about five minutes. Then he came back and mounted at once, saying—

"I have set fire to the murder den."

"Have you though, really?"

"Yes, and I think it is the very best end it can come to. There's not a living thing in it but that woman, and she will take good care of herself, no doubt."

"And if she don't," said Dick, "it won't grieve me much, for if anybody deserved a roasting in the world, it is surely such a person as that. This has been rather an ugly night's work, and a most narrow escape."

"It has, indeed. Let us get on, for the further we are from the Bunch of Grapes, the better I shall think the air."

The horses were tolerably fresh, and they now made good speed along the road, but they had not been gone above a mile, when Jack looked round, and cried—

"There burns the old crib. Don't you see the light in the sky?"

They all three paused for a moment or two, and sure enough it was sufficiently evident that the public-house was in roaring flames. It was quite a relief to Claude to find that such was the fact, and to think that he—by the aid of his two friends—had been the cause of sweeping from the face of the earth such a den of iniquity as that house had been.

They started again, and soon left the inn, and the whole district in which it was situated, far behind them. Nothing of further moment occurred to our heroes, until they reached to within a mile of Tyburn-gate, and then they saw a carriage coming along in great state, with a couple of footmen behind it.

"Hilloa!" cried Claude. "Coachman! coachman!"

The coachman thought that something was amiss with his vehicle and pulled up. "That will do," said Claude. "Who have you got in the inside, coachman?"

"You rascal!" said the coachman; "I really thought a linch-pin had come out, or the tie off one of my precious wheels. Get out of the way, you villain!"

Claude fired a pistol apparently at the coachman's head, but he took care to miss. It was so very nigh to a hit, however, that it frightened the coachman very nearly out of his wits, and dropping his whip and his reins, he cried out—

"Oh, my lord, it's highwaymen! it's highwaymen!"

Dick had ridden up to the carriage-door, and a gentleman, in a powdered wig, looked out, crying—

"Drive over the rascals, coachman! drive over the rascals!"

"No, don't," said Dick, as he laid hold of the wig, and by its assistance gave



A NIGHT ADVENTURE AT THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

its owner's head a sound rap against the side of the coach-door. The wig then came off in Dick's hand.

"You villain!" said its owner; "do you know who I am?"

"Not I,—perhaps you will tell us?"

"I am the prime minister."

"The deuce you are! Then you ought to have rather a long purse, for all the

world agrees that you rob the people at such a rate as was never known before. Come, sir, hand out your purse, your watch, rings, or any other jewellery you may happen to have; and I beg to tell you that it won't be at all safe to trifle with us."

"Help! help!"

"Oh, certainly. Jack, the prime minister wants to be helped out of his coach; open the door, Jack."

"No—no! If I am to be robbed, I may as well submit quietly. There is my purse and there is my watch, and there is a diamond ring, which is the only one I ever wear."

"You won't wear it any longer, my lord."

"Nor you, I hope, for long. I shall offer a reward of one thousand pounds for your apprehension, in the morning."

"Make it two," said Dick, "and I'll come and give myself up and claim it, my lord. All's right. Comrades, the prime minister has done the handsome thing, so he may go—off and away: Good-night, my lord, good-night."

"Ha! ha! good-night!" laughed Claude, as he passed the carriage window.

"I should only just like to know who you are," said the minister, "that's all, my fine fellows."

"Why, the fact is," said Claude, "we are three young ladies in disguise. We have just run away from a boarding-school, at Turnham-green. My name is Lydia; that one who took your purse, and watch, and ring, is the amiable Sophia; and this one who is close to me is the gentle Emily. Good-night, my lord. Mind you advertise us all well."

The prime minister was so indignant at this fun being poked at him, that he drew up the window of his carriage with a jerk and would not say another word. One of the footmen had to get down for the purpose of picking up the reins and the whip for the bewildered coachman, and while that was being all settled, our friends rode off.

"Well," said Claude, when they got into Oxford Street, "there has been some fun in that."

"Yes," said Dick, "it was done in an off-handed way at all events; and what is better, the purse seems to be pretty heavy, too, that he handed me out."

"That's the best of it," said Jack. "Here's a good lamp in Quebec Street here. Let's look what's in it."

"With all my heart."

They all three turned their horses' heads up Quebec Street, and halted close to a lamp. The purse was a most magnificent one that the prime minister had handed to Dick, and now he opened it, and poured some of the contents into his hand.

"Halfpence, by Jove!" said Dick.

"All halfpence!" cried Claude.

"Yes, every rap. Here's a do!"

Claude was so highly amused at the long face that Dick pulled over this affair, that he nearly fell off his horse with laughing, and the tears ran down his face.

"Oh, that's good," he said; "but the best of it was your look, Dick, when you turned them out into your hand. That was truly rich. Where's the watch?—Is that copper?—Oh—oh!—I shall never leave off laughing at this."

"No, the watch is all right, and so is the ring, but I admit I never was so thoroughly done with a purse before. It's really provoking."

"Not at all," said Claude. "It's a clever thing, and I give him credit for it, that I do."

"Come—come," said a watchman, at this moment turning a corner, and officiously holding up his lantern to look at them. "Come—come, move on."

"What do you say, my friend?" asked Claude.

"Move on, I say."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Just step here; I have got something to say to you. A little nearer. It's rather a secret."



"Well?" said the watchman coming up close to him. "Well?" Claude poised his riding-whip in his hand, the end of which was heavily loaded.

"I," he said, "am Claude Duval, with one thousand five hundred pounds reward for the taking me. That is Dick Turpin with a thousand pounds for him; and there you go, old fellow."

Down went the riding-whip, and the watchman fell sprawling in the kennel.

"Come on," said Claude. "All's right. He won't like it when he comes to his senses again. Come on."

## CHAPTER CCXIII.

### THE KEN IN THE OLD MINT.—A NIGHT SCENE.

"WHERE shall we go?" said Jack when they had got nearly as far as the junction of Oxford Street with Holborn.

"That is worth the considering," remarked Dick, "before we proceed any further, I think. Suppose we go to the old ken in the Mint? I have not been there for a considerable time, and I dare say you have neither of you crossed its threshold for a long day."

"It is a couple of years since I was in it," said Claude.

"And three times a couple since I was there," said Jack.

"Well, then, is it a bargain? We can put up our horses elsewhere. We have plenty of places where we can safely do that, I should say; and then, on foot, we can walk to the Mint."

"Well, come on, then," said Claude. "It will be a pleasant enough way of passing the night; and who knows but we may chance to meet some old friends there? I think it is always as well now and then to pass a few hours in such places, for the sake of being able to contrast them again with the beautiful open country, which, I confess, is much more my admiration than the town can ever be."

"And mine, too," said Jack; "so let us be jogging."

They put up their horses in the City, where they knew they would not only be perfectly safe but comeatable at a moment's notice, if needs were; and then, on foot, they proceeded to the Mint at Southwark. That locality then was considered quite sacred to the thieves of London, and it was seldom, indeed, that an officer ventured into it for the purpose of attempting a capture. If one had done so, it would have been a great chance for him to escape with his life.

The ken—as it was called—to which our three adventurers proposed to go, was one of the most celebrated in the whole locality; and if any of what might be called the aristocracy of iniquity went to the Old Mint at all, it was there that they bestowed themselves.

A gentlemanly-looking man suddenly stepped up to Claude, and said—

"Sir, can you tell me the time?"

"Oh, yes. It is past twelve."

"Thank you, sir."

The man looked keenly in the face of Claude, and then, with a bow, walked away.

"What is the meaning of that, I wonder?" said Claude.

"A spy," said Dick. "There was something in that fellow's manner that convinces me at once of his vocation. He is on the look-out for some one; but it can hardly be for us, as our presence here could not be even suspected by any one, since we only made the determination to come here at all within the last half hour or so."

"And yet I feel a presentiment," said Jack.

"Of what?"

"Of much danger. Oh, Claude, it seemed to me as if at the moment that man

spoke to you, an audible voice from some invisib'le lips had said to me, 'Go not to the Mint.' "

"Oh, Jack, you should not give way to such fancies," said Claude. "If you continue to do so, you will at last find yourself the slave of all sorts of fancies, and you won't know what to do or to think. Every enterprise you dream of executing will be nipped in the bud by your imaginary terrors, and you will be the slave of your own feelings."

"All that is true, Claude; and yet——"

"Yet what, Jack? Speak freely."

"I would give something if we were not going to the old ken in the Mint to-night."

"Oh, stuff, Jack. Come on—come on!"

"I will go if you go, Claude; for in life or in death, in safety or in danger, I feel that my place is by your side, and it is the place of all others in which I best wish to be; but I still cannot help having my fears."

"Which will all prove groundless, Jack, and to-morrow we shall laugh at them. Come on! It's all right enough."

"There are three of us," said Dick, "and we are all well armed. It would be a bold man, and indeed, I may say, it would be a bold half-dozen of men, who would interfere with us."

"You are right," said Claude, "it would indeed; but here we are."

They had now reached the door of a large building, that looked like some old tavern that had decidedly seen very much better days, but had given up the hope of ever seeing them again. Hanging at right angles from the wall, there was an old, blackened sign; but the wind, and dust, and rain of that not very clean and favoured region, had long since obliterated all traces of what had been upon it.

The roof of the house, which, by-the-by, was only one story in height, was one of those huge sloping ones with a perfect wilderness of tiles, which are still to be seen in some of the very old streets in London. The frontage was rather extensive, for there were no less a number than eight windows in a row, and the doorway was huge, and deeply sunk in the front wall of the old house.

"Well, here we are," said Dick, "and the old ken don't to my eyes look a bit different to what it did a couple or three years ago, and I do believe it will just look like what it does now till the end of the world."

"And three days afterwards," said Claude. "I wonder now if any one is here. There used to be a jolly enough lot always about the old crib. Knock, Dick, and we shall soon see."

With the handle of his riding whip, Dick knocked in a very peculiar way at the door, and he repeated the summons thrice before any attention was paid to it by any one. Then from a little window, that looked like an eye above the door, a face looked out.

"Hilloa!" said the voice that belonged to the face. "What now—eh? Who is it?"

"Old friends," said Dick. "Open the ken. Confound you, don't you know me? You ought to do so."

"Why, it's Turpin!"

"Hold your noise, will you? What do you mean bawling out a man's name in that way for?—I have got two gentlemen with me, and it don't look well to keep them waiting."

"Gentlemen? Why, who are they?"

"The right sort, you may depend; so be quick, will you? Is there anybody in the old ken?"

"Oh, yes, a jolly lot. Ain't it quiet, though? Now they are all singing a chorus, and yet you can't so much as here that a mouse is stirring, can you now? Oh; we keep the sound in nicely now; but that's all owing to science, it is."

The head disappeared from the little window, and Claude said to Dick and Jack—



"He may talk of keeping the sound in as much as he likes, but I can hear the rumour of voices as I stand here. They are under this part of the ground on which we tread. But I don't see that it much matters, for the officers and the beaks know of this place as well as we do, only they dare not come to it to do any mischief. I take it now that there is not a ken in London that is without its spy or two to give notice of who has been there, and that's the only danger with them. It is not in the ken that you run any risk, but it is in being closely watched as you go from it, that you may have a fellow upon your heels when you least expect, who will give the affair to the grabs, and then they will have a snatch at you."

"You are quite right, Claude," said Dick. "But here's the door opened. We won't stay long, and then off we will go to the road again, if you like."

"Agreed."

"And the sooner the better," said Jack.

The door of the old place was cautiously opened, and a man with a lantern made his appearance.

"Come in," he said. "Come in. It's all right."

They, upon this, all three passed into the house; and when Dick had passed the man, the lantern was held up in the face of Claude.

"Oh, gracious, it's him!" said the man. "Why, it's Claude Duval!"

"To be sure, my friend," said Claude. "Couldn't I find time to come now and then to some of the old cribs?"

"To be sure—to be sure, and there ain't a face in the old place that will be welcomer than yours; but who are you, old fellow?"

This last question was addressed to Jack, but although the man looked well at him, he failed to recognise him, and shaking his head, he said—

"You are a puzzler.—I don't know you."

"But you will take our word," said Claude, "that he is one of the right sort, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I'd take your word for a good deal more than that, I rather think; so come on all of you."

The man with the lantern led the way and they followed him closely. After traversing a very large passage, they came to a door, which he pushed open, and then descend a flight of stairs that evidently led quite down among the foundations of the house. Then a couple of gloomy-looking cellars, which might possibly have been dignified by the name of kitchens, were passed through, after which, at the end of another short passage, a blanket, hanging double from the ceiling, was pushed aside, and they were in the ken.

The scene that now presented itself was a most extraordinary one. The ken was an apartment roughly boarded on all sides, ceiling included, with planking, that, by the aid of time and tobacco smoke, had become as nearly black as it very well could be. At one end was a great roaring fire, but owing to there having been some difficulty in carrying the fiew so that it should not point out the exact locality of the ken, the fire had the amiable peculiarity of discharging the greater quantity of its smoke into the ken.

This little circumstance imparted a cloudy look to the atmosphere of the place, and always set everybody coughing upon their first entrance into it. The room, if room it could rightly be called, was capable of holding a couple of hundred people with tolerable ease, and it was now about half full.

There was a large proportion of ladies (?) present.

It was not usual to announce guests in that place; but that quiet rule of allowing anybody to go in and out unobserved, was on the occasion of persons of such celebrity as those that were now ushered into the ken, dispensed with, and the man with the lantern called out in stentorian accents—

"My ram 'uns, here's Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and a friend of theirs. as they goes bail for!"

At this startling announcement, all eyes were directed to the door of the ken,

and then a shout of gratification arose from the assemblage, which was materially assisted by the shrill voices of the ladies.

Claude advanced, and with a smile upon his face, he said—

"I have only just popped in to spend an hour with the family, and to take a bottle of wine, to the health and good keeping of old friends. After that, we must be off again, for London is rather a warm place for us to be in, just now."

"Hurrah!—hurrah!"

A rather dashing specimen of the female sex now came forward, and throwing her arms round Claude, she cried—

"You are as welcome as gin in sorrow, Claude Duval. Come, sit down and tell us what you have been about for this age. Why, some of the old family coves would have it that you were married!"

"Dear me, what could put such a thing into their heads?" laughed Claude. "How very ridiculous. You know, my dear, that a highwayman is married to the road, and that he never seeks to break the union that binds him to a lonely path and a moonlight night. What say you, Dick?"

"I can hardly say anything, Claude, for a young lady has got me so fast round the neck, that I am in peril of instant suffocation, if she don't let me go."

A roaring laugh at this rung through the place, and then the wine was brought. Claude had ordered it as they came along the gloomy passages that led to the old ken, but the bottle he spoke of had somehow swelled to two dozen, of which everybody was to partake.

"Come," said Claude, "I don't come often to the old ken, but when I do, you know, I feel that I ought to order as much as though I had been here once a week, at least; so, as I can't drink it all, I hope all kind friends will help me a little."

This was one way of insuring the most enthusiastic popularity in the ken, not but what Claude was, with his great reputation, sufficiently popular without standing treat to such an extent as that; but with it, he might be called the king of the old family ken.

One hour was thus passed, and the ladies were getting rather glorious, when a voice suddenly cried out—

"It ain't all right. Hilloa!"

At this announcement, everybody was hushed, except a young lady who was singing a song, and she heard nothing but her own dulcet strains; and was not aware that there was anything amiss, until some one threw a glass of wine into her open mouth and nearly choked her.

"What's amiss," cried Claude.

"I'll tell you," said the young fellow who had made the announcement that all was not right; "I'll tell you. The Crinkley Fox and me was a going out of the ken, and he went first, and directly he got outside he was grabbed. I hung back and got the door shut again."

"Perhaps he was wanted *pertickler*," said a deep gruff voice, from a corner of the room.

"Perhaps he was," said Claude, "and if so, it don't much affect us; but that's what I have always said, my friends—the ken's are safe enough while you are in them, but they are watched by the grabs like a cat watching a mouse."

At this moment the man with the lantern rushed into the ken, and in a voice of dismay, he called out, to the astonishment of all present—

"*Milintery*!"

"What?" cried Claude.

"He means military," said Jack. "Hilloa, old Bob White, tell us exactly what you have got to say at once. Is there any danger to Claude Duval?"

"Who is yer, that yer calls me Bob White? Why, I havn't been knowed by the name of Bob White for the last five years or more. I calls myself now, Peter Brown."

"You are determined to be among the colours, then?"

"I tell you what it is, I don't like your looks. You know more than you

ought, old fellow, and I don't know nothing about yer, nor does any of the family know nothing about yer. I've been among 'em and asked 'em, and they don't none of 'em know you; and now all on a sudden yer calls me Bob White!"

"A spy!—a sneak!—kill him!—down with him!" cried a number of voices.

"Silence!" said Duval; "you seem quite to forget that I brought him with me, and that I answer for him as a friend of mine."

"And I too," said Dick.

"Yes," said Bob White, alias Peter Brown, "but yer is both taken in, that's the fact. No doubt yer think he's all right enough, but it's a take-in."

"There you are wrong," cried Claude, "and if any one here attempts to lay a hand upon him, they must first take my life; so I warn you all."

"Hold!" cried Jack; "this must not be."

"And they must kill me likewise," said Dick. "Our word ought to be sufficient for the safety of any one."

The thieves rose in a body with menacing gestures, and the noise of voices was quite tremendous.

## CHAPTER CCXIV.

### THE ESCAPE BY THE RIVER.—THE FATE OF THE POLICE GALLEY.

As the enraged members of the old ken advanced thus threateningly upon Jack, many concealed weapons were produced, such as knives, and other steel means of offence and defence, such as few of the large fraternity of thieves in those days were ever without.

The complexion of affairs was indeed threatening.

"What is to be done?" whispered Dick to Claude.

"Defy them."

"But they are half mad with drink."

"That, indeed, is the worst feature of the whole transaction. Jack, what do you think of this affair?"

Before Jack could answer, the thieves made a further advance towards him, and one pressed so near, that Claude at once stepped forward, and grappling with him, he flung him right into the fire at the farther end of the ken, from which he was only just clawed out in time to save his life by some of the ladies, who, when there appeared some signs of a disturbance, had retired to that end of the ken for safety.

"Beware!" said Claude; "I tell you all to beware of me. When I say I am answerable for the good faith of a man in a place like this, I likewise make myself answerable for his safety."

"Kill him! Down with him!"

"Who says that? Whoever he be, he can howl loud enough," said Jack. "If he will be so good as to step forward and try it, here I am, and I promise him a warm reception."

"Don't speak, Jack," said Claude.

"Oh, but I must; it is time that I should speak; and, now that I have begun, I will speak to some purpose, and they shall hear me. I find that the gentleman with the powerful throat, who was so anxious to kill me, and down with me, don't seem to be glad to come forward."

As he spoke, Jack got upon a table that was close at hand, and Claude and Dick stood close to him to protect him. Claude, with a pistol in his right hand, called out,

"I see a man aiming a bottle at my friend; let him throw it, and I will give him a pistol-bullet in exchange for it."

"Hark ye," cried Jack. "You call me a spy?"

"We do—we do!"

"And you think I am a sneak, and have got into the old ken for the purpose of knocking it up and bringing mischief on all of you? That's what you think?"

"We know it!"

"Indeed! and you think that I have been so cunning as to impose upon Claude Duval and Dick Turpin? Two pretty innocent babes to be taken in by any one, truly!"

There was a loud laugh at this, particularly from the ladies, and one man called out, "It's all right, I think; let it pass, comrades, I say; it's all right."

The tide of popular feeling regarding Jack was certainly on the turn; but yet, in the flashing eyes and the menacing gestures of some present, he saw that they were still far from satisfied, so he added:—

"My good friends, for myself I am not afraid; but if there be danger to-night, it is fit that we should all be united, and well able to resist it. If there be anything like doubt or disunion amongst us, we are lost; and so for that reason, and not for any other, I will tell you who I am."

This announcement created the greatest interest, and every sound was hushed, while the utmost attention was given to what Jack might next say.

"I am quite astonished," he added, "that Bob White don't know me. To be sure, it is years since we met; but that ought not to make much difference to him, for he knew me well."

"If I did," said Bob White, "you are preciously altered, that's all."

"I am altered," said Jack, in a tone of sadness; "and yet I am not so much altered as I was a year ago. Look at me!"

He took off his hat, and stood looking at Bob White, who, shading his eyes with his hands, regarded him for some moments in silence; and then in a loud voice he cried—

"Why, by all that's good, it's—it's——"

"Who?—who?" shouted everybody, and then a silence, as profound as that of death, reigned in the ken. Jack smiled faintly as he still looked at Bob White, who then cried—

"Yes! I'd swear to him now he has laughed. Why, old fellows, this is Sixteen-string Jack!"

The moment these words were pronounced by the old servitor of the ken, there was a roaring shout of pleasure, and Jack was dragged from the table to be half smothered by the caresses of the ladies, and the shaking of hands to which the men subjected him.

"Lor' bless us!" said Bob White, "we have all of us heard an odd story of how Jack was brought to life agin, arter his dance upon nothing at Tyburn, but we none of us believed it till now; but this is him, as sure as eggs is eggs."

"Yes," said Jack, "I am Sixteen-string Jack, and the story is true; and let it have been dressed up in ever so marvellous a manner to your ears, it cannot transcend the truth. But now that your minds are at ease about who I am, let us think of the main chance. What is the danger, Bob? Tell us all about it."

It took about ten minutes to get the meeting into the quiet orderly state which was so highly necessary under the circumstances; and then Bob spoke clearly and distinctly—

"You see, pals," he said, "I began to think it a very odd thing, that half an hour and more had slipped away without any fresh arrival to the old ken, so I got up to the little window, and looked out, and what should I see but the *millintery*, actually a parcel of soldiers, a keeping guard at the corner of the old house, and close to the door stands half-a-dozen of officers waiting to nab everybody as comes out of the ken."

"Yes, and the Crinkley Fox is nabbed already."

"You hold your noise. What's to be done, that's the thing! Who do they come after, that's the question? It ain't all of us."

"That," said Claude in a clear voice, "can scarcely be a question now. By some means or another, they have dogged me, and Dick, and Jack to this place, and it is us they are after."

The general silence in the ken sufficiently proclaimed that such was the universal opinion of all present.

"I don't mean to say it isn't so," said Bob White, "but we know how to settle that without troubling them, after all. There's two ways of getting in and out of the old ken."

"I know there is," said Claude. "You have a mode of getting to the bank of the river, I am well aware, from this house, and that is the only way by which we shall have a chance of escaping. The sooner we go the better, and it is not at



THE ESCAPE ON THE THAMES FROM THE OLD MINT.

all likely that any one else, upon leaving the ken, will be more than merely temporarily inconvenienced by a detention long enough to convince the officers that he is not one of those whom they seek. I would wish you all to stay as long as you can, so as to give them a good waiting job. And now, Bob, if you will show us the way out to the river, we shall be glad enough to be off at once."



"Listen to me a moment first," said Bob ; " I don't feel, do you know, quit clear in my own mind that they don't fancy we have such a way to the river though they don't know where it is exactly, for the last time we had to use it there was a police-galley plying about the spot, as if on the look-out."

"It must be risked, though, for all that."

"In course it must ; but it's as well you should know that there may be the grabs in that direction."

"It's much better that we should know, and we all feel not a little obliged by the caution, Bob ; but the sooner we be off now, the better."

"Good again. Now for it. We will soon open the way from the old crib to the Thames, if that will do any good, and I am in hopes as it will."

There were many then present who perfectly understood how to open the secret passage from the ken that led to the banks of the Thames. It was done thus :

From a corner of the ken, three of the floor-boards, that were placed apparently quite permanently against the wall, were removed, and when such was the case, they disclosed an aperture behind them, about large enough for two persons to walk in abreast.

"There it is," said Bob. "All folks have to do now, is to go right on, and then they will come to the old wharf that's always to let, on the banks of the Thames."

"Always to let ?" said Dick.

"Yes, it belongs to us. This secret passage from the old ken opens on to it. It ain't worth above twenty pounds a-year rent, and by asking forty pounds for it when anybody comes about it, we keep it unlet, you see ; for we would'nt let it on no account at all, as if we did, the people would be sure to go poking about, as folks do when they get into a strange place, till they found out the secret passage."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Well, now, I'll go before you with a light, so that you can't help being all right. Come on."

Claude turned to the thieves in the ken, and said in a cheerful voice—

"Good-night, or rather good-morning to you all I hope we shall meet again soon, when we may be able to spend a little more time together than now."

"Hurrah !" cried the thieves. "Good-night, and good luck to you all three. some again to the old ken as soon as you can."

"We will," said Dick and Jack. "You may depend upon it that we will, my lads."

"Come on," cried Bob White. "Come on ; who knows but the *millinery* may get outrageous, and come in all of a troop ? Come on now, while you can."

Claude, Dick, and Jack, followed Bob through the opening in the wall ; and as he preceded them with the lantern, it seemed as though they were diving right into the bowels of the earth, or exploring some long closed up mine, with a faint star to guide them. The air was mouldy and misty in that place, and they could feel that the ground upon which they trod was very damp, while here and there an absolute pool of water splashed under their feet.

"This is not the most delightful place in the world," said Claude. "It seems reeking with moisture."

"Well, perhaps," said old Bob, "it isn't the most delightfulest place in the world ; but it's a deuced deal better than a cell in Newgate, I should say."

"Oh, there's no comparison," laughed Claude. "But what makes it so damp ? It don't lie so very low, I think."

"It's always been so since the last time the Thames took a freak of rising about six feet higher than it was used to do. This old place was flooded then, and so was the ken ; but what with the constant fire and the feet of the family coves, we got it out of the ken ; but it never all *evapooiwated* out of this here old passage."

The three friends smiled to themselves at the rather peculiar manner in which old Bob pronounced the word evaporation ; but they controlled their inclina-



tion to laugh outright, for they had a respect for the old man which made them anxious to spare his feelings, independent of the fact that he was there and then doing them a very great service.

"Mind, Bob," said Dick, "that you put us down for the rent of the old wharf this year."

"Oh, that will be all right, I know. Don't say anything about that, old fellow. We know you all well enough to feel quite sure the payment is forthcoming some day or another."

"It shall be forthcoming at once," said Dick. "We have enough for that, although we are not what we consider in full feather, just now, Bob; but, you know, we have ways and means of getting more."

The old man laughed; but he did not refuse the money that Dick thus implied that he would hand to him. The passage now certainly did not improve in appearance or in comfort, for the sloppy condition of the ground of it was much worse as they neared its termination on the old wharf; and it was but natural that such should be the case; for it went on a slight incline all the way, and, of course, the lower part of it took the greatest possible amount of drainage from the upper.

Now and then, too, a suspicious scampering sort of noise, just on in advance of them, spoke eloquently of the presence of some of the reptile tribe.

"You have rats here," said Claude.

"A few," said Bob. "I don't think there's a great lot; for there ain't much to get here, you see, and they are wide enough awake for to look after their own insides, you see."

"Not a doubt of it, Bob. If you were to put a nice old Cheshire cheese now here for them, it would be doing them rather an extensive favour."

"Ah, catch me at it! But here we are."

As he spoke, the old man emerged from the long and dismal passage on to an old miserable wharf, that was upon the bank of the river. All was in intense darkness, for before leaving the passage, he had placed the lantern on the ground with its dark shade turned towards the wharf, as he did not know who might be on the look-out from the river.

"This is the place," he said, "and when your eyes get a little used to the out-of-door darkness, you will be able to see what a rummy old den it is; but there are several wherries generally moored off it, and one of them will be the thing."

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## CHAPTER CCXV.

### A TERRIBLE NIGHT ON THE RIVER.—THE OLD BUILDING AT BUCKINGHAM-STREET.

CLAUDE and his friends looked about them as well as they were able, and they were not a little struck by the gloomy aspect of the place to which they had been led; and Jack, as he nearly fell over a piece of timber, said—

"Confound the place! why, it seems full of pit-falls, and man-traps."

"Well, it is, in a manner of speaking," said their guide, "and it's a good thing to look where you are going here. A false step might take you right into the tide in a moment, and then away you would go."

"And in the darkness, no help for you," said Dick.

"Not a bit—not a bit!"

"What's that?" said Claude, suddenly.

"Where—where?" said Dick.

There was a light upon the river for about the space of half a minute, and then it disappeared again. It was more like a flash upon the night air for an instant than anything else; but still, it was suspicious, for the long, darting ray

of light was, to the apprehension of Duval, decidedly directed towards the old wharf.

"Did you not see the light?" said Claude.

"I did," replied Jack.

"And so did I," said the old man; "and I shouldn't be at all surprised if it wasn't one of those confounded police galleys, as they call 'em, that go poking about in the dark to hinder folks from getting a living."

"If so, Bob," said Claude, "it is on the look-out for us to-night, you may depend."

"And if so," said Jack, "we are hemmed in regularly both by land and water; for the soldiers hold us one way and the galley the other. All we can do now is to lead the life of decoyed rats in this place, and finish off by eating each other."

"What a lively picture you draw, Jack."

"Ah, Claude, it may be nearly a true one; and there's the light again—I saw it, and so did you all."

"I did," said Bob, "and I tell you what it is. This place, as I said before, wasn't thought very well off by the police, and you may depend upon it, as sure as eggs is eggs, that they have got their eyes upon it to-night, and are not likely to take them off again. The sooner you get away the better."

"Good advice, Bob," said Claude; "but, like most of the same quality in this world, rather difficult to follow."

"Not at all; you all creep along by the side of the wall, and keep as close as you can till you get to the edge of the wharf. Mind you don't take one step too far and tumble over, that's all. When you get there, wait till you hear something of me. I know all the ins and outs of the old den better than most folks, and if I don't bring you a wherry soon, it will be something rather particular that hinders me. Good-by."

With this, Bob crouched down himself, and crawled away, leaving his friends to follow the good advice that he gave them.

"Come on," said Claude. "Follow me. I fancy I am something like a cat, for I can see capitally now, notwithstanding the darkness of this place; so I shall not lead you astray, any of you. Come on."

"We will follow."

Claude bent forward and kept his eyes fixed upon the ground before him, lest he should, notwithstanding he thought so much of his powers of observation in the dark, go a little too far; and he felt then quite convinced that he saw well enough to know when he should come to the extreme edge of the old wharf.

Moreover, his sense of hearing began to be of some assistance to him in that particular, for he could hear the water hissing and gurgling past the old rotten and tide-worn piers of the wharf; and as that sound increased upon his sense, he crept along still slower and slower, until he reached the verge of the wharf.

"Halt!" he said.

"All's right, Claude?" said Dick. "All's right? Is Bob there?"

"No, not yet; but everything is profoundly quiet now. I don't hear any sound of our enemies on the night air."

"Hush!" said Jack; "I hear a low kind of splashing, as if some boat were being very carefully rowed along. Ah, now I hear the oars working in the rollers. Be upon your guard, Claude."

"I will. Hush! hush!"

The most profound stillness reigned in the place, and they all three of them faintly heard the sounds that Jack had spoken of as indicative of the approach of a boat. That it was Bob they all hoped and expected; but in that they were disappointed, for in a few moments a voice said—

"Hilloa! Who's there?"

Perhaps the most obvious policy of Claude would have been to keep profoundly still, but he hit upon a bold manœuvre, and in a moment he said—

"Police! Surrender yourselves, or we will fire!"

"Hold hard," said the voice again. "We are police. This is galley No. 4. Don't fire."

"Oh, all's right," added Claude. "Pass on, and don't make a noise. We have got scent of the game."

"Good luck to you, then. We won't be far off."

"I will flash a light if we want you," said Claude.

"Do—do. Good speed and good luck."

The boat which he, Claude, could only just dimly see low down in the water below the edge of the wharf, had some half dozen men in it; and as they glided away they looked like shadowy spectres in the night air, that, mixed with the vapour arising from the river, seemed floating like something tangible around that spot. Claude and his companions preserved the most profound stillness for nearly five minutes, and then Jack ventured in a low tone to speak.

"You did them, then, Claude. It was a capital move, and if anything will save us, it will."

"I think so, too," said Dick. "Half the danger is past now that these fellows are fairly taken in."

"Don't let us be too sanguine," said Claude. "Caution will do us no harm at all. I hear another boat coming. Crouch down, both of you; and if it be an enemy, I will try the same game with it."

"But it ain't," said a voice from the water, which they at once recognised as belonging to Bob. "What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Bob is it?"

"To be sure. I don't see nor hear any of the Philistines, and I really begin to think they have given it up as a bad job, do you know?"

"Do you, Bob? Just listen to me a little, and I'll tell you what will open your eyes to the contrary."

Claude then in a few words told the old man what had taken place, and at its conclusion, Bob drew a long breath and said—

"Well, that was what I call taking a lion by the nose, or a mad bull. They say if you lay hold of a mad bull by the nose, he is all civility, and says directly, 'Anything you please, sir!' but the difficulty is to screw one's courage up to do it."

"I should think it was; and likewise to get the gentleman—I mean the bull—to stand still while you do it. But will your boat hold us all, Bob? for I suppose you are not in the water."

"Yes, come on; drop over one by one, and I will take hold of your legs and bring you down safely into the boat. There's a kind of fog getting up on the river, and if we can but get a quarter of a mile from here, we are all right."

"Do you intend going with us, Bob?"

"To be sure. I shan't feel happy to-night till I happen to know that you are all safe and sound; so come on."

It was rather a nervous kind of thing to do what Bob suggested, namely, to swing oneself off the edge of the old wharf in the trust that some one would take hold of one's legs and place them in safety; but Claude and his two friends were so much in the habit of doing all kinds of nervous and adventurous things, that they did not for many moments hesitate over this one—and in the course of a few minutes they were all three safely in a small wherry, that old Bob had got from its moorings not far off, and brought to the spot, borrowing it of its owner without the ceremony of asking his cognisance or sanction to the affair.

"All's right," said Bob. "Here you are. Now sit down, all of you, and be as quiet as lambs. You can't do any good, you know, and you may do no end of harm. I have a pair of skulls here, and will creep along close to the bank, and off we go."

The boat was pushed off, and it had scarcely got two yards out into the stream, when a broad gleam of light came from the old wharf, and a loud voice cried—

"Surrender yourselves, or we have orders to take you alive or dead! Resistance is useless!"

"That's a clever fellow," said Bob; "he is just in time to be too late. Ah! they see——"

"Escaped!" cried the voice again. "Escaped! Hold your light up, Watkins, while I fire at that boat. There you have it."

Bang! went a pistol, and one of the oars gave a jerk as the bullet touched it, and knocked a splinter off it.

"Any mischief?" said Claude, as he drew a pistol from his pocket. "Is any one hurt by that shot?"

"No!" was the simultaneous reply.

"Then I won't return it."

"Fire at them!" cried the voice from the wharf again. "Fire at them! There they go, my boys! Hold up the light."

Bang! bang! went two pistols. One bullet made a splash in the water, and the other hit the hat of Claude.

"They mean it," said Dick, "and I don't feel as if one ought to be made an animated target of here, and not return the compliment. So here goes. How do you like that?"

Dick took as good an aim as he could at the lantern that a man was holding up upon the wharf, and fired. There was a crashing sound, and then all was darkness.

"A capital shot that," said Bob. "What can the fellow be yelling about, I wonder? It was the lantern you hit, not him, I take it. Do you hear him?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried some one from the wharf.

"There's some mischief, at all events," said Claude. "Give me one of the oars, Bob. I can pull, and we shall get on all the better. That will do. Now for it—off and away."

Another shot was sent after the boat, and then all was still for a few minutes. Claude and Bob pulled very well together, and the boat shot along; but it was quite a mercy that there was nothing in her way, for if there had been, bump she must have gone against it, as the fog was so thick now that it was quite out of the question seeing above half a boat's length a-head of them.

"This fog is capital," said Dick.

"Ah!" said Jack, "but it will leave us in the lurch."

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"I mean that this is that sort of fog that sweeps over the face of the world often just before sunrise. I have watched it come, and watched it go many a time, and watched where it came from. It will vanish in a few minutes of time, and I take it as a sign that the morning is closer at hand than we all think."

"Hark!" said Dick. "That's a clock."

"St Paul's," said Bob.

The sound came faintly only through the mist upon the river; but yet, in the absence of other disturbing causes, they could count the hour of five distinctly enough to make them feel quite sure that it was no mistake.

"It is as I said," remarked Jack. "The day is coming."

"Pull away," said Bob. "There's a wharf a little further on that we can stop at; and if we can but secure a landing there, I do think we may baffle the blood-hounds yet."

Claude found that the old man was pulling with an energy that was hardly to be expected at his time of life, and for a few moments it was quite as much as he could do to keep up with him, so as to prevent the boat from being turned out of its course. He did manage to do so, however; and then, in a low but distinct voice, Jack said—

"They are after us."

At this intimation, both Claude and Dick looked narrowly in the wake of the boat, and then they saw what it was that had induced Jack to speak as he had done, and they could not doubt but that he was perfectly correct in the statement that he made.

Creeping on after them through the fog, there was evidently a large boat, with

a light in its stern, for the rays of the light were thrown right on the boat, and revealed a crowd of dusky-looking figures within it; while, by the jerking movement of the light, it was quite evident that the boat was being urged through the water at great speed.

"Ah," said old Bob. "They are coming, sure enough."

"You think they are our foes?" said Claude.

"Not a doubt of it, I should say—not a doubt of it. They fancy they have got us into a regular line, now, and that they must run us down at last. But perhaps they may be mistaken after all. It isn't the best calculation that always turns out the thing in the end. Pull away."

"Yes," said Jack. "You may now pull away, both of you, as much as you like; but I don't think a couple of pairs of oars will do the work of six exactly, and no doubt they have that number of rowers. Ah! what are they about, now?"

Crack! went the report of a pistol, and those in the little wherry could hear the bullet go whistling over their heads.

"A little too high, I take it," said Bob. "They may blaze away at us in this fog, and not do much mischief, after all."

"But the fog is going," said Jack. "Look how much whiter it is getting each moment. I tell you, Bob, if you don't pull in on shore with us in another ten minutes at the latest, the river will be clear, and they will see us as well as if they had us in their own boat."

"There's reason enough in that," said the old man; "but just wait a bit. It won't do to pull in shore now, for there is no place to land at; and as they come on, they would soon see us; for you may depend they keep a sharp look-out now for fear we should double upon them in any way."

"What's this confounded lump of something in the bottom of the boat?" said Dick. "I have been knocking my feet against it I don't know how often. What the deuce can it be?"

"A lump of stone," said Bob. "Don't throw it over, I want it."

"You want it?"

"Yes, to be sure I do, or else I shouldn't have got hold of it, and put it in the wherry, I can tell you. Do you think it's rather a weighty affair, Master Dick?"

"In truth, I do. Why, it's enough to sink the boat."

"Ha! ha!"

With this significant kind of laugh, that none who were with him at all understood the meaning of, old Bob only pulled away still. And now the truth of Jack's prognostications of the weather began to be very apparent, for the fog got whiter and whiter each instant, and seemed to be upon the point of rolling away altogether, for it moved about in flimsy masses, and now and then, through open places in the vapour, the banks of the river might be seen quite plainly in the early morning light that was beginning to make itself apparent on the face of nature.

## CHAPTER CCXVI.

AN ALARMING EXPEDIENT.—THE LANDING-PLACE AT THAMES STREET.

"It's going now," said Jack—"it's going now."

"What's going?"

"The fog—the fog."

"Yes," said Dick, "and here comes the police-galley, so I rather think, Claude, that it's no use pulling any more, and tiring yourself. If we are to have a fight for it, the sooner it begins the better, for then the sooner it will be over."

"No," said Bob, as he suddenly shipped his oar. "As you say, it is of no use pulling. They must catch us now."



"What!" said Claude, "do you mean to say that you give up so easily? I will not be taken alive, and I will not die without a struggle. If this is to be the day upon which I go into the other world, I will not go alone. So let them come on, if they will do so, and take the chances of the fight."

As he spoke, Claude stooped down in the boat, but he kept his eyes intently fixed upon the now rapidly approaching police-galley.

"It's no use," said Bob; "you can do nothing."

"I can shoot a couple of them," said Claude.

"Don't, don't. Will you keep your pistols out of sight for a moment or two, and trust to——"

"Yes, if you can do anything, Bob."

"I can try."

"Ah," said Dick, "I can guess what he means to try, and it may do. We will leave all in your hands, Bob. Now try what it will come to. Leave him alone, Jack, and let him carry out his plan, for I have some reason to think it is not a bad one."

"I know it isn't," said Bob. "Crouch down all of you, and don't say one word."

They did as the old man asked them, but although both Claude and Jack now saw by his movements what he intended to try to do, they neither of them had great hopes that it would be very successful upon that occasion. Men such as they were, and leading the wild adventurous life that they led, were much more capable of keeping quiet even under the disastrous danger that threatened them, than as if they had been ordinary members of society; and, consequently, they let the old man have everything his own way.

The fog had not quite gone, but it was reduced to rather a thin fleecy kind of mist, that confused rather than hid objects from view. The police-galley, with its glaring light, that now looked red and lurid through the vapour, came pressing on.

Bob raised his voice.

"Hilloa!—Police there!"

"Hilloa!" was the response. "Wherry a-head! It's no use trying to get away. We have you."

"We know it," said Bob, "and don't want any bloodshed, so you may come on. When a man's time comes, it's no use kicking."

"No tricks," said the voice from the police-galley. "There are twelve of us here, so you will but sacrifice your lives at once by any useless resistance. You had better give up at once."

"That's what we mean.—Come on—come on."

The boat now went very lazily on with the stream, which happened to be running down at the time, and in a very few seconds the police-galley was quite close upon them.

"The first man that makes the least resistance," said a voice, "I will shoot dead upon the spot."

"The boat-hook," whispered Bob to Jack, "It's lying along the gunwale, there."

"I have it."

"Hook 'em fast, then."

At the same moment that some one from the police-galley made a plunging abortive effort with a boat-hook to catch hold of the side of the wherry, Jack, with the boat-hook that Bob had pointed out to him, caught a firm clutch of the galley. The two craft were drawn alongside of each other, and then, with a strength and a suddenness that was quite marvellous, Bob raised the heavy block of stone, and flung it right into the centre of the galley.

"There you are," he said. "Put the darbies on that, but don't think to put such tricks upon travellers again."

There was a sharp sudden crash, and the heavy jagged block of granite went right through the centre of the police-galley. The galley lurched over and began to fill rapidly.

"Pull away!" cried Bob, as he snatched his oar and plunged it into the stream

"pull away!"

"Help!—help!" cried the voices from the galley.

A couple of pistols were fired at random, and in another moment down went the galley, head-foremost, as if diving into the river, and the twelve men were left struggling for life in the stream.



CLAUDE GETS SHOT AT BY A BOW-STREET RUNNER.

Claude seized the other oar, and without a word commenced seconding the exertions of old Bob. Not a word was spoken by either of them for nearly five minutes, during which time they had made great progress from the scene of action. Then it was the old man who broke the silence, by saying, in a calm voice—

"I do think we shall have a very fine day, by the colour of the mist that still clings about the banks of the river."

"Upon my life," said Claude, "you take things easily, Bob. How many, if any, of those fellows could swim, I wonder?"

"If that part of their education," said Bob, "has been very much neglected by their parents and guardians, you know, it ain't our fault, you know, by any sort of means."

Dick executed a long whistle, and then he said—

"I tell you what it is. If I live to be a hundred years old I shan't forget the crash with which that stone went right through the bottom of the boat."

"You see it was rather jagged, and had no end of ugly points and corners about it, so it was sure to go; and I daresay it hurt some of their toes at the same time."

"Well," said Jack, "after all, you know, Claude, they would have either taken our lives here upon the river, or dragged us to prison with the hope of taking them on the scaffold, so that in self-defence we were right enough, I take it, with what we did with them."

"Agreed," said Claude. "Don't mistake me, Bob. I am much obliged to you for the skill and promptitude with which you have saved us from what would have been certain death or capture. I still only regret, as I always shall, that no other way presented itself than that of putting twelve men into the water. But they brought it on themselves."

"To be sure," said Bob; "and, after all, an officer ain't like another human being. They know their chances, and they think to get on and drink their brandy-and-water on the strength of frightening other folks; but with us it don't do; and if they are such fools as not to have found that out, why, they must take the consequences, that's all; and whether they sink or swim don't much matter. They won't be any great loss to society at large."

"You are quite a philosopher, Bob."

"I believe you. But now I advise that we pull right across the stream, and land at some of the little quays on the other side. There's half-a-dozen there to one that there is on this side, and then you can think of what is best to be done."

"I am for the country at once," said Claude.

"And I," said Jack and Dick, simultaneously.

"Agreed, then. We will get our horses as soon as possible, and set off out of London; for after this freak, I should say it would be too hot to hold us."

"Very good," said Bob, "and I shall quietly get back to the old public in the Mint, and look as if nothing had happened at all."

"And if a good face can carry things off," said Dick, with a laugh, "you are just the man, Bob, to do it. You may depend upon it that when we find ourselves pretty well to do in the world, and the fates have sent us some tolerably full purses, we shall not forget you."

"Oh, I know that's all right. You never did forget the old man, and you are not at all likely to begin now; so I am satisfied upon that head, you see."

"You may be," said Claude.

"I think we ought to give Bob a distinct promise," said Jack.

"Very good."

"I propose, then, that we ask him what sum of money will compass any particular wants that he may happen to have."

"Good again," said Dick. "Come now, Bob, don't be modest. Just say what sum of money would make you tolerably comfortable."

"Why, you see," said Bob, "the honest truth is, I don't myself want for anything; but I have a young fellow, a son, and he is in love with a good girl, but they can't afford to marry, cos, you see, all that I have is locked up in the property of the old ken, and I seem as if I should not like to shut it up, or to let it go into other hands while I lived."

"Certainly not, Bob."

"Very well, then, if you could spare among you about a hundred and fifty pounds, you see, some day when you are quite lucky, and can easily place your hands upon it, I should be glad of it for the young folks."

"It shall be done," said Claude. "We all promise; and if we live, Bob, you may expect it soon."

"Don't hurry at all about it."

"We both promise likewise," said Jack and Dick; "so you may consider that as settled."

"I do," said Bob, "and it's quite a weight off my mind, I can assure you. I was in love myself once, and hadn't the money to keep a house over the head of her that took my fancy a kind of prisoner, and popped the darbies, in a way of speaking, on my affections, and locked me up in the stone jug of her charms; so I can feel for the young folks a little."

The three friends laughed heartily at old Bob's highly figurative description of his love-making; and now they got right across the river, and pulled the boat into a little landing place that was at one end of a little miserable turning out of Thames-street.

A water-jack pulled the boat's nose right in shore, and begged for the job of taking care of it, which our friends were nothing loth to give him.

"Mind you keep a good look-out on the sticks," said Bob; "there's so many bad characters about, you know."

"All's right, sir. I'll keep my eyes on 'em."

"Do so. We shan't be gone very long."

"Very good, sir."

Claude could hardly preserve his gravity at the calm, steady, and precise manner in which the old man acted his part, and as they walked up the narrow sloppy turning to Thames Street, he said, "Really, Bob, I had no sort of idea you had one half of the accomplishments that you have exhibited to us."

"Ah, Duval, when I was a young one it was all right enough with me. I was up to everything that you could think of. But now my race is nearly run, though to-night's proceedings have roused me up a little, and once or twice I felt as if a matter of thirty years had gone from me, and I was something like what I used to be."

"Ah," said Dick, "we are all getting old."

"None of your gammon," said Bob.

They all laughed, and then Jack said, "Now, it will be much better for you two to go into some house, and keep yourselves quite quiet, while I get the horses, and thus it will create less observation. I will just go in with you, and make as much change as I can in my looks, without our vallise, with our things in it, and then I will be off."

"That's the best plan," said Bob.

"I think it is," said Claude; "but it is rather too bad, Jack, to give you all the bother of it, especially after your night's fatigue. Shall I go and get the cattle? I will do so cheerfully, if you are at all tired."

"No—no, Claude, I can go, so let me do it. I am less known than you are, I am quite certain, and so run much less risk."

No further opposition was now made by any of them; and after walking a considerable distance up Thames Street, they got into Cannon Street, and paused at length at a house not a long way from Blackfriars. Jack, as he said he would, made what alterations in his appearance he could, and then set off for the horses.

"Good-by," said old Bob. "I am off home now, for you recollect I left it in rather an uncomfortable state."

He shook hands heartily with them all, and then off he went, and Dick and Claude hired a private room in the tavern they stopped at, and waited the arrival of Jack with the horses with no little impatience, for they were now most anxious to get off to the country as quickly as they possibly could.

In about an hour Jack came back, mounted upon his own steed, and safely leading Dick's and Claude's. They soon settled their reckoning at the tavern,



and mounting, they at a sharp trot got into Fleet Street, and so took their way down the Strand westwards.

"Oh, what a relief is this!" said Claude, when after traversing Piccadilly, they fairly got out into the open country.

"Yes," said Dick, "I feel it as such; but at times I like to visit one of the old kens. They are not only useful to a fellow when he is fairly hunted, but by their contrast with the brightness and the beauty of the country, they make him satisfied when he gets to it again."

"As for me," said Jack, "I could live and die in the open country. It has grown upon me now to be a great delight. But are you going to keep on this road, Claude, or shall we get on the regular western one?"

"What do you say, Dick?"

"Any road but the one which, if pursued a little too far, would take me to Oxford, will suit capitally for me, I should say; for even Oxford Street brings a disagreeable crick in the neck."

Claude laughed as he said—

"Well—well, we need not get further than Southal on the Oxford road; and I propose that you both come with me to the farm at Ealing, where Cicely is, and then that we dine there, and have a rest; and then, after which, we can push on to Southal, and regularly take the road as the shadows of the evening begin to creep about the old trees."

"Agreed—agreed."

"If we are not intruding upon you," added Dick.

"Now, I do think you are laughing at me," said Claude. "The idea at this time of day, after all we have gone through together, of you, Dick, talking about intruding upon me is rather too rich."

"Well, but I really——"

"You really, nonsense. Don't say another word about it whatever you do, my dear fellow, but let us cut across Hyde Park here, and get along the best way we can to Ealing."

They were all sufficiently familiar with that part of the suburbs of London, to enable them to go the nearest way to any given point; so they soon reached Ealing Common, and in three minutes from that time they were at the old farm again, where Cicely ever awaited the appearance of Claude, while in his absence a thousand fears for his safety agitated her bosom.

The people of the farm made them all three as welcome as they possibly could, and it was one hour before sunset when they again mounted and took the road with the intention of having a sharp trot to Southal.

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## CHAPTER CCXVII.

### THE STRANGE ADVENTURE WITH THE PLAYERS NEAR SOUTHAL.

THE sun sunk rapidly as the three adventurers got out into the open country beyond the then pretty and rural village of Hanwell, which has since been spoiled by the huge asylum, that, with a melancholy suggestion, meets the gaze at every turn. The trees were gently waving to and fro in the evening air, and the birds had all retired to rest, save some few late songsters, who yet circled the topmost boughs of the tall trees, and caught some faint reflection of the fading glories of the sun.

"This is a fine scene," said Claude, "and one that has rather a different effect upon the feelings to that which is produced by such a combination of circumstances as that which heralded us to the Thames only a short time ago."

"A," said Dick, "and to me it is a finer scene than——"

"Never mind what, Dick," said Jack. "Just look ahead, and be so good as to say what you see coming on at a tolerable speed."



They all glanced forwards at this speech, and beheld a chariot emerge from a cross-road. A postilion was driving a pair of rather lean and scraggy horses; and from the white bow in his hat, it was rather evident that something in the shape of a wedding was going on in the neighbourhood.

"Now, if that were the bride and bridegroom," said Claude, "I would stop them, just to have a look at the lady."

"Why not?" said Dick. "It may be so. Who shall say to the contrary?"

"What do you think of the set-out, Jack?"

"Why, that at the force it is going at it will all break down together soon if it don't moderate. Ah, you see the old postilion only put his steeds to their mettle upon emerging from the lane, and now they go at a pretty jog trot."

This was the fact, for the post-chaise was drawn over the ground at a very slow pace, indeed, now that the high-road was fairly reached, by the miserable cattle that were harnessed to it; and, upon the whole, so strange a set-out was seldom to be met with so near to the metropolis.

"Well, Claude," said Dick, "I see that you are hankering to stop the coach. Do so, and Jack and I will keep back, so that you may have it all your own way in the matter."

"Very good. I will let you know if there be any fun going on. I don't think there is a soul in sight besides ourselves."

"Not one, with the exception of the carriage occupants."

"Here goes then," said Claude, and he trotted after the chaise, which he soon came up with. Duval upon this occasion did what he very seldom did in the day time even, and that was to put upon his face a small half mask, with a dependent piece of srape that came down nearly to his mouth, and which effectually prevented anything in the shape of recognition at the moment.

"Hold!" he cried to the postilion, "upon your life, hold!"

The man immediately drew up, exclaiming—

"Oh, Lord! here is a highwayman in arms, as I'm a sinner! Oh, good sir, spare us all, do, and don't blow our brains out upon the spot."

"If you keep your horses still you are as safe as if you were at home in your own bed; but if you play any tricks, I would not give a bad sixpence for your life. Be warned."

"Oh, lor, yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I am very sorry, indeed, sir—very sorry, and won't move an inch."

Claude went up to the coach door, and the moment he got there, he heard a loud voice cry,—

"What's this—what's all this, eh? Am I to be continually annoyed by all the world, eh, eh?"

The window was let down, and the face of a man, of about sixty years of age, presented itself. Old age is frequently venerable and becoming, but this face was wrinkled with dissipation, and the eyes had a bleared and blood-shot look, such as in youth is sad to see; but in age, if arising from excesses, is most particularly revolting. The countenance, too, was of that purplish sanguine hue, which bespeaks a great attention to the bottle in some shape or another.

The voice of this detestable character more resembled the bow-wow-wow of some cross-tempered dog than anything else.

"Well, sir," said Claude, "who are you?"

The old gentleman looked so amazed at this question, that his eyes quite protruded out of his head, like those of some fish after it has been rather over-boiled. Before he could form any reply, or find words in which to express his overpowering indignation, a faint voice from the inside of the carriage cried,—

"Oh, Sir Felix, give the wretch a guinea or two, and let us get on to the Grove. Do, Sir Felix, for my sake."

"Oh, bother your sake," said the old gentleman. "Hold your tongue, madam, will you? Confound you—Pof!"

The pronunciation of this word "pof," seemed to be some insane peculiarity of the old gentleman. Certainly, it was not a piece of jocularity, for to judge from

his countenance, nobody could be in a greater rage than he was at that moment.

"Sir Felix," said Claude, "I will trouble you for your money, watch, and valuables, if you please, or else I shall be under the necessity of taking them, in a manner that won't be half so pleasant as if you gave them up yourself quietly."

"Police!—police!" cried Sir Felix. "Watch—watch! Police! Murder! A highwayman!"

"These cries are quite useless, sir. You will only bring danger upon yourself, but none upon me."

"Cora," said the female voice from within the carriage, "Cora, you speak to the fellow, and tell him that there is nothing here for him. He will not be such a brute as to stop a bride on her way to the home of her dear bridegroom."

"Oh, mother!" said a soft and gentle voice, that was like music itself, "how can you speak to me in such a way, when you know that tears are on my cheeks, and that my heart is desolate?"

"Fiddlesticks! You are married now to Sir Felix, and it is too late to speak about your heart, now. You should have thought of all that in the church, and stopped the ceremony."

"Oh, mother, did not I go upon my knees to you, but you forced me to this, you know you did, forced me to this by an untruth? Oh, Arthur, Arthur! where are you now?"

"Silence, minx!"

"Silence, wife!" cried the old gentleman, and then—as though that word had tickled him very much—he burst out into a chuckle, that ended in a cough that nearly carried him off. He was obliged to lean back in the coach to recover himself. A scraggy looking specimen of female humanity now appeared at the window, and said—

"Now, my good man, go away. There is half-a-guinea for you. Of course, you will be hanged, some day, and serve you right, too. Go away directly, man. We don't want to have anything more to say to you. Samuel, drive on directly, or you will get your discharge."

"Yes, marm," said Samuel; "I'll be shot if I do!"

"You wretch, what do you mean?"

"Spare your anger, madam," said Claude; "I shall, I see, be under the necessity of shooting Sir Felix. It is always much easier to rifle a dead body than a living one, provided you do it before it has had time to stiffen."

"Oh, murder!" cried Sir Felix. "Here's my purse—Here's my watch—Oh dear!—Oh dear! what a loss! Take them; but I can't die just yet, with such a load of wine in my cellar as I have. Oh dear—oh dear! I shall be a long time getting over this, that I shall."

Claude took the purse and the watch. The former was heavy, and the latter glittered with jewels. It was no bad booty, that, for a beginning to the evening.

"What are you about, Cora?" cried the rather scraggy female, as the glass window of the door on the other side of the chaise was suddenly let down.

"Nothing, mother—oh, nothing—nothing."

"Pull up that window again, directly. Do you want dear Sir Felix to get his death of cold and leave you a widow, you unfeeling monster? When a man of property marries you, you ought to study him all your days, that you ought."

Sir Felix gave a terrible grunt, and then Claude, turning to the postilion, said—

"You may go on now, and the less you say about this little affair will be the better for you all. You won't get your money back again, Sir Felix, and it is much better to leave me alone than to make a foe of me. Good-afternoon, or I may rather say evening, for it is that time now. Drive on, Samuel."

Samuel did drive on, having quite satisfied himself that the highwayman was willing for him to do so; and then Claude returned laughing to his two companions, with the purse and the watch in his hand.

"What booty?" said Dick.

"Oh, pretty good, I should say. There ought to be something handsome in

this purse, by its feel ; but after the manner in which we were taken in a little time ago, I am always suspicious of chancing hasty conclusions."

"Look at it, then."

Claude emptied some of the contents of the purse into his hand, and even by the fading light of evening, he was satisfied that they were real golden guineas that lay glittering before him.

"All's right. This is no take-in, Jack. I don't think you have a watch, just now, have you?"

"Not I," said Jack. "The one I had didn't go very well, and I tossed it into a tree, where it hung by the chain and seals enough to puzzle a conjurer, from a distance, to know what it was. Do you mean to make me a present of one, Claude?"

"Yes, of this one that I have just had handed to me, if you will accept of it, friend Jack."

"Certainly. All's fish that comes to the net ; so I'll keep it till I get a good offer for it ; or it gets some stray knock that at once disorders its inside, and prevents it going as it ought to do, and then, ten to one, but I throw it away."

"You should sell it," said Dick. "You will always find a customer for a watch among the fences in London."

"But that is throwing it away, Dick, with the additional mortification of knowing that it is picked up by a rascal. So I decline that mode of getting rid of it except in dire extremity. What's that, Claude, that lies on the ground just where the chaise stood?"

"It looks like a white handkerchief."

"And it is one, too," said Dick.

"Perhaps it means something," added Jack. "I'll pick it up."

He rapidly dismounted, and picking up the handkerchief, which was wrapped up rather carefully, a folded paper dropped from it to the ground. Jack picked up that likewise, and cried out—

"Here's a billet, I'll be bound for Claude, written by the young lady on the spur of the moment, while he was robbing her husband. Read it, Claude, and tell us what it is all about."

"Read it yourself, Jack, as you have it."

"Very good. There is just light enough, I think. No, hang it if there is, though, or else my eyes are bad. The letters run into one another in rather a confusing way."

Both Dick and Claude tried, by the dim light, to read what was on the paper, but could not, and Jack had to light a little match for the purpose of reading it ; and so by holding it up and down the paper, Jack managed to read aloud the following words—

"These lines are addressed to any man of humanity who may chance to read them. I am a young girl, not quite nineteen years of age ; and my mother has forced me to become the wife of Sir Felix Brown, whom I abhor. I resisted until she swore to me that she had committed a criminal offence that Sir Felix only knew of ; and that if I would not marry him, she would be dragged to a prison—perhaps, to a scaffold ; but when the ceremony was over, she tauntingly told me that that was all a delusion, merely got up for my own good, as Sir Felix was very rich, and would support us both in splendour at Lime Grove, his estate, near to Southal. I write this in the little bed-room of an inn, where they are baiting the horses ; and I implore whoever finds this paper, to send it or take it to Cornet Tarlton, at the Barracks at Knightsbridge ; and tell him that I yet hope he will come to rescue me from a fate worse than death itself ! Oh, have pity upon the unhappy Cora !"

After this rather singular communication had been read, our three friends looked at each other with some surprise, as well they might ; for the extremity in the fortunes of the young girl who signed herself Cora must have been serious, indeed, when her only hope was to throw herself in such a way upon the charity and good feeling of strangers.

## CHAPTER CCXVIII.

DETAILS SOME PROCEEDINGS AT LIME GROVE.—THE RESCUE.

CLAUDE broke the silence, by saying to them both—

“What is your opinion of this affair? Is it one of those things that are likely to give us either profit or satisfaction in the following up? The billet has a genuine air about it.”

“Of that there can be no possible doubt,” said Dick. “It is quite genuine, and, for my part, I do not for a moment doubt anything of its statements.”

“Nor I,” said Jack.

“Well, then, if that is the case,” responded Claude with a smile, “what do you say to a trot to Lime Grove?”

“Agreed!” they both cried.

“Yes,” added Claude, “we will go; but there is no reason on earth why we should neglect business upon the road; so if we do meet with any chances, I vote against throwing them away by any means.”

“And so do I,” said Dick. “We can easily enough, in our pleasant professional pursuit, combine business with pleasure; and while we choose to play the knight-errant, in the way of succouring beauty and virtue in distress, I have no sort of objection to empty as many pockets as possible.”

“Well spoken, Dick. Come on.”

Claude had taken the billet of the enforced bride from the hands of Jack, and he took good care to place it in a secure pocket, for he did not know how useful it might chance to be to him when they should arrive at Lime Grove, which they did not anticipate the slightest difficulty in reaching.

The ride that they now took was a very pleasant—indeed, one may say a delightful one. It was through a prettily diversified country; and as the moon rose—it was but a young moon—a faint and gentle silvery radiance seemed to fill the air, as though some gauze-like vapour, spangled with stars, were floating between heaven and earth.

In the distance they began to see the twinkling lights of Southal, and Claude pointed them out to his friends, saying—

“This is Southal, and a pleasant village enough you will find it, take it for all in all.”

“Not a doubt of it,” said Dick. “I know it pretty well, and have passed a pleasant enough hour at the George Inn there. Why, we shall be there in the course of ten minutes, now.”

“Yes, we have made quick work of it, I rather think; but hark! I hear a horse’s footstep. Let us draw off to the side of the road, and reconnoitre a little. It is just possible that the kind fates are about to throw something in our way before we get to Lime Grove, where we have to do what we can for the disconsolate Cora.”

They all three moved off to the side of the road, and in a few seconds they heard some one muttering to himself as he rode on. The moonlight was not sufficiently powerful to enable our adventurers to see very clearly the person; but by the general appearance, it was evidently some one who basked in the beams of sunny fortune. The horse, too, from its shape and action, could not possibly be mistaken for other than a good one, so that, taking those circumstances into account, Claude thought that it would quite, in a manner of speaking, be flying in the face of Providence if he did not take some notice of the passing passenger. He accordingly rode out from the deep shadow of the trees on the road side, leaving Dick and Jack still concealed; and crossing the path of the horseman, he said—

“Good evening, sir.”

The stranger stopped instantly.

“Good evening,” repeated Claude.

“I don’t know you, sir,” said the horseman, in not the most courteous tones.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to say who you are, sir, for I cannot recognise you by your voice."

"Oh, I am an old friend, and was coming to call upon you."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure. I want to borrow a trifle of you; and as it might be very



CORA'S RECEPTION OF THE CORNET AT SIR FELIX'S.

inconvenient to name a sum, perhaps it will be as well if I say at once that what you happen to have about you will do very well, without further trouble."

"Perhaps, sir," said the stranger, "I am to conclude that you are a highwayman, then?"

"If you please."



"Take that, then, and a good riddance to society you will be. I am very glad I met with you."

With these words, the stranger, in the most off-handed manner possible, fired a pistol right into Claude's face, and the bullet actually tore the lower part of his ear. At the moment he was so astonished at this sudden assault, that he sat like a rock upon his horse, and he was only roused by Dick and Jack suddenly rushing up to the spot, and knocking the man off his horse to the ground.

They made sure that he had killed Duval, so that the blow with which they knocked him down was not the most gentle one in all the world, and he lay quite still upon the ground. Dick then cried out to Claude—

"Hilloa, Duval! Are you hurt?"

"Speak, Claude, speak!" said Jack, "I shall think you are mortally wounded, if you don't."

"Oh, it's all right enough," said Claude. "Confound the fellow, I believe he has taken away a bit of my left ear; which is rather an awkward thing, as if the officers only get hold of the fact, they will describe me by it to a certainty. I hadn't the least idea that he was going to blaze away in that style."

"Nor we—nor we; but when we saw the flash of the pistol, we saw that mischief was intended.

"Hold my horse, Jack, while I dismount and see how he is; I hope he ain't much hurt; for, after all, you know, it was quite fair, and he was right enough."

"It might be right enough for him, Claude," said Jack, as he held the horse; "but it was anything but right enough for you. Upon my word, you take these things so very easy, that one would think you have a charmed life, and know the fact well."

"I do sometimes think, Jack, that such is the case. You know I am something of a fatalist, and go so far, at times, in my belief, as to fancy that when a bullet comes out of the barrel of a pistol, it has a certain person to hit or no one to hit; so it's no use getting out of the way,"

Claude dismounted and stooped over the insensible form of the man, and then he said—

"By all that's uncomfortable, I do think he is dead!"

"Dead!" cried Jack and Dick.

"Yes. He looks so. Let us take him to some house. Ah, we shall see him better now, for the moon is peeping out again. There it comes. All's right. What's this he has got on?"

"A red waistcoat," said Dick.

"And what's this?" said Claude, as he took something from the pocket of the waistcoat and held it up.

"Why, it's an officer's staff. The fellow is a constable, after all, and that accounts for his being so uncommonly handy with his pistols."

"It does. I thought no ordinary person would be so well prepared with fire-arms, and so prompt in the use of them; but a thought strikes me, Jack, and you, Dick, which I think is a happy one."

"What is it, Dick?"

"Suppose I put on this fellow's red waistcoat, and take this little gilt staff in my pocket, and then we can all three go to the residence of this Sir Felix, of whom we are in search, and pass ourselves off for officers, giving him a sham account of how there is to be an attack made upon his house to-night by housebreakers, and so getting possession of the premises, and effectually protecting the young girl, who has been forced into a marriage so very much against her inclination. What say you?"

"Agreed," said Dick.

"And it's a good plan," said Jack. "But what shall we do with this man, or his body, if he be dead?"

"He is not dead."

"Not dead? I am glad of that."

"No, he is not dead. I have had my hand upon his heart for the last five minutes, and there is plenty of life in him yet. He is only stunned, and the longer he remains so the better it will be for us, you know. Suppose we take him to some road-side cottage, and leave him there for safety? for the poor devil will get ridden over in the road-way, here, and if we put him in the hedge, it won't do him much good. Where's his horse, Jack?"

"Oh, that started off London-way some time ago."

"Come on, then. I will place him upon mine till we come to a place of safety for him, and there we will leave him."

They took away the red waistcoat from the officer, and the staff, and then butting his coat closely round him, they laid him on Claude's horse, and went in search of some little inn or cottage at which they might leave him, and where he might get, at all events, the little attention that his case required. They were not many minutes in finding a cottage, and then after a little debate among themselves, they thought the best way was not to disturb the people if they could help it, but to prop him up against the door of it, and leave them to find him out.

This was an idea that they lost no time in carrying out. Claude took the officer by the head, and Jack took him by the legs, and so they, between them, very quietly placed him against the door of a cottage, within which they could hear the people talking, but to whom they gave no sort of disturbance by this proceeding.

When they had all mounted again, Jack said—

"I suppose, Claude, you have no objection to the people being let known that some one is at the door?"

"Not in the least, if you can do it, Jack, without our being delayed by getting into any talk or altercation with them about it—That is all that I wish to avoid."

"Oh," said Jack, "I have provided myself with a means of accomplishing all that, I think."

Jack had picked up from the ground a good sized, round pebble; and being a tolerable marksman with a stone, he threw it right through one of the little diamond-shaped panes of glass in the cottage window.

"Let us see if any one comes out," said Dick.

They all paused a moment or two, and then they saw the door of the cottage opened suddenly, and a woman rushed out with such precipitation, no doubt to try and catch the individual who had thrown the stone, that over she went into the road-way over the insensible officer.

"That will do," said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack, "but she will rouse the whole parish, if she goes on bellowing in that sort of way. Confound her! what on earth does she mean by it?"

"Only that she will call herself hoarse in a few moments," said Claude. "Come on, Jack. You cannot stop a woman's tongue; you ought by this time to know that well enough, and that it is of no use your trying so to do."

"Why, Claude," said Dick, with a laugh, "surely that is a singularly ungallant speech for you to make; I thought that you were the greatest possible favourite with the ladies."

"And so I am," replied Claude, "but it is not by praising them for virtues they don't possess. It is by telling them their faults, and then showing them that I love them in spite of all those faults. Then they know I am sincere."

"I am answered, Claude."

They all trotted away, and soon left the cottage and the insensible officer behind them; and the shouts of the woman who had tumbled over him upon the little door-step, likewise faded away from their hearing. Claude put on the red waistcoat of the officer. Our readers are well aware, no doubt, that in old times—indeed in not very old times—the red waistcoat was the distinguishing mark of the Bow-street officer, or runner, as he was then called.

From their peculiarity in that respect, they got the sobriquet of Robin Red-breast; and if a thief only saw the tip of a red waistcoat, he knew his danger

directly. The officers of the present day are a little more scientific, and do not carry about with them such an insignia of their profession, to warn evil-doers not to leave off being evil-doers, but get out of the way of the consequences.

"Now for Lime Grove," said Claude; "and as we, none of us, know where it is, we had better trot right into Southal, and ask the first person we meet for the place."

They accordingly trotted on at a good pace, and were soon in the village. The next morning was market morning, so that amid other sounds in the village there was a plentiful assortment of noises, incidental to turkeys, geese, pigs, sheep, and other creatures of the farm. Our friends drew rein at the door of the Old George Inn; and having indulged themselves with a glass of something strong each, Claude asked the landlord which was Lime Grove.

"Oh, sir, it ain't to say exactly in Southal, but about a quarter of a mile on the London road. You will know it in a moment by a large iron gate, and an avenue of trees, and there's a sheet of water close by it."

Claude had noticed this place as they came along without at all suspecting that it was that of which they were in search; but he was better pleased that it should be out of the village than in it, and they turned their horses' heads again in the direction whence they had come.

"There it is," said Claude. "There's the iron gates, and there's the water, don't you see it?"

"Yes," said Dick, "and a goodly place it looks. After all, I think our friend, Miss Cora, might get a worse home."

"There is no worse home in all the world," said Jack, "than the home you don't love."

## CHAPTER CCXIX.

### SIR FELIX FINDS HIS NEW FRIENDS VERY TROUBLESOME.

LIME GROVE was rather a considerable estate to all appearance, and the iron gates which stood at its entrance were rare specimens of the ancient art of casting in metals. They were supported by stone buttresses of great strength and solidity, and beyond these, sure enough, was the avenue of lime-trees.

Those limes looked extremely beautiful by the moon-beams that were just gently silvering the edges of the leaves, while the slight night-breeze that was up was just sufficient to give them a stirring motion and to break up the moonlight into silvery particles.

It was a beautiful scene.

By the right hand side of the large iron gates, there was a pretty picturesque lodge, and a light shining from one of its windows showed that some one occupied it.

"I suppose," whispered Jack to Claude, "it won't do to gallop right on if we could even open the gates? It will be best to speak to the people at the lodge first?"

"Oh, yes," said Claude. "Let us do everything quite regular—as we are officers, you know."

"Oh, oh! yes, to be sure."

"Hilloa—lodge! lodge!" cried Claude.

A man made his appearance, with a lantern, in the course of a couple of minutes.

"What is it?" he said.

"Is Sir Felix within?"

"Yes, sir, he is within; but I think he is rather busy, if you please, sir. Perhaps you don't know, sir, that he has been married to-day; and so you see, sir, perhaps you will call again?"

This speech of the lodge-porter was so far satisfactory, that it quite put at rest

any doubts, however slight, that Claude and his friends might have regarding their being at the right place, and Claude made answer at once—

“If he were even so busy, our business with him is of a nature that he will not be very well pleased to have delayed. I am an officer of police, and so are these two gentlemen. We have ridden from London on purpose to see Sir Felix, on a matter of the very greatest importance to him and to all of you.”

The lodge-keeper looked rather aghast at this news, for Claude spoke in a solemn and earnest tone, so as to induce in him a firm belief that it was a matter of the greatest importance upon which he came.

“Oh, Lord!” said the man, “it isn’t any danger, is it?”

“Yes,—serious danger.”

“You don’t mean to say so, sir? I’ll run up to the house and see if master will speak to you, sir.”

“Open the gates. We will walk inside.”

“Oh, yes, of course. It’s all right to officers; and now I look at you, sir, I see your red waistcoat.”

“Yes, my friend; and you may be still further convinced by this. You recognise this little emblem of authority, no doubt?”

As he spoke, Claude produced the little staff with the gilt crown at the end of it; and if the porter at the lodge of Lime Grove had had the smallest lingering doubt respecting the character of the guests, it was thus removed. He opened the gates, saying,—

“Come in—come in, gentlemen. You had better ride up with me to the house at once. Wife—wife!”

“Yes, Joseph?”

“Look to the gate.”

“I would advise you, my friend,” said Claude, “to lock the gate and give me the key. The fact is, that if we had not ridden down here to-night, you would all have been brutally murdered before the morning.”

“Murdered?”

“Yes; but do not alarm yourself. We intend to stay here all the night, and to take care of the premises.”

“Oh! do, do. Gracious Providence! Murdered! There’s the key of the great gate, Mr. Officer. Wife—wife!”

“Well, Joseph?”

“Hide the spoons and the babby, directly. There’s thieves and murderers a-coming. I’m only going up to the house with these three gentlemen. I will be back directly.”

“Where shall we put our horses?” said Claude.

“Why, gentlemen, the fact is that Sir Felix don’t keep up a stable on the premises, though there’s lots of stalls and room. He only keeps a couple of hacks for his carriage, and the landlord of the Blue Lion in the village contracts to keep them for him.”

“Never mind; here, we’ll put up our horses ourselves, if you will show us the stables, at once.”

“Oh, dear yes, gentlemen, and it will be best to go there first. There’s plenty of hay, for last year’s stacks all stand close to the stables, you see, gentlemen, so you can pull down as much as you like.”

“That will do—that will do.”

It was quite clear that nothing now was so delightful to the feelings of Joseph as the idea that the three officers, as he fully believed our three friends to be, should stay all night, and the fact of their putting up their horses in the neglected stables was a strong supposition in favour of such a result, and quite delightful accordingly.

As Joseph said, there was plenty of stable accommodation, although the parsimony of Sir Felix prevented it from being used on his own estate; and the contiguity of the hay-stacks enabled Claude and his friends to get not only plenty of bedding for the horses, but plenty of sweet food.

"That will do," said Claude; "and now, Joseph, you will be so good as to take us at once to your master."

"Oh, yes, gentlemen, certainly, and very happy he ought to be to see you, and very much obliged indeed to think how you came all the way from London to save our lives. I just tell you, sir, that the wine in the cellar here is good, cos you see, Sir Felix pretends that it ain't, and he says 'that the wine is going to be changed, so that I can't offer you any of it. My wine-merchant has made a mistake, and sent the wrong stuff;' and then he will offer you some capital stout, as he says; but Lord bless you, it's only small beer, and oh! so small."

"Thank you, Joseph, for the hint."

Claude and his friends could hardly suppress their laughter at this character which Joseph gave of his penurious old master; but they thought it better to keep up a becoming gravity, and having reached the house, Joseph called to the only servant that was in it, and who was a venerable old woman, to open the door.

"And what for, Master Joseph?" she cried. "And what for is the hall door to be opened?"

"Here are some gentlemen for Sir Felix."

"Indeed! Just ask them if they have had their supper then, for they will get nothing here, I can tell them."

"Open the door directly, Emily. How can you keep these gentlemen waiting in this kind of way?"

Thus urged Emily, who was about seventy years of age, and had not a tooth in her head, and was nearly bent double with infirmities, made her appearance, with a miserable rushlight in her hand, and opened the hall door.

"Ha! ha!" said the old woman, "visitors to Lime Grove? Well, well, wonders will never cease, as King Solomon said; and the more you live the more you learn. Dear me—dear me. The idea of the old idiot bringing home a wife."

"Ah, Emily—Emily, you should not call master an old idiot, though he is, to be sure."

"You hold your tongue, Joseph. I suppose these are some fine friends of young madam, the new wife. Oh, dear, yes, old Emily wouldn't do to look after the house, but a wife must be brought. Oh, I only hope she will be choked, that's all."

"How kind," said Claude; "why, Emily, you are about as amiable as you are ugly, I do think."

This remark put the old woman into such a rage, that she was half strangled with coughing, and was forced to take herself off into the domestic regions of the house, to try and recover from the effects of this sudden ebullition of anger.

"It's a very good thing, gentlemen," said Joseph, "that you have got rid of her, for she would have worried you to death in a little while, if you hadn't, that she would. Just step into this room, and I will go and tell Sir Felix that you are here."

All this time Joseph had carried his lantern with him, and now he lit a solitary candle, that was upon the chimney-piece of the really handsome reception room, into which he ushered the mock officers, and left them to consider about what they would say to Sir Felix, when they should see him, as they doubted not doing in a very few minutes.

"You be spokesman, Claude," said Jack; "you can keep your countenance somehow much better than either Dick or I can."

"Oh," said Dick, "I am the worst in the world to do that."

"And I not the best," said Jack.

"Well, then, I'll do the speaking," said Claude, "but, of course, you will both of you take what opportunities occur of confirming what I may happen to say to the old man."

"Oh, yes—yes."

Joseph opened the door of the room, and in a loud voice announced his master, and then the old man came into the room all of a shake, partly from fear and partly from anger.



"What is this?—what is all this?" he said. "I don't want visitors—I don't see company. What's it all about? Go away—go away. It is some mistake. I am busy—quite occupied! What do you want here, I say? Why don't you speak?"

"Ah, sir, you won't let 'em," said Joseph. "Why, sir, you have all the talk to yourself, and the gentlemen can't get in one word even edgeways, sir. You hold your tongue, and then they will tell you all about it, and make your hair stand on end, sir."

"How dare you, you rascal, speak to me in that way? You villanous rascal, how dare you, I should like to know? Get out of my sight directly, Joseph. You get fat—fat, sir, upon my substance. My servants ruin me, with one extravagance and another; and oh, oh! I now and then only for a few moments forget how I have been robbed on the road! Oh, dear—oh, dear, forty guineas, at the least. Oh—oh—oh!"

Sir Felix was so overcome by the recollection of his encounter with Claude on the road, that he felt ready to faint, and was compelled to sit down to recover himself; but he soon got up again, and in a loud cracked voice, he cried—

"Go away—go away. I don't want any company. No company comes here. We are all poor. There is nothing to eat and nothing to drink. Good night! Joseph, show the gentlemen out."

"No—no, sir!"

"No? Do you say no to me, you villain?"

"Yes I do, sir. You hear the gentlemen."

"Sir Felix," said Claude, stepping forward, "I and my two friends are quite willing to go, if you wish it. We have ridden down here from London at no small inconvenience, expressly for the purpose of protecting you and your property. We are police officers. There is my staff."

"And there's his red waistcoat," said Joseph.

"The magistracy of London," continued Claude, "have become aware of a plot for the purpose of robbing your house to-night, and murdering you and all within it. We are sent down expressly to defend you and your property. There is one notorious rascal, who, on the highway, often wears a crape mask——"

"Oh, I know him—I know him!" cried Sir Felix. "He is in this neighbourhood. He robbed me, only two hours ago, on the high-road. A most notable rascal he is."

"In the neighbourhood already, is he?" said Claude, in affected amazement. "Joseph, make all the doors and windows fast. Comrades, look to your pistols. He has two companions with him who are very nearly as bad as he is."

As he spoke, Claude pulled a pistol from his pocket, and made quite a parade of shaking the powder in the pan, and of putting it otherwise ready for action.

Both Dick and Jack followed his example, and at these manifestations of sincerity, poor Sir Felix began to show the most unequivocal symptoms of alarm.

"Oh, dear," he said, "you don't mean really to say that there is any real serious danger, gentlemen?"

"A little," said Claude; "but it is just possible that when the villains find they have to fight the affair out with us, that they will retire, after the exchange of a shot or two."

"A shot or two?"

"Certainly. You may depend that anger at their disappointment, if no other feeling, will induce them to do all the mischief that they possibly can. I repeat to you, that their deliberate intention is to rob the house, and to murder all that they find within it. Of course, it is our duty to risk our lives in your defence, however harshly you may be disposed to treat us; and we cannot help thinking, Sir Felix, that when men ride twelve or fourteen miles, to save your life, they are entitled, at your hands, to some little consideration."

"Oh, dear yes, of course—of course!"

"I am glad to see, sir, that you begin to appreciate our services in some

manner. This is your house, and we will go from it directly if you, now that you know who and what we are, choose to wish us to do so. We are too much in the habit of respecting the law not to know and feel that a man's house is his castle, and that he may order anybody out of it that he pleases."

"Oh, dear—dear, don't go on any account! I didn't mean what I said—indeed I did not! Oh, pray stay, I beg of you! Make yourselves quite comfortable, do! I am thankful you have come!"

## CHAPTER CCXX.

### A PLEASANT EVENING AT LIME GROVE.—THE YOUNG OFFICER.

IT was now quite clear that poor Sir Felix was most thoroughly impressed with a notion of the danger he was running, and that he would not have had those whom he called his protectors go from the house on any account.

"Very good, sir," said Claude, "of course we shall stay with very great pleasure. I don't think that you need now much alarm yourself; but, at all events, we will not leave you until we are able to assure you that the danger is over."

"Thank you—thank you! Oh, I am very much obliged, indeed. It would have been a most shocking thing; for do you know, gentleman"—here Sir Felix lowered his voice—"I was only married to-day. Yes, I was, indeed."

"Married?"

"Yes, to be sure. It's only my fourth wife; and why not, I should like to know?"

"There is no reason on earth against it, sir. I am very much surprised, though, at your talking of a fourth wife. You could hardly have had time, Sir Felix, to contract four matrimonial alliances, for really to look at you, no one would at all suspect you to be more than about nine and forty."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Indeed I do, and I think it likewise."

Old Sir Felix quite smiled at this compliment, and for a few moments forgot the danger with which he was threatened. It was quite evident that from that moment Claude was quite a special favourite with him. Perhaps at that juncture the personal vanity of the old man was more open to flattery than at any other.

"Pray walk this way, gentlemen," he said. "This way, if you please, and I will introduce you to my—Oh!"

The poor reluctant bride's mother at this moment opened the door of the apartment so abruptly, that Sir Felix got a smart rap upon the nose from one of its panels.

"What is all this, Sir Felix?" she said. "I hope you are not being imposed upon?"

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! My nose—my nose!"

"Your nose, Sir Felix, is of the smallest possible consequence; what I want to know is, if these persons are imposing upon you in any way? Pray, sir,"—to Claude—"who may you be?"

"I don't know, madam," said Claude, "what I may be—that is a secret of destiny; but I am a Bow-street officer, and I came here on business."

"Oh, gracious!"

"And," continued Claude, "as I have explained that business to the master of the house, I presume I have done all that is sufficient."

"Indeed, sir, I will beg you then to observe, that I consider myself to be the mistress of the house."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Impudence."

"Oh, don't—don't!" said Sir Felix. "This, gentlemen, is my young wife's

mother, you see; and—and so she is going to live here just to keep things in order a little, that is all, gentlemen. She is a very good woman in her way, and remarkably quiet, I assure you, gentlemen. My dear, Mrs. White, I beg you will allow these gentlemen to stay, for if you don't, I believe we are all to have our throats cut this very night."



CLAUDE SURPRISES THE EFFICIOUS COUNTRYMAN NEAR GUILDFORD.

"Our throats—cut?"

"Yes, my dear Mrs. White, or our brains blown out, which, to us, you know my dear madam, would be much the same thing. These Bow-street office have come down from London on purpose to protect us from being murdered.

"Oh, my poor heart! Oh—oh!"

"The mother-in-law showed symptoms of fainting; but as nobody seemed

inclined to pay any attention to her, or to fly to her aid, she thought better of it, and didn't faint at all.

"Can this be possible?" she said. "Oh, are you quite sure, Sir Felix, that it is not a horrid take-in?"

"If Sir Felix has any suspicions of that nature," said Claude, with well-acted indignation, "we will leave the house at once; and probably, now that you are all upon your guard against the attack that will certainly be made upon you, you will be able, without our assistance, to protect yourselves against it. I can say for myself, and I am sure I may likewise say for my two comrades, that we are quite glad to be allowed to go."

"Certainly," said Dick; "all that we shall then ask of Sir Felix is a note of dismissal, signed by him, so that whatever happens, the blame will not rest upon our heads."

"Oh, come along," said Jack. "Come away at once. We can take oath as to the mode in which our services were dispensed with."

"Oh, no—no!" cried Sir Felix. "Don't go, and by all means don't mind one word that this stupid old woman says. I am going to get rid of her as soon as possible, I assure you, gentlemen. She is only my young wife's mother, that's all, and I can't bear the sight of her. Don't think of going on her account, gentlemen, I beg of you. I will make you quite welcome to everything the house may contain."

"Oh, you old wretch!" cried the lady.

"Old? old? How dare you call me old?"

"Allow me to beg that there may be no quarrelling," said Claude. "Really no one can tell but that we may be all in another world before the morning; and as regards the word 'old,' I am sure it will be many years before either of you need trouble yourselves about it. This lady cannot be above forty."

"Oh, sir," said the mother-in-law, who had just passed her sixtieth birthday, "oh, sir, upon my word you are really a—quite—gallant. I own I am forty-five—indeed, I am. Now don't be contradicting me. I am forty-five."

"Oh, dear!" said Sir Felix, lifting up his hands. "She owns to forty-five, does she? What an admission!"

"Pray step this way, gentlemen. We will at least try to make you as comfortable as we can, while you oblige us by staying in the house. It's a great favour of you to come all the way from London to protect us—indeed it is. Of course, as a sensitive female, I feel naturally timid; and if wretches of house-breakers were to get into the house, who shall say what they might do?"

"Ah, who, indeed?" said Jack.

Peace being thus happily restored between Sir Felix and the mother-in-law, the whole party adjourned to a room, in which there was a fire, and where, with her face buried in her hands, sat the young bride, poor sacrificed Cora.

"My dear," said her mother, "here are some police-officers come to watch the house, for they say that some thieves were going to break into it to-night, and murder us all."

"Happy death!" said Cora.

"What does she say?" cried Sir Felix, sharply, "what does she say? I am sure she said something."

"It's of no consequence, my dear sir," said the mother. "It's not of the slightest consequence, I assure you, sir."

"I promised," said Claude, aside to Sir Felix—"I promised to let a magistrate, as far off as Ealing, know of our arrival here, Sir Felix. Will you allow your servant at the lodge to ride as far as there with the message from me? otherwise one of us will have to go, and the effect of that, of course, would be rather to weaken our strength here in the house."

"Oh, yes—yes," said Sir Felix, "Joseph will go. He will go at once. Joseph is the man. Don't either of you stir, gentlemen, by no means, Oh, dear, no—no. Joseph will go. Ring the bell, Mrs. White, for Joseph."

Joseph was duly summoned, and Sir Felix gave him orders to go when he

should be directed; so that Claude had that sagacious-serving man quite at his disposal. He put a couple of guineas into Joseph's hands when he got outside the room door with him, and then he said—

"Joseph, get me some sealing-wax and a candle."

The couple of guineas acted like some potent charm upon the spirits of Joseph, and the sealing-wax and the candle were both quickly produced. Claude enclosed the letter from Cora, that had been picked up in the road, in an envelope, in the inside of which he wrote the following words:—

"Cornet Tarlton is advised to come at once to Lime Grove, and take Cora away with him. He will find friends there who will assist him, and Cornet Tarlton is warned to place no reliance upon any odd story the bearer of this may tell him."

"Now, Joseph," said Claude, "you will get the best horse you can in the village, and ride to the barracks at Knightsbridge, close to Hyde Park. There you will ask for Cornet Tarlton, and give him this paper, and when you come back, another couple of guineas will be waiting for you, Joseph. Do you understand?"

"Lor, yes, sir. That's as clear as clear can be."

"Very good; now be off, Joseph, as quickly as you possibly can. Don't risk your neck by any outrageous speed, but go as quickly as may be convenient to you, sir."

"I will, sir—I will."

Claude retired to the sitting-room, and the moment he seated himself, Sir Felix said—

"It would give me, do you know, gentlemen, such pleasure to offer you a glass of wine; but the fact is, my wine merchant has made a mistake, and sent in the wrong article, so that it has to go back and be changed, you understand; but I have some capital stout in the house, if you can manage a little of that, gentlemen."

"The wine is sour, I presume?" said Claude.

"Oh, quite—quite."

"Well, do you know I am glad to hear that; for although you may think it a very odd and vitiated taste, yet I prefer a glass of sour wine to anything else."

"And so do I," said Dick.

"And so do I," said Jack.

"You really don't mean it, gentlemen?" said Sir Felix, looking dreadfully alarmed. "You don't mean that you like sour wine?"

"Yes, we do. So I beg of you to get up a bottle or two of it at once for us. We shall be quite delighted with it, I assure you. Sour wine is just the thing for us."

Poor Sir Felix, who kept always the key of his own cellar, was upon this compelled to go for the wine; but such a fear had got possession of him concerning the probable attack upon the house, that he begged Claude to go with him, upon which both Jack and Dick likewise started up, crying—

"We will all go, for it would be a thousand pities for you, Sir Felix, to be cut off in your prime."

Sir Felix carried the light, and they all went into the cellar together. The old man picked one bottle out of a rack; and then, with a sigh, he said—

"This will be enough, I dare say, gentlemen, for I do think it will give you the stomach-ache."

"Oh, yes, quite enough," said Dick and Jack; and while his back was turned, they each possessed themselves of a couple of bottles of wine, and Claude did the same.

The amazement and vexation of Sir Felix when he found that no less than seven bottles of wine was placed upon the table in the sitting room, was perfectly ludicrous. He groaned again, but he could not help himself, as it would not exactly have done to send the wine back again.



A couple of the bottles were speedily opened, and as Claude had been informed by Joseph, the quality was found to be excellent; but they all three declared that it was sour, very sour, indeed, but yet that they liked it; and poor Sir Felix kept drinking away at it in order that while it was going in such a dreadful manner he might have as much as possible of it himself.

Mrs. White, too, was by no means behind-hand in taking her full share of the rare old wine, which had been in the cellar for many a long year, and was of first rate quality.

## CHAPTER CCXXI.

[CLAUDE TELLS A GOOD STORY—AND THE CORNET ARRIVES.]

THE evening wore on in this way very pleasantly indeed, and Sir Felix was really so pleased that he almost forgot that his wine was going at a great rate down the throats of his guests. He even had the temerity to offer a toast or two, to tell an anecdote of how, when he was in the yeomanry once, many years ago, he had fallen off his horse; and how the Colonel said:—"Hilloa! there's one dead man," and how he, Sir Felix, said, as he got up again, "Not yet, Colonel."

This was not a very brilliant joke, but the old man told it as if he thought it one of the most exquisite that could be imagined, and Claude laughed at it immoderately.

The old lady, however, was certainly not at all pleased. She was on the fidget the whole time, and although Dick plied her with wine it did not seem in the least to ameliorate her condition; for if it had been really as sour as old Sir Felix had pretended it was, it could not possibly have made Mrs. White more cross than she became.

"I really don't see any danger, Sir Felix," she said, "and I do think that we are detaining these gentlemen quite unnecessarily at this time of the evening."

"Oh, don't mention that, madam," said Claude. "The pleasure of your's and Sir Felix's society is ample recompense for anything of that sort; and if Sir Felix has no objection, I will just recount to you a little anecdote that happened to me once when I was in pursuit of a celebrated character."

"Pray who was it, sir?" said Mrs. White. "I hope it was no improper character, sir, as I am present?"

"Oh, dear, no. It was only Claude Duval the highwayman."

"And do you call him a proper character, sir?"

"At last, madam, I am not aware that there is anything in the career of Claude Duval that should be particularly bad for a lady to hear; and if Sir Felix pleases, I will tell the story."

"Oh, dear, yes, by all means. Let us hear it."

"Very good, sir. It happened thus:—Claude Duval, sir, probably feeling that some events in his life were not just what a very strict moralists would approve of, determined now and then to try and do some good; and feeling quite confident that a good deal of villany was going on against the fairest and best portion of creation—of course I allude to lovely woman."

Here Claude bowed to Mrs. White, who looked rather gratified at a compliment, the like of which she had not met with for the last thirty years.

"Being, as I say, convinced that the fair sex were very much imposed upon, he resolved to do them all the good he could; so, you see, Sir Felix, as he was going along the road one day—"

"But my good sir," said Sir Felix, "this story seems to be about Claude Duval and not about you."

"Exactly, sir. That's the beauty of it. But you will soon see how I shall come in at the end of it."

"Oh, very well—very well. Pray excuse me for interrupting you. I daresay it is a capital story."

"You may depend upon that, sir," said Dick; "and I can answer for it, it won't be one word too long."

"Not one," said Claude. "And so, as I was saying, Claude Duval, you see, was very much averse to any young girl being sacrificed in consequence of the cupidity of her relations to any old rascal, whose sole recommendation might be that he had plenty of money."

"Oh!" said Sir Felix.

"Humph!" said Mrs. White.

"And so one day as he was going along the road, he found a piece of folded paper, which stated that a young lady had been cajoled into matrimony by her mother to an old man, quite old enough to be her father; but she had a lover whom she wished to be informed of her situation; and she hoped that whoever found the note would forward it to him in the hope that he would arrive in time at the house of the old husband of a few hours, and rescue her from so dreadful a fate as remaining with him."

Sir Felix's young bride had retired to the next room; but as Claude spoke, he saw her shadow in the doorway, and he felt that she was listening to his recital.

"And what did the highwayman do, sir?" said Mrs. White, with a toss of her head.

"Why, he sent the young lady's note to the young officer, whom she wished most particularly should hear it."

"Thank God!" cried the young bride.

Mrs. White rose directly.

"What was that?" she cried. "Oh, what was that? Did you hear that, Sir Felix?"

"I—I heard something."

"It was me," said the young creature, coming timidly into the room. "It was me. I nearly fell over a chair, and I am sure I should have seriously hurt myself. Perhaps it was rather a trifle to thank God about that I escaped from the fall that I spoke."

"It's rather odd," said Mrs. White, with a thoughtful look. "It's very odd."

"Allow me, madam, to go on with the story," said Claude. "The fact is that the old husband, with the assistance of the poor girl's mother, had taken her to that home which, with all its advantages, would have been to her only a gilded cage; but Claude Duval, the highwayman, had forwarded the young lady's hurried appeal to her lover."

The young creature burst into tears, and Mrs. White got up from the table in a rage.

"I don't understand this," she said. "Sir Felix, I am rather an old stager, and I begin to suspect something wrong."

"An old stager are you, madam?" said Claude.

"Yes, sir; and I begin to smell a rat."

"Then I would strongly advise you to call the cat, madam, as the best possible means of catching it. I cannot understand what it is that alarms you. You are beginning to get quite red in the face, I assure you, madam."

"That's a melancholy truth," said Dick.

"Very," said Jack.

"How dare you remark upon my appearance, you low fellows? Sir Felix, if you are a man, rouse yourself, for I am very much afraid that something is amiss. I don't believe one word that these men say. It's all a delusion, Sir Felix—quite a delusion, sir; and I desire you to turn these people out of the lodge, sir."

"Well, but the thieves, Mrs. White! The thieves, you know. We don't want all our throats cut."

"I don't believe there is any danger, Sir Felix."

"Hark!" said Claude.

He held up his hand, and at the same moment the sound of horse's feet was heard upon the winding path that led up to the house. The horse that was ap-

proaching was evidently at a hard gallop, and the stop at the hall door was very sudden.

"Murder!" cried Sir Felix. "We shall be murdered!"

"Help! help!" said Mrs. White.

"Be under no alarm, let me beg of you," said Claude. "I will do what I said I would do, namely, protect you against all violence, let it come from whom it may. I am well armed, and so are my friends, and we never make a promise of protection without meaning to keep it, and taking care that we do keep it."

Mrs. White flew behind the chair of Sir Felix and looked rather alarmed, even through her rouge, and that had been rather liberally supplied to her countenance. She crouched down behind the chair, and was hidden completely from observation.

Poor Sir Felix looked the picture of bewildered dismay, and his young bride came from the inner room again, and held by the back of a chair for support, looking very pale and full of fright.

A hasty footstep sounded through the house, and was evidently approaching the door of the room, but it paused, as though the person to whom it belonged, being a stranger, did not feel quite certain of his way.

Jack went to the door and flung it open. Claude Duval had given him a hint to do so; and the gleam of light that went out into the corridor was a sufficient guide to the stranger. In the course of a few moments a singularly handsome-looking young man, in the regimentals of an officer, but splashed from head to foot by riding hard, strode into the room.

The moment the young bride observed him, she flew forward, and with a shriek of joy flung herself into his arms.

"Saved—saved!" she cried. "I am saved!"

"Gracious Heaven! what is the meaning of all this?" he cried. "Let me know what has happened! Are you the wife of another, dear one, or are you mine still? Oh, answer me."

"I am, and—and I am not," she sobbed.

Sir Felix turned of a purplish hue, and slid off his seat on to the floor of the room.

"You are, and you are not!" cried the young soldier. "Oh, why rack my brain by such words? Will no one take pity upon me and tell me what all this means? A man in hot haste rode into the barracks, and handed me a note. I am here in consequence, but yet I feel that I do not know all. Who will explain it to me?"

"I will," cried Claude Duval, stepping forward. "I will explain to you, sir, all that at present appears to you so inexplicable, and I hope and trust, satisfactorily to you."

"And who are you, sir?"

"That I don't think matters much. Suffice it to say that I was the means of sending to you the paper which has brought you here, and that I now give you an opportunity of action, which otherwise you could not have had possibly."

"Then I do not indeed ask you who you are, but know you as a friend. And now, dear one," added the young officer, addressing the bride, "will you fly with me from this place, or do you feel that you ought to remain in it?"

"With you—with you, to the world's end, if need be."

"I am content, then."

"But goodness gracious, sir," cried Sir Felix; "are you at all aware, sir, that that is my wife that you are hugging in that very affectionate kind of way?"

"Pho! pho! sir. Think yourself well off that I don't take some personal chastisement of you, sir."

"The best way," said Dick, "it there should be any cavil about the marriage that has taken place, would be to make the young lady a widow. Perhaps Sir Felix has no objection to fight it out."

"A capital thought," cried the young officer. "I will fight you immediately, sir, in any way you think proper."

"Oh—no—no!—Oh, dear no!"

"Then, perhaps," said Claude, "rather than fight, Sir Felix will give up all right and title to the hand of the young lady?"

"I will give up all right and title to a thousand young ladies," said Sir Felix, "rather than I would run into any personal danger. It is all very well for people to fight who have got nothing to lose; but I have a good estate, and every comfort about me, and that makes a vast difference."

"And a good cellar, too," said Duval.

The old man uttered a groan at the recollection of how his wine had gone down the throats of people who, after all, had come for his confusion, instead of for his protection, to the house; but Claude, seeing writing materials on a side table, at once drew up a short renunciation of all claims to the young lady on the part of Sir Felix, which he signed at once.

"There," he said, "take her, sir; I have done with her."

"It's the wisest thing you could do, Sir Felix," said Jack; "but where is Mrs. White? She ought to be something like a witness to this transaction. Where is she?"

"Ah, where is she?" said Dick. "Not here."

"Then she means mischief," said Claude, "and the sooner we now get away the better it will be for us, I am certain. We will leave directly, my friends."

"And so will I," said the young officer, "although I cannot see what you can have to dread from Mrs. White."

"I am sorry to say though," said Claude, "that I and my friends see it very well, and perhaps when we get outside this house I will tell you?"

"I can tell you now," said Sir Felix, pointing at Claude; "I can tell you at once, if he won't be angry at it."

"I don't want to know," said the officer. "If this gentleman and his friends have any secret to keep, it would be very ungenerous upon my part to seek to know it."

"Speak freely, Sir Felix," said Claude, "I don't care what you say. Who do you think I am?"

"I don't think at all about it," said the old knight; "but after all that has passed, now, I know that you are Claude Duval the highwayman, and you won't deny it."

"Claude Duval!" said the officer. "Is that possible?"

"Sir Felix says so," said Claude, "and I would advise you to believe him, sir. Do you think it quite out of the course of nature, that Claude Duval should do a kind action?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Then do not be surprised at my name. It's probable enough that you have heard more bad than good of me; but when you hear me spoken of again, you can say, that even the worst persons have, now and then, a kindly feeling, even towards strangers; and so I will bid you good night."

"No, no," said the young lady; "we will not—we cannot part thus with him who has done us so much kindness."

The young officer took Claude's hand, and said,—

"Were you ten times a highwayman, you are my friend, and only say in what I can serve you."

At that moment, and before Claude could reply, there was heard a great noise in the hall, and Jack, who for the last few moments had been to the door to listen if any danger were at hand, said immediately,—

"It is Mrs. White, and she brings with her an armed force. We are in danger indeed, now."

Sir Felix, full of dread of the conflict that he fancied was about to ensue, crept under the table at once, and there hid himself, while Claude and his companions drew their pistols, and were resolved to defend themselves to the very last extremity.

## CHAPTER CCXXII.

THE REFUGE AMONG THE PLAYERS.—CLAUDE'S DISGUISE.

Dick glanced around him, and pointing to the inner room, in which the young bride had remained for the greater part of the evening, said,—

"Where does that room lead to?"

"To a staircase," said the young lady, "but that is all I know of it. Oh, fly from here, and we will stop your pursuers."

"We will try it, at all events," said the officer, drawing his sword; "they shall not pass me without a fight for it."

"My good sir," said Claude, "let me beg of you not to draw down upon yourself mischief—it cannot help us; you had much better seem to be our foe, and yet in reality be our friend. Come on, Dick and Jack, and we'll soon find where the staircase leads to."

Claude snatched up a light from the table, and dashed into the adjoining room, followed by his two friends; and it was well that they did so soon as they did, for hardly were their backs turned, and the door of communication between the two apartments closed and locked, which Claude had the presence of mind to do, than Mrs. White, with eight well-armed men belonging to the constabulary, rushed into the apartment so lately occupied by the three friends.

"Where are they? she cried, "where are the three wretches? Take them into custody at once, my good men; they are arrant thieves, I assure you. Knock them down, and if they resist ever so little, I advise you to shoot them. Oh, they are gone!"

"Quite gone, you see, madam," said the officer.

"Oh, you low, poor wretch! I know you well," cried Mrs. White; "you have not one penny piece to scrub upon another, except your pay, you know that well enough. How dare you interfere with me, sir, and my family arrangements?"

"You may make what family arrangements you like, madam," said the cornet, "so long as they only include yourself in their results and consequences; but I certainly object to your making arrangements that involve your daughter's happiness."

"You puppy!"

The officers who had come into the room along with Mrs. White paid not the remotest attention to the little family squabble that was going on, but with great tact and skill, they began to search the room for the parties they came to apprehend. After a little time, they espied poor Sir Felix under the table; and the principal officer seizing him by the leg, cried in a loud voice of exultation to his companions,—

"Here's one of them! here's one of them! I'll have him out in a minute—Come, come, let's have no resistance, sir! that's a sort of thing that won't do here."

With this, poor Sir Felix was dragged out so roughly that he was for the moment deprived of the power of speech; but the moment Mrs. White saw him, she screamed out,—

"Why, that is Sir Felix! That is the master of this house. Let him go instantly, you wretches!"

"The master of the house!" said the officer, who was much disappointed that he had caught nobody. "Why, what the deuce does he mean then, by hiding under his own table?"

"That's no business of yours," said Mrs. White, who guessed very well that was the fears of Sir Felix that had taken him to so ignoble a place of refuge, and was quite willing to come to his rescue. "You find the highwaymen; and if the officer, as he calls himself, who is as poor as Job, and as proud as Lucifer, don't be off directly, I will give you a guinea to turn him out of the house. Come away, you slut," addressing her daughter. "You know that you are Sir



Felix's wife, and you have no sort of business to be in the arms of another man. Come away, this moment."

"But Sir Felix has given me up, mother."

"Oh, dear, yes," said Sir Felix, "I don't want to have my throat cut, or my brains blown out, for a little chit of a girl, not I. If there's to be continual squabbling and fighting about her, let her go: I don't want to see her face again."



AN ADVENTURE WITH THE PLAYERS AT GUILDFORD.

Mrs. White gave a slight scream at this and flung herself upon a couch, as though she at least had made up her mind not to leave the house of Sir Felix if her daughter did; and the officers, finding they were disappointed of their prey, and being quite convinced that no one was concealed in the room, tried to open the door of connection with the next apartment, but in vain.

"Where does this lead to?" said one.

"Why, to where the people you want have gone, to be sure," said Sir Felix, "and I only hope you may catch them, for I shall feel no peace of mind until they are all three hanged."

The officers, upon finding the door locked, did not stop long to talk upon the matter, but proceeded with violent precipitation to break it open, in which, despite the remonstrances of Sir Felix, they in a few moments succeeded. The room was empty.

The fact was, that Claude, the moment he and his two friends got into the next room and had locked the door, spoke to them in a low tone of voice, saying—

"Let us pause a moment here, and listen; one of our great objects will be to discover who they are that are after us. If they consist merely of some of the blockheads of the neighbourhood, our danger is by no means great; but if they are professional officers, we had better know it at once."

With this view, in the propriety of which both Jack and Dick fully concurred, they all listened at the door of the room, and they soon heard enough to convince them that the men were officers, or at least the greater part of them.

"Come on, then," said Claude; "frightening will have no effect upon them. It is only killing that would do, and that is what we don't like to have recourse to, except at a last extremity; so let us be off at once and see if we cannot get out of the house by some means."

"Our horses!" said Dick.

"Ay," said Jack, "I fear for them. I am half afraid to think of them, and I shall not believe that we shall ever possess them again until I feel myself mounted."

"Do not speak of the horses just yet," said Claude; "let us hope for the best, and that we shall find them all right in a little time. At present, what we have to do is to get out of the way of the Philistines."

As he spoke, Claude, with the candle still in his hand, went towards a door at the farther end of the little room, and upon opening it, he found that it at once opened upon the staircase that had been mentioned by the young bride.

"It is of very little consequence to us," he said, "where this staircase may lead to; our only chance of escape is by it, so down we go."

"Very good," said Dick. "We will follow."

Claude ran down the stairs, and found that they led to a room below, that seemed as if it had once been a library, from the shelves that were all around it, although some old moth-eaten, mouldy-looking books, lying huddled together upon the floor, were now the only evidences of its being devoted to such a purpose. Still, as it was upon the ground-floor, it offered some facilities to leaving the house, or at all events, it ought to do so.

"Come on," said Claude, after taking a brief glance round the room. "Come on. We will get out of this. Here is a door."

The door through which he passed led into a kind of passage, and at the end of that was another door that had the upper portion of it made of glass. Through that was the open air; but they found themselves in a part of the grounds of the house that they were strange to. The most unlucky thing was, that the moment that door was opened, there came a puff of wind through it that blew out the candle, so that they were in comparative darkness, although the night was rather a lighter one than ordinary.

"What in the name of all that's perplexing, are we to do now?" said Dick.

"It's like being set down in the moon."

"Not quite so bad," said Claude.

"Very nearly, though; but we must go round the house till we find the stables. Oh, that we were but mounted once again! That would be the thing for us. Then we should laugh at all this."

"The time will come," said Claude. "Let us keep here under the shadow of the house. We must get to the stables soon."

"Hilloa!" said a voice.

They all paused ; and Claude, as he levelled a pistol in the direction whence the voice came, said in a low but perfectly clear voice—

“Whoever you are, if you don't come forward I will fire at you.”

“Don't do that,” said the voice. “It's me, Sir Felix's man. Don't you know me, gentlemen? Lord bless you, don't shoot me.”

“Oh, it is you, is it? You have got back from London tolerably quick.”

“Yes, and I advise you to leave this place tolerably quick. I know who you are now, and what you are ; but you came here on a good errand, and I'm as glad as possible you have saved that poor girl, and got the better of the old woman. Do you know that there is a party of officers in the house looking after you?”

“We do.”

“Very good. They have told me to take the horses out of the stable, and send 'em loose in the paddock, so that you may not get 'em ; but I saddled them all three, and got 'em nice and comfortable for you close at hand. Come after me, and I'll soon take you to them.”

“How can we thank you?” said Claude.

“Oh, don't mention that, only come on, and don't lose any time about it, for there's no knowing how soon they may come down, and be about our ears.”

“Dare we trust this fellow?” whispered Jack.

“Yes, implicitly,” said Claude. “Come on. What money have you, Jack, about you?”

“About thirty pounds.”

“Give it to me. Thank you. We can supply ourselves again, you know. Now, my good friend, go on towards the horses as quick as you can, and we will follow you.”

The man went on rapidly, and came in a few moments to a fence made of oak pailings. There was a door in it, but no one who had not known of its existence could have observed it in that dim light. He, however, wrenched it open at once, and said—

“This way—this way! Here are the cattle.”

It was all right, for immediately upon passing through this little gate or doorway, they found the three horses ready for the road, and fastened to a ring in a post that was there for the purpose,

“Now I tell you what it is,” said the man, “I don't want to get into trouble, so you will be so good as to knock me down, you know, and pull this little oak door off its hinges, and then you can mount and be off, and all I can say is, good luck go with you.”

“When I knock you down,” said Claude, “I hope somebody may serve me the same way. Take this as a small testimony of our gratitude to you for the efficient aid you have give us to-night.”

As he spoke, Claude placed in the man's hands the thirty pounds that Jack had given to him. Dick and Jack had already mounted, and Claude was in the act of doing so, when a blaze of light flashed into the place, which was a little enclosed straw-yard, and a voice cried—

“There they are!—there they are! Blaze away!”

A couple of pistol-shots were fired at them, but did no damage, for nothing like an aim could be taken at such a time ; and Claude at once closed the little oaken door.

“Stoop in your saddles,” he said, “stoop—stoop, so as to keep your heads below the pailings.”

“That's impossible,” said Dick, as he rapidly dismounted. “Get down, Jack, or they will pick you off. The pailing is not near high enough to stoop below it. All's right.”

Bang! went another shot just as Jack got off his horse ; and then Claude, whose anger was roused, said—

“I am not going to stand thus to be shot at in this place, by a parcel of ragamuffin's, as if one were a carrion. Is any one hurt?”

“No—no!” they all said.

"Very good. Then I promise those fellows that at the very next shot they favour us with, they shall have my double-barrel in return, and then they will find out how they like it."

"Pepper the rascals!" cried a voice. "I daresay you have killed some of them, my brave fellows."

Claude found that this voice came from an open window some distance off, at which, in the uncertain light, he saw a head just a little way projecting. The officers that were outside the pailing had a large stable lantern with them; and now two more shots were fired at Claude and his friends, that came crashing through the oak pailing.

"I'm hit," said the servant.

"And my horse is, I think," said Dick.

Claude was infuriated at this; and taking aim at the head that projected from the window with one barrel of his double-barrelled pistol, he fired at it. A loud shriek testified to the success of the shot, and the head disappeared. The other barrel Claude discharged through the pailing at those who had the lantern.

"Murder!" cried a voice, and then all was still.

"I wonder how they feel after that?" said Claude. The silence that ensued now had quite an ominous kind of feeling with it; and Claude endeavoured all he could to pierce into the darkness, for the purpose of observing what his foes were about. Presently a voice said—

"Claude Duval, this is a foolish resistance to make to your capture. We know you well, and you have got Dick Turpin with you, and some one else. You must be taken, and you will only make your case worse by resisting. We have already sent off for more assistance."

"So have I," said Claude.

"Come, come, don't be foolish. Do you know that you have killed Mr. Smith, the officer?"

"Really, you don't say so?"

"Let me advise you, as a friend, to give yourself up, and advise your two friends to do so likewise; for if you don't, you won't live another hour, for we have made up our minds to have you, dead or alive."

"Come and take me, then," said Claude.

After this, there was evidently a rather uneasy kind of consultation among the officers to know what to do, and Claude said in a low tone—

"Did our friend say that he was hurt? Speak—speak!"

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## CHAPTER CCXXIII.

### THE ESCAPE TO THE ROAD, AND THE VIGOROUS PURSUIT.

THESE last words of Claude's were addressed to the servant who had played so kind a part towards them; but they were answered rather cheerfully.

"I am hurt, but it ain't much. It's only a touch on the arm, that won't do much mischief. Keep them in talk, Claude Duval, and I will get you out of this mess."

"Can you?"

"I can and will, if you will trust the cattle to me."

"I would trust you with my life."

"Then you three hold this place against the officers, if you can, for the next five minutes, and I warrant to take you comfortably out of it by another route. I will pull down an iron hurdle here, and then we can get into the garden—the kitchen garden, I mean."

"I will help you," said Jack.

"Do; for I don't think, with my arm rather queer, that I could get the hurdle up alone."

Jack went with this man, who now behaved in so bold and generous a manner, and between them they went to work capitally. Claude, then, to cover what was going on, thought it would be better to parley with the officers a little, so he said—

“Of course, if we were to give in, we could only expect the very worst treatment from you.”

“Oh, no—no—you are quite mistaken,” was the reply. “We will say as little as possible of the resistance you have made.”

“But this Mr. Smith’s death?”

“Oh, we will pretend that it was rather accidental than otherwise. Only give yourselves up, and you may depend upon the best of treatment from us. We are not at all vindictive; but you know as well as we do, that we must do this duty.”

“Yes, I am aware of that.”

“And you should think, too, what a poor chance you three have against eight of us, who are quite resolved in the matter, and must have you, dead or alive, somehow. Besides, we have sent for more help; so you had better give in while you have a whole skin, than when you have a broken one. Come, come, be wise, and give in.”

“Well, I will consult my friends for a few moments. As regards myself, I am always favourable to doing the best I can.”

By this time, the man-servant of Sir Felix had taken away the three horses, and now he came close to Claude, and whispered in his ear—

“Follow me quietly. They are all right.”

Upon turning suddenly round, Claude saw that both Jack and Dick were gone, and at the moment a rather uncomfortable feeling of loneliness came over him.

“Are they safe?” he said.

“Oh, quite, quite; follow me.”

“I will do so.”

Claude followed the man. It was, perhaps, rather a risk to run, to put so much faith in one who was merely an utter stranger; but then, no one was more in the habit of trusting to others than was Claude Duval; and he had found, by long experience, that it was the very best way of procuring their best services.

The man led him through the gap that he had made in the iron-hurdle fence, and then, by the tread, Claude felt that he was upon garden ground, for his feet sunk in at every step up to the ankles, and he said—

“Have we far to go?”

“No. This way—this way.”

Claude went on, and in a few moments he heard the voice of Dick saying—

“Is that you, Claude?”

“Yes—yes.”

“I was afraid the Philistines had got you, and so was Jack. I have had the greatest difficulty in keeping him quiet. Here we are, all among the cabbages in the garden, mounted, and Jack has got your horse by the bridle. I do think we shall give our friends on the other side of the pailings the go-bye yet.”

“I’m sure we shall,” said Claude.

“Thank God I hear you speak again!” said Jack.

“Ah, Jack,” said Claude, “you are always expecting the worst to come to us; but I have great faith in my good luck. Now, which way are we to go, and what are we to do?”

“Let me lead your horses clear of the garden,” said the man, “and then you may all three go off at a gallop, if you like, as soon as possible; for it will be in the main road that I shall lead you to, and all the mischief will be a little knocking about of the vegetables, which won’t much matter.”



As he spoke, this man—without whose aid the escape of Duval and his friends from that place would have been a very dangerous and critical affair—took hold of the bridle of Claude's horse, and led the creature over some of the beds in the garden, totally heedless of the crushing and displacing effects the horse's hoofs upon the various vegetables that were growing there. This kind of progress lasted about five minutes, and then they came to another oak paling.

"Wait a moment," said the guide. "There is a door here that I will open for you directly."

He did so, and then Claude, as he passed out of the garden, found, by the firm, hard tread of the horse, that he was on the high road. A feeling of intense satisfaction came across him upon being assured of this fact, and he said—

"All's right at last. Let me but be mounted, and upon the road, and I look upon whatever may happen as only in the regular course of events. Come on, Dick and Jack."

They both emerged from the garden, and then Claude turned to the man, and said—

"I hope, my friend, that we shall meet again. Let me have the pleasure of shaking hands with you."

"Excuse me offering you the left one, then, for the right don't feel very comfortable just now."

"Ah, it is in that you were wounded?"

"It is; but I have stopped the bleeding, I think, with my handkerchief, so it won't do me much harm."

"I sincerely hope not. Good-by."

"Good by to you all. Don't wait. All's right, you may depend, in the house; so be off at once."

Claude gave the reins to his steed, and off he went, closely followed by Jack and Dick; but they had not gone far when they became quite conscious that some one well mounted was pursuing them, or if not pursuing, was coming sharply upon the same road.

"Do you hear that, Claude?" said Dick.

"I do. Let us listen. Just draw up half a moment."

They did so, and then Jack cried—

"There are two."

"Yes," said Claude, "I hear the tread of two horses. I don't like a race. I propose that we draw up to the road-side and listen. We will wait for the comers, be they whom they may; but don't do anything hastily, whatever you do—I mean as regards the use of your pistols, Dick. We have had fighting enough, I think, for a day, or rather night, already."

"Quite enough."

The two horses came rapidly up, and although our friends were quite in the shadow of some trees, yet, as we have said, it was rather a light night, so that those who were riding upon the road could hardly miss seeing them, if they were looking about at all.

"Hilloa! who is there?" cried a voice.

"A friend," said Claude, "if you like to think so, and pass on; but a foe if you like to make him one."

"Ah, I know that voice surely."

"And I," said some one in female tones; "it is our gallant friend, Claude Duval, I feel assured."

Upon this, Claude and his friends emerged from the shadow, and they saw that the mounted persons were none other than the young officer and his lady love.

"I am quite pleased," said the officer, "to find you safe upon the road. I was, indeed, afraid that your enemies would prove too many for you. I trust that you are not hurt at all?"

"No, we are pretty well; but, you see, we have left our foes the field all to themselves, preferring a prudent retreat. Are you for London?"

"Yes; and if you are for that road, pray ride with us. Sir Felix, after you were gone, tried to fight it out with me, and I am afraid he has done himself no good by the attempt. I have had some trouble, too, with Mrs. White, who would interfere. But here we are at last, safe and sound, and I don't think they will find it very easy now to get their loved one away from me again."

"I don't think they will. But pray ride on, sir, and take with you our good wishes. You will not find that our company upon the road will redound much to your credit."

"But I am, I hope, far above paltry feelings of that sort. You and your friends have done me a great service, and I will not fail to acknowledge it in all places, and under all circumstances, that may require. So ride on with us, I beg of you, without further scruple, or we shall take it amiss if you don't."

"Oh! listen, listen," said the young girl, "I hear some people coming; do you not?—Listen now! the regular tread of horses' feet comes plainly on my ears."

"And upon mine, too," said her lover. "I am rather surprised, but it strikes me I can hear the clank of military accoutrements too; how can that be, though? There is no barracks or military station nearer than Hounslow, I think."

"That is not very far off," said Claude; "we have even reason to believe that the officers who thought fit to beleaguer us at the lodge, finding we made a stouter resistance than they anticipated, sent for some help, and it is likely enough that it has been to Hounslow Barracks."

"If so, then," said the officer, "this party that is approaching is a sergeant's guard of cavalry, that the commanding officer at Hounslow has thought proper to send in aid of the civil power."

"There's very little doubt of it," said Dick.

The young officer mused for a moment or two, and then he said,—

"Keep by me; you have done me a great service. Without her who is now with me, and from whom I will not part while life remains to me, I should have passed but a miserable existence. I will now endeavour to repay some small portion of the debt of gratitude that I owe you."

"What would you do?"

"I would, and I will save you from a contest with these soldiers, if they are bound for the lodge. Trot gently on, and be under no sort of apprehension: I can and will do it."

"We should be sorry," said Claude, "if you did yourself any personal injury by interfering in our behalf. We have a thousand chances of escape. Ride on, sir, and leave us to our own resources."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the young lady, "that must not and shall not be done. You shall be protected. I wish it with all my heart."

"And your wish is a law, my darling," said the young officer; "so I am sure our friends will not say another word about it, but permit me to act as I wish, and as you wish, in the little affair."

"It would be absurd and ungrateful of me," said Claude, "further to refuse so great a kindness."

"Hush—they come!"

Clattering on in the middle of the road, came five mounted dragoons, and a sergeant. A very few moments would have brought them close to Claude and his friends. By the side of the sergeant rode a man in plain costume. This was no doubt the officer who had been sent by his comrades to request the aid of the commanding officer at Hounslow. The young cornet rode up to the troop, and in a loud clear voice cried—

"Ha't!"

The soldiers drew up in a moment.

"Sergeant, what is this party about?" said the officer. "I think you belong to my regiment, do you not?"

The sergeant at once saluted the young officer, and riding up to him, he looked at him as well he could in the dim light, and saw quite enough of him to convince himself that he was one of his officers.

## CHAPTER CCXXIV.

## THE THREE FRIENDS FAIRLY ON THE ROAD AGAIN.

UPON the discovery that this was an officer in his own regiment, the sergeant at once gave up all authority in the matter, and was ready to act upon any orders he might name.

"I have no wish to interfere with the duty you are upon," said the officer. "Go on at once, sergeant."

The sergeant saluted the officer, and then gave the word to the guard to pass on. The officer looked as though he were rather mystified at what was going on, and pointing to Claude and his companions, it was evident that he said something to the sergeant concerning them; but the latter only shook his head, and went clattering on.

"We are indebted to you, sir," said Claude, "for our escape from this danger. It was a serious one."

"How much more am I indebted to you!"

"Well, if you think that, we are even, so be it; but we must positively not embarrass you any longer by our presence. I can easily comprehend the kind and honourable feeling you have towards us, but it would be very base upon our parts to take further advantage of it, to your, perhaps, great prejudice. We will now bid you adieu."

"If you will, at this juncture, bid us good-by," said the officer, "I cannot say anything that ought to stay you; but you now know my name, and you know my regiment, so that you can have no difficulty in finding me; and let me hope that you will not scruple to do so, if I can be of any service to you."

"I will remember that. Farewell!"

Both Dick and Jack cried "Farewell!" and then, without waiting for another word from the young officer, they all three dashed down a lane that was close at hand.

The entrance to that little lane—it was so very dark—looked like the entrance to some cavern.

"Well," said Dick, "we are well out of that affair, at all events; and there is one great satisfaction connected with it, that we did not go into the adventure for any mercenary motives."

"Certainly we did not," said Jack; "but I should like very well to know where this lane leads to. Can you enlighten us at all upon that rather interesting subject, Claude?"

"Not I."

"Humph! Then, perhaps, the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Every lane, Jack, has an end of some sort, and no doubt this one is no exception to the rule. I was particularly anxious to get out of the high road, for I could not help feeling that we were a very serious encumbrance to that young officer, although his gentlemanly and grateful feelings prevented him from saying as much; so I really took the turning just because it presented itself, without having the smallest idea of where it led to."

"What's that?" said Dick, suddenly.

"What's what?"

"Oh, it's a light a little way on in advance, I see. It is having quite a fight with the coming daylight, to make itself visible. It seems to proceed from some cottage window, don't you think, Claude? Just take a good look at it."

Claude paused, and shading his eyes with his hands, he gazed earnestly in the direction of the light, and then he said—

"It is the reflection of a fire-light, I think, darting out into the air, through a little latticed window. At all events, it shows that somebody is up and stirring from whom we can ascertain where we are."

"Push on, then," said Dick.

In about five minutes they came to a pretty-looking cottage; but whether it

was the lodge entrance to some estate, or a cottage of itself, merely built in the lane, they could not decide. Claude, however, raised his voice, crying out—

“Hilloa !—hilloa ! Anybody at home ?”

An old woman appeared at the door of the little dwelling, and, to the surprise of Claude, she said—



THE SCUFFLE WITH THE CROWD IN THE VILLAGE OF EALING.

“A, B, C. One, two, three, and take it out of that.”

The three friends looked at each other, and then they looked at the old woman, after which Claude said—

“Perhaps it’s rather an ungracious question to ask you, old lady ; but, are you mad, or have you had a little drop too much very early this morning ?”

The old woman immediately retired into the cottage, and closed the door with a bang, without deigning to say another word to Claude and his companions.

"This is rather funny," said Dick. "What do you make of it, Claude? What does it mean?"

"I don't know—I suppose she is cracked."

"Possibly," said Jack, rather drily.

"At all events, I will have her out again," said Duval, as he leant from his saddle, and began banging at the door with the handle of his riding whip.—"Hilloa, old dame! Hilloa! your society is so delightful, that we want a little more of it—Hilloa! House—house! Come out—come out!"

Rap, rap, rap, went the heavy handle of the riding whip, and then the window was opened suddenly, and a jug of water was dashed out, which missed Claude, and fell right over Jack.

"Take that," said the old hag, "and [perhaps you will get a little worse, if you don't be jogging while you may."

"Come, come, old lady," said Claude, "you have got hold of the wrong customers to try any threats upon. We have made up our minds to ask you a civil question, and we will not only ask it, but we will have an answer to it likewise, or we will have your cottage down about your ears."

"Confound the old hag," said Jack, "she has drenched me."

"What's your question, idiot?" cried the old woman.

"Ah! now you are talking to yourself, old girl. Why, I suppose, you were with Noah in the ark, you are so old and hag-like, or are you one of the original witches in Macbeth?"

"I only wish I had a gun, I'd soon let you know what I am, and what I was, too."

"Oh, you can threaten, can you? Well, as you are such a nice comfortable old girl, we will dismount and step inside the little cottage for a while. I want a rest."

"You shall not—you dare not!"

"Oh, but we will; and as for daring, we are rather used to that, as you will see. Come, comrades, let us bestow a little of our company upon this sour crab of an old woman. It will be quite a piece of christian charity to do so, I feel assured."

"You wretches, what do you want here? Do you fancy I keep open house for such vagabonds? I do believe you are highwaymen."

"You don't say so?" cried Claude, as he dismounted, and fastened his horse's bridle to the branch of a walnut tree that grew close to the hedge-row. "Why, you must be quite a witch, old lady. Now, to my mind, there is nothing in nature half so well worth the studying as a real good old-fashioned, vicious, carping, snarling, old woman."

As Claude advanced, the old hag retreated into the cottage, and with a passionate vehemence, which showed how ill-regulated the disposition of that aged female must have always been, she commenced throwing at Claude and his friends everything she could lay hands upon in the cottage, quite heedless of whether they were articles that would break or not.

"Oh," said Claude, "that's it, is it? You want to get the crockery all outside do you? All's right. Let's help her, my friends. We ought always, you know, to lend a helping hand to the aged."

Jack, who had already had a taste of the old woman's passion, in the shape of the jug of cold water that had been thrown over him, had no objection to revenge himself a little, and Dick entered into the affair for the fun of the thing. They all three set to work, and in about five minutes they had cleared the cottage, and the lawn was strewed with the fragments of crockery of all descriptions, and broken articles of furniture. The last things that Claude threw out was a large earthenware pitcher, and that he sent slap through the latticed window.

Saucepans, pots, kettles, a warming-pan, all followed, and at the last, the old



woman got desperate, and feeling herself fairly conquered, she sat down on the floor, and shrieked with passion.

"Now," said Claude, very gently, "you will, perhaps, answer me the quiet civil question I wished to ask you at first?"

"Oh, you odious wretches!"

"Where does this lane lead to?"

"I'll have you all hanged, I will!"

"Where does this lane lead to?"

"I won't tell you!"

"You won't? Very good. I didn't see those few little glazed prints on the wall. Out with 'em, Jack."

"There they go."

The old woman sprang to her feet, and catching up the fender, she began to lay about her with it with savage fury. Claude got out of the way as best he could, and then, watching his opportunity when she was near to the window, he tilted her out of it, fender and all, on to a little flower border that was underneath it. Then, resting his arms on the sill, he said—

"Now, old lady, where does this lane lead to?"

She scrambled up again, and seizing a garden rake, she began to poke it in at the window, with the hope of doing them some injury, but Claude quickly disarmed her of it, and then said, quite gently, and in a soft, gentle tone of voice—

"Old lady, where does this lane lead to?"

"Why, what's all this?" cried Dick, suddenly.

"All what?" said Jack.

Claude glanced round, and he saw that Dick had opened a cupboard in the wall, from which had tumbled out to the floor of the cottage a quantity of costly dresses for females. There were shawls, mantles, slippers, flowers for the hair, bracelets, girdles, and, in fact, every description of wearing apparel; and among the lot, a quantity that seemed to have belonged to mere girls.

At the sight of this discovery, the old woman uttered a cry of dismay, and fell flat upon her face.

"What is the meaning of it all?" said Claude; "is the old devil a fence, after all?"

"No; surely not," said Dick; "she would get no business out here, and, besides, this is not the sort of property. This looks as if all the young girls in the parish had been robbed of something. It's quite past my comprehension altogether."

"And mine," said Jack.

"And, I am afraid," said Claude, "I must say mine. However, this discovery seems to have quieted her down a bit, at all events. She has fainted, I do think. Let's pick her up and bring her in; at all events, she has made a grand fight of it, and considering that she must have known that there was not a very good chance for her against three men, she carried on the war pretty well."

"It was all temper," said Jack. "But I could have forgiven her everything but the cold water business."

"Ah, Jack! that seems to have thrown cold water upon your feelings in the matter. Bring her in, Dick, for let her be what she may, in temper or in conduct, she is yet a woman, and as such, entitled to some care from us."

"Agreed," said Dick; "and all she has done is her own violence. We have been careful not to touch her, I am sure, the stupid old pump! How the deuce she became possessed of all these clothes is a mystery to me. They are far beyond anything one might expect to find here."

Dick, however, picked the old woman up and brought her into the now dilapidated cottage. They placed her as comfortably as circumstances would admit upon the little miserable truckle-bed, which was about the only article that had not been thrown out into the lane; and then Dick dashed some water upon her face, and she slowly opened her eyes.

"Hilloa," he said, "are you better?"

"Yes. Oh, God, yes!"

"Do you know where you are?" said Claude.

"Yes—yes, I do now."

"Then where does this lane lead to?"

Neither Dick nor Jack could restrain their laughter at the pertinacity with which Claude stuck to his question; and the woman, after looking at him for a moment or two in silence, said,

"To Wooksom."

"Oh, I know that," said Dick. "It is a little village of not much more than a dozen houses."

"Very good," said Claude. "Now that she has answered me, I am quite content; but if I had worried her for the next hour or two I would have made her tell me. I shall be off now, for to tell the truth, we have wasted too much time here already."

"Shall we ask her about the cupboard full of clothing?" said Dick in a whisper to Jack.

"Ah, do."

"I say, old girl, how came you by all these things that seem to belong to young ladies' wardrobes, eh? We are rather curious to know; and if it is a secret, we won't let it go any further."

"Mercy! Mercy!" said the old woman, "I suffer enough. Oh, do not drag me to a prison. Oh, have mercy upon me! If you are, as I suppose you are, the officers of justice, spare me or kill me. But I cannot tell: I am bound by such solemn oaths, that it would be perdition to break them. Oh, no—no, I can die, but I will tell nothing."

"Oh, she is mad—quite mad," said Claude. "Let us come away. If she were to tell us any long story, I should not believe it. Come along, my friends; the best thing we can do is to leave her to herself."

"Hark!" said Dick. "A horseman is coming at full speed down the lane. Do you not hear it?"

"I do," cried Claude, as he rushed into the lane just as a horseman drew up at the door of the cottage.

"Well met," he cried; and then Duval saw that it was the young officer to whom he had done such good service. He handed to Claude a small folded paper.

"Take this," he said; "it is from her whom you rescued from a fate worse than death, and I have to tell you that the whole country-side is now up in arms against you. If you follow the directions contained in the paper you now have, you will find a secure asylum for a little time. Adieu; I must be off again."

Without, then, waiting for a word of thanks, the young officer put his horse to a gallop, and went towards the high-road again.

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## CHAPTER CCXXV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE COTTAGE REMAINS A MYSTERY FOR THE PRESENT.

"To horse!" cried Claude. "I think that the sooner we get away from here the better. There is much danger now in this neighbourhood, and the daylight has all but fairly come."

When he was mounted, Duval looked at the folded paper, and found upon it, written with pencil in evident haste, the following words:—

"To my friend, C. D.

"I have abundant reason to know that you are environed by danger, and that more than ordinary means will be used for the purpose of capturing yourself and friends. My mother and Sir Felix will use every means for the purpose of destroying you. I, therefore, beg that you will take special warning, and do as

I ask you. Go to Guildford, and when you get there, inquire at the theatre for Mr. Clare. He is my brother, and for my sake will do anything he can for you. You may be quite certain, at all events, of getting with him an asylum that will provide you against any immediate evil consequences. I need not subscribe myself anything but one who feels how much you have befriended her."

Claude read this note to his friends, and then added,—

"What do you both advise upon this? Shall we obey its counsel?"

"I would," said Jack; "she cannot for one moment mean otherwise than for our good; and the young officer would assuredly not have ridden back to bring you that message, Claude, if he had not felt well assured of the emergency of the case."

"That I believe. What do you think of it, Jack?"

"I vote for Guildford."

"Very well: I own that my own inclination likewise points that way. Be it so. This Mr. Clare may assist us for his sister's sake. At all events, if we go among the players, it will be a new phase in our existence, and promises a little change to us. The only question is how to get there, for I must confess that I don't know the way."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"But I do," said Jack; "after the name of the little village, which the old woman mentioned, I know pretty well where we are; and I think if you both follow me, I can lead you to Guildford."

"Lead on, Jack, then," said Claude, "although I do think it is a pity to leave this place without ascertaining all about the mystery of that old woman in the cottage; for that there is some great mystery connected with her I feel assured."

"Not a doubt of it;" said Dick, "but if I mistake not, it is one of those mysteries that will keep; and I shall be the first to propose a return to her cottage when this hot pursuit of ours is over, even if we should be at the trouble of throwing all her crockery into the lane again."

"Or of buying her a new lot," said Claude. "We will follow you, Jack, if you please."

The old woman had recovered from her swoon, but she did not stir off the bed upon which they had laid her, so that they had no interruption from her, but off they went at a good pace down the lane in the direction of the little village that she had mentioned in answer to Duval's inquiries, which he had persisted in under such extraordinary circumstances.

At the pace they went, they were very soon quite clear of the lane, and then, upon turning an angle, formed by a splendid group of chestnut trees, they came at once upon the little village which had been mentioned. From that point, there was a capital view over the surrounding country for a very considerable distance.

"There's our road," said Jack, pointing in the direction of a clump of trees that stood by the edge of a winding road that the morning sun was just faintly shining upon.

"All's right, then," said Claude. "We can push on. How far is it, Jack, do you think, to Guildford?"

"About eight miles," said Jack. "But hold my horse, Claude, and I will get upon yonder bank and take a long look round the country. I think if there are any persons in sight, one will see them for some miles off in the clear morning air, from such a height as yonder is. It will be as well to know."

Claude accordingly held Jack's horse, while he clambered up to a bank that rose some fifteen feet above the level of the road, and then, while he steadied himself by a good grasp upon the lowest arm of a stunted oak, he took a long look around him.

"Do you see anything?" said Claude.

"I do—I do. There are two distinct parties coming down separate roads. They look each of them strong enough, too, to give us some trouble; but they are a good mile off yet."

"Only a mile? Are they mounted, Jack?"

"Yes ; and well mounted, too."

"Then, we have not a great deal of time to spare. Come down, Jack, and let us be off at once, for I have no fancy to be taken nor killed upon this fine fresh morning."

Jack was in the saddle again in a moment or two, and without another word of hesitation, off he went in advance, putting his horse to a sort of half gallop, while Claude and Dick kept close after him.

At the rate at which they rode, they got over the ground well, at the same time that they did not so much distress themselves to prevent them from making a grand start for a mile or two upon any emergency that might arise to call for such an exertion. The road wound round the little village ; but after that, it was straight and clear, and for the most part bordered by tall banks upon either side, down which was a luxuriant growth of shrubs.

In this way, without exchanging a word, they went about two miles, and it was no small satisfaction to Claude to see that Jack did not for a moment hesitate, for that to him was a good proof that he knew the road perfectly well.

Then, Jack drew in a moment, and looking round, he said—

"The nearest way is over a hill. It makes a difference of more than half a mile to skirt it, but then we are out of sight in the hollow, and in sight on the rise."

"Skirt the hill, then, by all means," said Claude.

"Very good. I think, myself, it is the best ; but I thought I would mention it to you, that's all."

"All's right, Jack !"

Jack now abruptly turned to the left, and plunged down a narrow lane, that was so thickly studded with trees on each side, that they met overhead, and, although it was really then broad daylight, involved the place in a kind of dim and dubious twilight. The road was very damp and sloppy, too.

"This," said Claude to Dick, "is, no doubt, a pretty and romantic spot in the mid-day heats of summer."

"Delightful enough ! But what's the matter with Jack ? He has come to a dead stop."

They were soon by the side of Jack, and they found that the obstacle to his further progress consisted of a hurdle, drawn right across the middle of the lane. On the other side was a man in a smock-frock, with a pitch-fork in his hand, which he held in a threatening attitude.

"What's the meaning of this ?" cried Claude.

"Why jist that you may go over the hill," said the fellow. "This here lane, you see, goes through a part of my farm ; and I and my missus have made up our minds to stop it up. The parish say as how they will go to law with I, but I don't mind ; I'll go to law with the parish."

"Come—come, don't be a fool."

"Yes I will : I have put up thesen hurdles here, and out yonder I have put up thosen hurdles there, and here I stands ; I means to do what I likes ; and here's my muck-fork, and danged if I don't put it into anybody as comes here."

"Come—come, my friend, here's a guinea ; get out of the way at once like a good fellow."

"I bean't a good fellow, and I don't want a guinea."

"Oh, then, you will be a fool ?"

"Yes, I will."

"Then, my friend, I have to tell you that we intend to pass this way, whether you like it or not."

Upon this, the countryman put himself into a ludicrous posture of defence with the pitch-fork, so that Claude and his friends could hardly forbear laughing at him, although there was really no time to lose, as they wished to make what progress they could in as short a time as possible.

"Once more I ask you," said Claude, "in a civil manner, to move aside. Letting us pass will not affect your quarrel with the parish ; for we are perfect strangers in this neighbourhood, and may very likely never be in it again."

"No—no, I know better; you have been put on this here job by Muster Nicholls the overseer; but here I be, and here's my muck-fork, and I'm danged I'll give thee a poke with it as thee won't like if thee comes here."

"Very good, then, as we are determined to pass, I will shoot you; I am very reluctant to do it, having already shot a man this morning who offended me; but if you will have it, it is your own fault."

With this, Claude took a pistol from his pocket, and without waiting for the astonished farmer to say a word upon the subject, he fired at him, taking care only just to miss his head.

The effect of this was so astounding, that for a moment or two the fellow stood with his pitch-fork in an attitude as though he had been transformed to stone, and then, with a roar like that of some bull-calf, down he fell flat upon his back.

"We can jump it," cried Claude, and giving his horse his head, away he went over the fence.

Jack and Dick followed quickly; and leaving the farmer speechless upon his back with his pitch-fork above him, they went at the next hurdle-fence which he had put up, and cleared that likewise.

They were now half way round the hill over which the conservator of the rights of his farm had been so anxious that they should pass, and they enjoyed a hearty laugh at the consternation of the farmer. Claude, when they got right round the hill, got half way up a tree and found that they had distanced the parties that were in search of them; but he fancied that there was a suspicious collection of people a little way in advance of where they were.

"Jack," he said, "is there no way to Guildford but by the high-road? Can we not get there in any other way than by going right on, for there are people that I think we may as well avoid, in advance of us?"

"Then we must try the meadows, Claude. I know we can get across them, although the horses may give us some little difficulty. We can but try it, though."

"We will, Jack. We can surely make our way through a hedge, if it should be absolutely necessary so to do. Come on; I am for the meadows, if you can act as a guide to us across them."

"I can do that."

"Then, do it by all means; for the more I look at those who come in advance of us, the more I dislike them. There is certainly some consultation going on, and as we are very likely to be the subjects of discourse, I should like to get as far off from the council as I possibly can."

"And I," said Dick.

Jack, without more ado, now began to unfasten the first gate they came to, that upon the side of the road upon which lay their route, and by the aid of one of his picklocks, he soon succeeded in opening the padlock with which it was secured, and swung the gate open.

"I don't think," he said, "it is above a mile-and-a-half now across the fields to Guildford, if it be so much. Come on, Claude. This will, after all, perhaps, be the very best way of reaching that town, if we can do it sharply."

"Every place has its disadvantages," said Dick, "as well as its advantages; and we cannot expect this one to be without them. We certainly avoid our foes who are in advance; but, I think, we give those who are in our rear a little chance of observing us."

"Doubtless," said Claude; "but, I think, we may, having such a start of them, outstrip them tolerably easy; so that, after all, their progress through the meadows, has, I think, its good features to a greater extent than its bad ones."

"That's likely enough. Speed will be everything."

They now got on in a very peculiar manner, indeed. When they came to a meadow that was of sufficient extent, without a fence, to enable them to do so, they went at a gallop across it, and where the fence was not a particularly bad one, they leaped it, and went right on without pausing. Upon occasions, however, where the fence was high and straggling, and beyond the power of a horse,



with his rider, to go over it, they rapidly dismounted, and soon broke away sufficient of it to enable them to get the horses through a gap.

By this means, and by not pausing for a moment to consider how they were getting on, they made good progress, and upon arriving at the top of a little hill, Jack pointed in advance, and cried —

“There’s Guildford.”

“Why, we have not above two or three meadows to cross,” said Dick. “It will be awkward now if we come plump upon somebody’s garden at the end of these fields.”

“If we do,” said Claude, “the somebody will have to put up with the inconvenience of our going through it, for now it would be madness for us to turn back.”

“If we did,” said Jack, “it would be into the arms of our foes, for behold! they, too, have taken to the fields, and are making what speed they can towards this point.”

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## CHAPTER CCXXVI.

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS FIND SAFETY AMONG THE ACTORS AT GUILDFORD.

As Jack spoke, he pointed to the portion of the fields where the officers were actually coming on as quickly as possible, and in the course of a very few minutes must have reached them.

“Ah, indeed,” said Claude, “there is no time to lose.”

“Not a moment,” said Dick.

The next fence they came to was one which, if they had not been in so great a hurry, they would have found it the safest thing to dismount at, and make a gap through; but now Claude resolved to put his horse upon its metal, and try the leap. He did it successfully.

It is well known that nothing induces a horse to do anything half so well as seeing another do it, and the consequence was, that both Jack and Dick likewise succeeded in clearing the fence in good style, although it is probable enough that under less urgent circumstances they might not have succeeded in doing so.

“All’s right?” asked Claude.

“Yes—yes.”

“Then we are tolerably safe, I think; for if they can get over that they are much better mounted than I think them.”

“It is not likely,” said Dick. “While they are making a gap to get through, we shall be off and away.”

There was but one field now between them and the outskirts of the town of Guildford. Claude had rather dreaded that their course might take them to some enclosure which they might not be able to pass through, and to skirt it might indeed be a serious waste of time; but luckily for them, such was not the fact. They merely found a straggling wooded fence thrown across the end of a half-finished street which led directly into the town.

“Is this our place of destination, then, Jack?” said Claude.

“It is; this is Guildford.”

“Good. It strikes me that we have about ten minutes to spare, and it is to be hoped that will suffice to reach the theatre, which I presume there will be no great difficulty in doing.”

“There ought to be none. Let us ask this boy. Hilloa! my lad—where is the theatre?”

“Lor!” said the boy, gazing at Jack with all his eyes. “Be ye player folks, eh?”

“Yes, my boy. All’s right.”

“Why then, it is down along side o’ the White Horse, and then you turn round by Green’s piggery, and you comes bump agin it.”

"Why, what a dear lad you are. If you will run on before, and find out for us the White Horse and Green's piggery, I dare say we shall muster a few half-pence among us."

"Oh, won't I!"

At this moment a young man stepped up, and said—



CLAUDE FINDS THE INSENSIBLE BOY NEAR THE HAUNTED MANSION.

"Pardon me, gentlemen; but I think I heard you ask for the theatre just now. Is it so?"

"It is," said Claude, interposing, "and we want a Mr. Clare that belongs to it."

"Mr. Clare, gentlemen? Why, I am that person. My name is Clare.

What can you possibly want with me? Pardon me for being so abrupt; but I really did think I was quite unknown in this part of the country."

"So you are, probably; but if you will cast your eyes on that note, you will see that we have been sent to you."

With this, Claude handed the young man the note which the officer had brought to him in the lane.

"Good Heavens!" he said, "it is from my poor sister. I heard that she was being forced into a most unwelcome match by our mother, who, I grieve to say, is not all that a mother should be. By this note I see, gentlemen, she recommends you to my care. In what possible way can I aid you?"

"By protecting us for a few hours only. We have had the good fortune to perform a signal service for your sister, the particulars of which I will inform you of at greater leisure. Let it now suffice, that on account of that service we are hotly pursued, and that, if taken, our lives are not worth much. Can you by any means hide us, or disguise us, until the men who are on their route to Guildford have left it, and given up the idea that we are here?"

The young man paused for a few moments, during which he was in deep thought, and then he said—

"Yes—yes. I can and will. I am the poor manager of a very poor company of players; and that circumstances, not my poverty, but the fact of my being the manager, will enable me to do something for you. Follow me at once. We will first of all get your horses put up, and then we will to the theatre."

"Let me assure you that every inquiry will be made for us," added Claude. "This is no common danger. If our horses go to any inn, we are lost, for our enemies know that we are mounted, and will leave no stable unsearched."

"That is awkward."

"It is; but if you have any place about the theatre in which you can possibly bestow our steeds, let it be ever so rough, it will be better than going to an inn with them, for that would be at all events to insure their loss, if not our own destruction as well."

"Yes—oh, yes. Come on. There are actual stables at, or I ought rather to say underneath, the theatre, for it has at one time been used as a circus for horsemanship. We will manage all that, no doubt. Come on. I will take you by a back way, so that you may avoid observation as much as possible."

"Do so, sir," said Claude, "and as quickly as possible, for according to our calculations, our foes must now be very close indeed to the outskirts of Guildford."

The manager of the little travelling company that had taken up a resting-place for a week or two at Guildford, at once led their friends down a narrow court, in which they led their horses, and then crossing a piece of waste ground, they made their way to the back of the theatre. There there was a door that by a gentle slope conducted to some old stables beneath the stage. The door was fast, but Jack soon got over that difficulty by picking the lock, and in the course of a few minutes the three horsemen were safely bestowed beneath the Guildford theatre.

To be sure, it was but a very gloomy place, indeed, into which they were led, but it was, in comparison with the inns in the town, a safe one, and the creatures were sufficiently docile to allow their masters, with whom they were in such constant companionship, to take them where they pleased.

"We are much beholden to you," said Claude.

"Oh, no—no. But tell me. Do you really now anticipate any very immediate danger? I mean, do you think there will be an active search made for you in the town?"

"I am afraid there will."

"Humph! Well, at ten o'clock we have a rehearsal of Hamlet. I will order that it shall be a dress one, and if you will allow me to rig you out in costume from our wardrobe, I will defy your most intimate friends to know you. You of course know nothing of the parts, so you must be content to appear in a very

inferior condition. We can easily make you into supplementary lords in waiting about the Danish court ; or what say you to representing yourselves to be three stage-struck gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who are willing to pay handsomely for being permitted to appear ? In that case, I will put up a play for you, and you can appear at the rehearsal in full dress of distinguished characters."

"That will do well," said Claude, "and it shall be no delusion, for we are willing to pay, and will pay well."

The young manager changed colour.

"Ah!" he said, "now you suspect that I was angling for money. You are wrong, on my soul you are, gentlemen. I will not take one farthing."

"Believe me," said Claude, "I had no such suspicion ; but you will permit us to put your company in good humour with us, at all events, by our paying them. Do not fancy that we have the remotest idea of accusing you of any unmercenary motives, but you will see that it is the best plan. We can easily do it, so let me beg of you to allow us the gratification of so acting."

"You shall do so, gentlemen, if it so please you ; but do not overdo it. A small sum will amply suffice. And now come with me to the wardrobe, and I will do my best to equip you."

They all three followed their new friend, the manager ; and since it was not to be thought likely that stage-struck gentlemen would perform any part but one of importance, Claude was equipped as Hamlet the Dane ; Dick was accommodated with a royal suit in which to play the king ; and Jack, of his own free will, insisted upon dressing for the friar, who has a few words to say upon the occasion of the funeral of Ophelia.

They had all, by the kind assistance of the manager, got on their dresses by the time the players reached the theatre for the rehearsal ; and the manager then, leaving them in a private room, said to them just before he did so—

"You will be able from where you are to hear what I say to the company concerning you. They will be upon the stage, and you must give me credit for saying what I consider it to be politic to say, not what I think."

"Say anything you please of us, my good sir," said Claude, "so that you manage to make things agreeable to yourself and to your company. I trust that we shall not be compelled by circumstances to intrude for long upon you."

"It is no intrusion ; and the moment they find that you are willing to pay them, you will be most welcome, for that is more than the good folks of Guildford seem inclined to do."

"Do they not, then, patronise the drama?"

"Patronise it, sir? they are brute-beasts—mere animals, sir. They don't know what the drama is. It was only the other night in the middle of Macbeth, that a wretch got up in the boxes, and said—'I'm sure it would be agreeable to the company to have a comic song,' and the proposition being hailed with great delight, I was forced to sing one in the character of the Scottish tyrant. What do you think of that, sir?"

"Why I certainly think that the drama must be at a low ebb, indeed, in Guildford."

"You are right, sir—you are right; but I will now go, and prepare the company for your reception."

With this, the manager went upon the stage, and in a loud voice he said, addressing the company—

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have caught three gudgeons. They are willing to pay ten pounds into the treasury, which shall be equally divided ; but they want to play in Hamlet. Has any lady or gentleman any objection?"

"Objection?" cried everybody in chorus. "Objection? Oh, gracious, no! Give us the money."

"I have not got it just at present, but I pledge you my word that it will be forthcoming soon, and that, as regards the equal division of it, there shall be no cavil. The three gudgeons are in the house, and they are dressed, one as Hamlet, the other as the king, and the third as the friar, so you will be so good as to go

through the rehearsal with them, gentlemen, with as much gravity as you possibly can."

"Oh, leave us alone for that," said one; "we'll do it. Only think of ten pounds dropping into the treasury, when all we have had for a fortnight has been eight-and-twenty shillings among us."

"Oh, it's quite delightful," said a young lady, who played Ophelia. "The people where I lodge are quite dunning me for three-and-eight-pence, I declare, and how could I pay it?"

"And only think of the predicament I have been in," said the principal tragedian. "I make it a rule to board and lodge wherever I go, and thus save getting into debt to a lot of people, and you only make one enemy when you go away without paying, you know."

"A good plan!" cried everybody.

"And," added the tragedian, "they threaten to cut off the supplies if I do not pay the two weeks that are owing."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said the manager, "not so loud; I am afraid our three friends may overhear us. Shall I call them on, and give them a book each for to read their parts from?"

## CHAPTER CCXXVII.

AN ADVENTUROUS OFFICER FALLS DOWN A TRAP AT THE THEATRE.

THIS little conversation among the players was very amusing, indeed, to Claude and his friends, for they overheard every word of it, situated as they were so close at hand.

"Well," said Turpin, "we shall do some good by coming among these people, at all events; for I think, from what we have discovered, that we shall be the very best patrons that the drama is likely to have in this town of Guildford."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude. "But here comes the manager; do not let him know that we have overheard the needy confessions of his company: it might sound ungracious."

The manager made his appearance with quite a smile upon his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have made every possible arrangement with the ladies and gentlemen of the company, and they will be most happy to see you all, and go through the rehearsal with you."

"That will do," said Claude; "we will attend you, sir."

"This way, gentlemen, if you please; you will not, perhaps, find our stage appointments exactly what you would wish and expect, but I assure you that from the front, and when everything is well lit up, the effect is exceedingly good."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude.

The manager coughed loudly as a hint to the company that he was about to bring before them the three liberal amateurs, and they at once ceased the buzz of conversation that had been going on previously, and saluted the new comers with great taste and tact.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Claude, "I am very much afraid that you will find us so far behind yourselves in ability, that you will feel an inclination to laugh at us."

"No,—oh, no!" cried everybody.

"I have only to request," added Claude, "that if you do so, it will be before our faces, as then we shall consider it a useful lesson, otherwise, it might a little disconcert us."

"Laugh!" cried the low comedian, who was going to play the second gravedigger; "allow me, sir, in the name of the company, to state that we never laugh."

"Never, never!" cried everybody.



"That is very satisfactory," replied Claude; "and now I hope you will not feel in any way offended at what I am about to say, and I hope your worthy manager will be so good as to take it in good part."

"Oh, yes, yes!" said everybody; "pray proceed, sir."

"We are, as you see, three friends, and we usually travel together, and as our means permit us to do so, we take good care of ourselves in the eating and drinking way. Now, it so happens that this is the hour at which we usually lunch."

A look of expectation passed from face to face.

"Therefore," added Claude, "as we are here, and as we make it a rule always to lunch in as pleasant society as we possibly can, we hope that you will permit us here, not to invite you all to a stage banquet, but to a real one, compounded of what we usually lunch upon."

A murmur of satisfaction went through the company, and Ophelia told the queen that really he, meaning Claude, was a very nice man indeed, to which the queen, in the most feeling manner in the world, assented.

"Sir," said the principal tragedian, "it is an honour to have you amongst us. Quite an honour, sir."

"You are too good," said Claude. "Will you then permit me to order half-a-dozen bottles of champagne, and a guinea's worth of pastry, from the best sources in the town?"

"Oh, yes, yes," cried everybody, and the ladies of the company almost shed tears at the extreme niceness of Claude.

"Oh, it's too much," said the manager; "it's too much. A couple of gallons of half-and-half, now —"

"Wretch!" cried Ophelia. "Oh, you low wretch. You nearly take my breath away."

"Well, well; I have nothing to do with it. Of course, if these gentlemen please to be so very generous, I am not the person to stand in the way of their very great kindness."

"Nor I," said the principal tragedian, advancing: "and I can only say, that knowing Guildford very well, I will take upon myself to order the little articles suggested, from the very best of places in the town. It will give me positive pleasure."

"It is very kind of you," said Claude, as he counted out seven guineas from his pocket and handed them to the tragedian, whose eyes brightened at the sight of the gold. "It is very kind of you indeed, to condescend so far; but I believe that will cover the order?"

"It will—it will! Way for seven guineas! way there—ha—ha! Champagne and pastry for the gods!"

The tragedian made a most magnificent exit with the money. Ophelia turned a little pale at the frightful idea that he might not come back again; but she did not like to mention any suspicions of so highly derogatory a character to the company. She only whispered faintly to the queen, who remarked in the same tone, that if he did play such a trick, she would—with her own hands—skin him the very next time she had the fortune to meet him.

For the honour of the profession, however, nothing was further from the intentions of the tragedian, than to appropriate in any way the guineas to himself; and in the course of a quarter of an hour, he returned with a man behind him with the half-dozen of champagne. How delightful it looked in its well-wired bottles, and no less than two men and a boy with the pastry!

Ophelia shed tears again when she saw this.

A stage table was placed in the middle of the stage, and every description of chair and stool that the place afforded, was brought into a state of requisition. The chairs from the private boxes, covered with dreadfully-faded cotten velvet, were procured for our three friends, and Claude being placed at the head of the table, bowed to the company, and said—

"I hope that the toast I am about to propose, will be acceptable to all present. Jack, tap the wine."

"Yes," said Jack, and pop went one of the corks.

"Success to the drama!" cried Claude.

Bang went another cork, and then there was such a jingling of glasses, and hissing of champagne, as never was seen; and how Ophelia and the queen did eat the pastry, to be sure!

The toast was drunk with all the honours, and then the principal tragedian rose to propose a toast and sentiment.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "when I see myself surrounded by youth, beauty, and talent, like—like I don't know what; and when I observe upon the admirable countenances of those around this festive board a—a—a kind of you know—I feel that I ought to propose —"

"If you please, sir," said a boy, making his appearance suddenly, and interrupting the speaker as he addressed the manager, "there's two gentlemen as say they is officers of justice, and they say as they has heerd as some gentlemen is here as they wants."

"The devil!" said Claude.

"Can it be possible," said the tragedian, "that the officers of justice are base enough to interfere with persons who can be so liberal?"

"Oh, impossible!" said all the company.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Claude, "the fact is, that this is a wager. We have bet a thousand pounds to a couple of noblemen in London that we would travel a thousand miles with a couple of police officers after us, upon a sham charge of our being highwaymen, which the officers were to be made to believe, so that they should not be inkewarm in their efforts to take us, without being apprehended. Will you help us to win the wager?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" cried everybody.

"Stop a bit!" cried the low comedian. "Stop a bit! I will open the long trap in the stage from below, and if you three stand on the other side of it, the moment the officers come to seize you, down they will go at once beneath the stage."

"Oh, yes, the wretches!" said Ophelia; "I don't wish to hurt them, but couldn't something jagged, and hard, and sharp, be put underneath, for them to fall upon? There's nobody in the world more human than I am, and I merely throw out the little suggestion!"

At this moment, a furious knocking came at the door that led to the stage of the theatre.

"Stop!" cried the manager, "it's just possible enough that disguised as these three gentlemen are, the officers may not know them, and in that case, it will be much better to let them go away again quite quietly as they came."

"We should prefer that," said Turpin.

"Yes," added Claude; "but there can be no objection to the little affair of the trap, notwithstanding; and we can take up such a position by the side of it as will protect us, if you will show us where it is on the stage."

"All's right!" said the comedian; "I will run down and unbolt it at once, and if there is any fuss afterwards, we can easily say that they had no business here, and that the trap was unbolted on purpose for Ophelia's grave."

"Exactly," said Ophelia. "Now you be off at once."

The knocking continued more violently than before, and the manager pointed out the place upon which Claude and his two friends might stand, so as to be quite clear of the trap, and yet so that no one could dart towards them without stepping upon it.

The six bottles of champagne were all drunk out, and great havoc had been made with the pastry by this time, so that the tables were cleared away, and the manager, with a studied look of surprise upon his face, went and opened the door at which all the knocking had taken place.

In another moment, two officers, with pistols in their hands, rushed on to the stage.

"How came you to keep us so long at the door?" cried one, with a violent tone. "We shall complain to the magistrates of it."

"But, my good sir," said the manager, "who are you, now you are here? We were in the middle of a scene, and really could not leave off for the purpose of receiving visitors. Pray explain your business, and then be off, for we are engaged at rehearsal, and your presence here is very inconvenient indeed."

"And shameful!" said Ophelia. "You are the ugliest pair of wretches ever I saw in all my life!"

"Dear me, miss," said the other officer, who until then had not spoke; "if we are ugly, thank God our noses don't turn up like some folks, at any rate. That's a comfort!"

"Oh, you odious monster! Do you allude to my nose?"

"If you please, miss."

"Fiend! I appeal to all the world about my nose: I hold up my nose to general inspection. Does it turn up? I ask everybody of an unprejudiced mind if it turns up in the least?"

"That it certainly does not," said Claude.

"It is a vile calumny," said Dick Turpin.

"It is much more of a beautiful Roman nose," said Jack, "than a turn-up one, to my ideas."

"The villains," sobbed Ophelia, "to cast any reflection upon my nose, when all my family have been celebrated for the beauty of their noses; but he must have known that, and so thought he would hurt my feelings through my nose; but it won't at all succeed—brutal as the attack is upon an unoffending female's nose, it won't succeed. I rise superior to it, and I treat it with the scorn it deserves."

"Bravo!" cried the tragedian.

"Come—come," said the principal officer of the two, "this won't do for us. We are after three highwaymen, and some people in the town say that you have strangers here. It won't do, you know, to play any tricks with us, and you will find it rather a serious thing to tamper with the law when it is in pursuit of offenders."

"We tamper with the law?" said the manager. "I should think not. But just look about you, gentlemen, and if you think that any of us poor players are highwaymen, say so."

"Surely," said Claude, "we had better go on with the rehearsal. These gentlemen, while they are prosecuting their own business, cannot have any wish to interrupt ours."

"Who are you?" said the chief officer.

"Jonathan Grogs, sir, at your service."

"Indeed! I think I have seen you somewhere, my friend."

"Very possible."

"Perhaps you have seen me, too?" said Dick Turpin.

"And me?" said Jack.

"And all of us?" said Ophelia. "Perhaps you have seen all of us, you wretches!"

The two officers whispered together, and then one of them said—

"Our information is quite clear and complete regarding the fact of three persons having come here, and we shall be under the disagreeable necessity of taking the whole company before the justices, when there will be such an accurate examination as will either satisfy them or not that you are all what you pretend you are. Resistance is useless, as you will only bring yourselves into trouble by attempting it, and perhaps get personal injury, for we are men who will do our duty let the consequences be what they may."

"You don't say so?" said Claude.

"Yes we do; and insolence will do good."

"Well, I for one won't go," added Claude; "and it will be a bad day's work, to the first person who tries to take me."

"Will it, indeed?" said the officer. Then turning to his companion, he said,—  
"Watkins, let's have that one first."

"All's right."

They both made a rush at Claude, and stepping upon the treacherous trap, down they went below the stage, calling out murder as they proceeded to the dismal depths.

"Oh, dear," said the manager, "that was the trap for Ophelia's grave! I really hope you are not hurt, gentlemen?"

"Help!—help!"

"Coming—coming. You ought to have asked if all the traps were right, you ought, indeed."

"We will be off," said Claude, in a whisper to the manager. "You will do us the greatest possible favour by taking us to our horses now at once. We have no time to lose."

"This way."

Claude and his two friends darted through a little side-door after the manager, who led them by rather an intricate route to the back of the theatre again. The horses were got out in a few minutes, and Jack said—

"Good gracious, are we to go off in this costume?"

"I did not think for a moment of that," said the manager. "Come on, you must change. This way. And yet, I must stay and mind the horses. It's the first door to the left."

"I know the room," said Claude.

They all three made their way to the dressing-room where their own clothes were, and with a marvelous rapidity, such as without some extraordinary impulse to urge them to it, would have been quite impossible, they got rid of their theatrical trappings, and resumed their own clothing.

The manager, accustomed as he was to stage dressing, was quite surprised to see them so soon.

"You are quick, indeed," he said; "mount and be off now, and good luck go with you."

"Take that," said Claude, as he handed him a purse; "take that, and divide it among your company according to your discretion; and believe me, I and my two friends will for ever feel grateful for the favour you have done us to-day."

"Don't mention that; you will put a meal into a number of hungry stomachs by your liberality."

Claude raised his hat, and the three friends set off at a gallop through the high street of Guildford, and were soon clear of the town, and in the pretty country beyond it.

## CHAPTER CCXXVIII.

### THE ROBBERY OF THE PRIVATE STAGE COACH, AND ITS RESULT.

CLAUDE pulled up when they had got about two miles from Guildford, and burst into a loud laugh, as he said,—

"Well, what think you of our Guildford adventure, Jack and Dick? Was it not an amusing one?"

"It was," said Dick; "I only wonder if the officers' broke their necks down that trap! I never saw people disappear so cleanly in all my life."

"I hope our friends, the players, will not get into any trouble upon our account," said Jack.

"Oh, no,—that is not at all likely," said Dick; "they will not be forced to say anything further than what Claude told them. But what do you think of doing, Claude, now?"

"Why, of making our way to London, and doing the best we can upon the road."

"Agreed.—I'm quite willing. It strikes me that we get on capitally together,

and of the two, I certainly prefer this sort of thing to solitude, which was never much in my line."

"Nor in mine either," said Claude; "and I can say for myself, and I am sure I can answer for Jack, that the longer you think proper to stay with us, the better pleased we shall be."



THE VISION OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE.

"Yes," said Jack, "that's about the fact."

"It's a fact, then," said Dick, "that it gives me no small pleasure to hear of, for I was really at times afraid that you might get tired of me and wish me from you; but now I do think I shall stick to you a little longer. Where are we now, Jack?"

"Well, we have got into a cross-road, I rather think."



"There's an inn a little in advance, I suppose," said Claude, "for I can see a swinging sign on a tall post in the road. Let us push on and see what it is."

They rode on, and soon came to as prettily situated an inn as could be conceived. One of the most magnificent chestnut trees they had ever seen shaded the door, and there were four horses standing there, evidently waiting for their riders, who were within.

"It's perhaps worth while to find out who these horsemen are," said Claude to Dick, in a whisper. "Just hold my horse while I step into the inn ; perhaps I may see them."

Claude was upon the point of dismounting; when the riders came out of the inn. They were four young men attired in faded finery, and they assumed a swaggering gait that quite astonished Claude. One of them in particular, as he mounted, hummed a song, the burthen of which was,—

" A moonlight night, a moonlight night,  
And my pistols bright and steady, O !  
'Stand ! stand !' I cry, and without sob or sigh,  
I pocket all their rowdy, O !"

With a whoop and a shout, the four horsemen then trotted off. Dick and Jack looked at Claude, and Claude looked at them with surprise, and then Jack said,—  
"Why, Claude, if we don't look out, we shall be robbed upon the highway by these fellows."

"Upon my word," said Claude, "it looks very like it. What, on earth, can be the meaning of it?"

"And who are they here?" said Dick.

"Perhaps the landlord knows them. I will go into the inn as I intended, and inquire. Oh, here he is, I suppose."

At this moment, a little corpulent man, with evident looks of alarm, made his appearance at the inn door, and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked after the four horsemen, and shook his head.

"Hilloa, landlord!" said Claude, "who are those worthies that have just left your door?"

"Worthies do you call them, sir?"

"Why, perhaps the term is misapplied; but they don't seem the most respectable members of society."

"Respectable? No, sir. Oh, dear, no. I only hope I shall never see them at the White Horse again, that's all."

"Why, who are they, then?"

"I tell you what it is, gentlemen—if you are going down the road, don't do it. Don't do it. You will be robbed—robbed, gentlemen, and, for all I know, murdered!"

"Robbed and murdered?"

"Yes, gentlemen: indeed you will."

"Oh, you don't mean that, landlord?"

"Don't I though! You take a fool's advice, now, for once, and stop at the White Horse. Don't you go any farther, now, or else, I assure you, gentlemen, it will be all the worse for you."

"But why, landlord?"

The landlord looked right and left to see that no one was listening to him, and then coming close up to Claude, he said, while Jack and Dick eagerly listened—

"Did you see that one, sir, that was singing a bit of a song?"

"Yes—yes."

"And you heard him, sir, as well? You took a good look at him, I hope, gentlemen, so that you might know him again?"

"We did—we did."

"Then, gentlemen, I can tell you that that person is neither more nor less than—than——"

"Who?—who?"

"The celebrated Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

"You don't say so?" said Claude, making a very great effort to keep himself from bursting out laughing in the corpulent little landlord's face. "You really don't say so, my honest friend?"

"Yes, I do."

"Is it possible?" said both Dick and Jack, affecting to lift up their hands in positive horror at the idea of being in such close proximity to such a dreadful and atrocious character as Claude Duval the celebrated highwayman was to all intents and purposes.

"Yes," added the landlord, who was quite gratified at the impression he thought he had made. "Yes, that was him; and I can tell you it will take me some time to get over the fright. I was told he was upon this road, but I didn't believe it—leastways, I didn't put myself out of the way about it, and only laughed; but now I'm all of a shake. Yes, gentlemen, I am all of a shake."

"And no wonder," said Claude. "But how did you come to make the discovery, landlord?"

"Why, you see, gentlemen, first of all, when they came to the White Horse, I thought they were no good, so I kept a sort of watch upon them—you understand, gentlemen? They ordered a bottle of wine; and just as I took it in, I heard one of 'em say to that young fellow who was singing the song, 'Well, Duval, I hope we shall have good luck.'"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. That's what I heard; and I heard something else, too, and that was, that they were going to stop Lord Whiffle."

"And who is he?"

"Why, gentlemen, he is a nobleman of very great taste, indeed, and a very nice man. He has set up a stage-coach of his own, and it's got up just like any other stage-coach; and his lordship drives it, and people actually think it is a stage-coach at times, and call after it, and that's the joke, you see, gentlemen."

"A very brilliant one certainly," said Claude. "But don't he ever take passengers?"

"Oh, yes, when he is in a sunny humour he will take up anybody; and then when they stop he will say 'Pray remember the coachman' and that's a capital joke."

"What an idiot he must be!"

"An idiot, sir?"

"Yes. Why don't his friends put him into some asylum for the weak-minded? But that is their affair, not ours. Do you really think that Claude Duval intends to attack his lordship's coach?"

"I am sure of it, sir; and I strongly advise you, gentlemen, to stop here till the affair is over, for you don't know what mischief may come of it. I have heard that that Duval is a most desperate fellow."

"So have I. But our business will not permit us to stop. So we must take our chances on the road. What has his lordship's coach upon it, landlord?"

"Nothing at all, gentlemen. You would know it in a moment if you saw it, for there is no reading on it at all. It's quite a plain coach; and sometimes, when somebody hails it, and his lordship stops, he says, 'What do you want?' and the person says, 'Where are you going to, coachman?' and he says, 'Wherever you see it written on the coach panels;' and then the person looks and looks, and can't see anything, and that's another of his lordship's jokes. You understand?"

"Oh, it's easily understandable, and I really cannot say which of his lordship's jokes is the most admirable. Good-day, landlord: we are much obliged to you for your information."

They trotted off, and the landlord looked after them, shaking his head, and prophesying that they would come to their deaths if they met with Claude Duval.

When they had got some distance from the inn, Claude pulled up, and turning to Dick and Jack, he said—

“Can either of you give a likely explanation of this affair? What, on earth, can it all mean?”

“The only thing I can think of,” cried Dick, “is that some fellows have taken to the road and have adopted your name, Claude, as a means of making the business more profitable than probably it otherwise would be.”

“Yes,” said Jack, “that must be it.”

“Well,” said Claude, “it’s about the only explanation that presents itself of the affair; but I am not going to put up with it quietly, I can assure them. What I do, I will stand the consequences and the repute of; but I am not going to let another bring disgrace upon my name and my courage, by insane proceedings on the road.”

“Let us after them,” said Dick, “and convince them that it is rather dangerous to travel with such an alias. They cannot have got very far by this time, and we are better mounted than they, for I took a good look at their horses, and I will engage that ours could beat them all to pieces at actual work.”

“Come on, then.”

Duval was rather in a state of aggravation at the idea that the person whom he had seen should adopt his name. It was really a species of arrogance that he was hardly prepared for; and probably if the jocose young man who had sung the verse of the highwayman’s song at the inn-door had come suddenly in his way, Claude would have made him repent most bitterly the assumption of the character that did not belong to him.

Fortunately for that individual, however, he did not happen to come in the way of Claude, and after about a mile’s gallop down the road, Jack raised himself in his stirrups and said—

“A coach! A coach!”

“Which way, Jack?”

“Coming on to meet us. There, don’t you see it?”

“Ah, yes, I do—and, by George, there are the very four fellows we saw at the inn. Look at them Dick. They are them.”

The three friends now stopped and drew aside, so that they were very much in the shadow of some tall trees that grew close to the road-side, and from that spot they were the witnesses to about as curious and amusing a scene as they had ever witnessed.

The coach they had no sort of difficulty in deciding to be that of the facetious nobleman who, in so very small a way, thought himself so very jocular, for it was quite plain, as the landlord of the White Horse had described it to be, and no one was upon it but the apparent coachman, and a lad behind in a red coat, who played the part of a guard. Coming after this coach, which was drawn by four horses, came the personages who had been seen at the inn door, one of whom gave himself out to be Claude Duval. A most amusing race took place, until a pistol shot was fired by one the horsemen, and then his lordship immediately pulled up.

The four horsemen galloped up in a moment. One of them went to the heads of the two leading horses, and held them until the others surrounded the coach. The distance was too great to hear what was said; but the conduct of his lordship was the best joke of all.

He dropped the reins, and scrambled on to the roof of the coach, where he got upon his knees, and in the most abject manner imaginable, held up his joined hands in the attitude of prayer. The lad in the red coat rolled out of the little dickey at the back of the coach, and lay flat upon his back in the road.

“I should like wonderfully,” said Claude, “to hear what they all say. Can we not get a little closer?”

“Yes, easily,” said Jack. “Let us get through this gate. The meadow continues all the way to the spot of the encounter, parallel with the road, and if we lead our horses, I don’t think it is possible that we can be seen.”

"Come on, then, at once."

The gate to which Jack had alluded was close at hand, and they soon opened it, and passed through into the meadow. Dismounting, then, they led their horses along the silent turf, and in a few moments were exactly opposite to the scene of the encounter, and only hidden from observation by a clay bank, with a thick set hedge at the top of it.

The noble lord, who was so very facetious, was pleading for his life. The four highwaymen had crape masks on, that concealed the upper portion of their faces completely, and they had pistols in their hands, with which they made a great deal of unnecessary flourishing, to the immense terror of his Lordship of Whiffle.

"Oh, spare my life, gentlemen," he said, "spare my life. I will give you all my money if you will be so good as to spare my life. I don't mean any harm, I assure you, Mr. Highwayman."

"Are you Lord Whiffle?" cried one.

"Yes, sir, if you please. Oh, have mercy upon me."

"Did you not say in St. James's Street only yesterday, that you defied all the highwaymen in England to rob you?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir, you are quite mistaken; I only said I hoped they would be so good as not to stop me, that was all, sir; but I am quite willing to be robbed, indeed, I am, sir."

"Do you know that I am Claude Duval?"

"Oh—ch—oh! I was told you were upon the road, sir, but I did not know you, sir. I have some money, sir; and I only ask for my life!"

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## CHAPTER CCXXIX.

### OLAUDE ROBS THE THIEVES—AND MAKES A LITTLE DISCOVERY.

THE abject manner in which Lord Whiffle begged and prayed for his life excited both the amusement and the indignation of Claude and his companions.

"Is it not monstrous," said Claude, "to hear a fellow set such store by his paltry existence, that he will whine and weep in such a way as that about it?"

"It is contemptible enough," said Jack; "but then, you must bear in mind, that he is a lord, and, of course, a legislator for his country, and loves to spend the taxes that the people are fools enough to pay; therefore, his life is of more importance than that of any ordinary person."

"Precisely," said Dick. "But do listen to them. It is as good as a play. I am much amused."

"Oh, then," cried the fellow who played the part of Duval, "you have some money with you?"

"Yes, dear, sir, I have," whimpered his lordship; "and it is all at your service. I have no objection, likewise, to draw you a cheque if you will be pleased to accept of it, and if you will only spare my life—I assure you I never did much harm."

"Why, I suppose, to tell the truth, you are stupid?"

"Yes, gentlemen, if you please, I rather think I am."

"Oh, very well. In that case, then, we will only rob you; and you will, I hope, remember for the longest day you have to live, meeting with Claude Duval upon the high-road."

"Oh, yes; thank you, sir, I shall remember it, and anything else you may be so good as to require of me."

"Well, since you are so submissive, give up your purse; and write the cheque you speak of. Here is a pencil and paper; let it be for five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds? Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Very good. You don't like it, and between you and me, I don't think your

life is worth one half the money. If you will just hold your head a little on one side so that I may get the barrel of the pistol into your ear, I will blow your brains out in a moment as comfortably as possible."

"The Lord have mercy upon me! I will write the cheque at once, I will, indeed. Oh, dear, it's more even than my coach cost; it is, indeed; but anything to oblige you, sir. Excuse its being a little shaky, but it will be all right, sir."

"Are we going to put up with this?" said Dick.

"Not exactly," said Claude. "I propose that we let this little affair proceed, and when his lordship is fairly robbed and those fellows have left him, we will be after them quickly."

"Agreed."

Poor, miserable Lord Whiffle shook so that it was far from being an easy matter with him to write the cheque that was proposed to him; but he did get through it in some sort of fashion; and having surrendered his purse, his watch, and his rings to the sham Claude Duval, he with a groan said,

"I humbly suppose, sir, that now I may go?"

"Why, yes, I don't see anything particular to stop you now, my Lord Whiffle, and it is only to be hoped that you won't deny at your club in London that you have been robbed on the highway by Claude Duval, that is all."

"Oh, dear no. Anything you like, sir. I won't deny anything."

"Go back, then, on your road, for if you come in the direction we are going, we shall be under the disagreeable necessity of blowing your brains out, notwithstanding all promises to the contrary."

Lord Whiffle was as submissive as any human being could possibly be, and turning his horses' head towards Guilford again, he went off at a trot, shaking so as he did, that the horses, no doubt, wondered who was jerking at the reins in such an odd fashion. But no sooner had his lordship got to a distance that made him out of ear shot, than the four highwayman burst into an uproarious peal of laughter, and seemed so delighted with the success of the adventure, that they could hardly sit their horses.

"It's capital," said one, in a very effeminate tone of voice. "It's capital! How much money have you got out of him altogether, Tom. Let's count it over at once."

"Oh, it's a good lot. But let us get off to London now as quickly as we can possibly do so. We will all go to my lodgings, and make merry upon the occasion."

"That will do—come on."

They set off at a pleasant kind of trot, and Claude, as he looked at his two friends, said—

"Well, I think that they take things coolly, don't they?"

"They do, indeed, said Jack. "But you don't mean to let them go off in that way, Claude?"

"Not, exactly. Let us get into the road, and be off after them, directly. A stern chase, as they say at sea, is a long chase, and it won't do to let them get too far ahead."

"Certainly not, and here is a gap in the hedge, quite convenient to get the horses through. Come on. Hear we are in the high-road, and by this time they must be a mile off."

"Which it will take a good canter of three to make up," said Jack, "so it is no use playing at it."

"Off we go," said Claude, as he put his horse to speed, and in a moment the whole three of them were going at a pace along the road that promised rapidly to diminish the distance between them and the party they pursued.

Claude, by dint of raising his voice and speaking very slowly, managed to carry on a sort of conversation with his two friends, notwithstanding the difficulty of doing so at the pace they were going at.

"I have thought," he said, "of a way of managing the affair, which will afford us no small share of amusement, as well as terrifying the party we are in pursuit of."



"How will you do it?" said Dick.

"In the first place, let us rob them of all their plunder, and of all their own cash likewise, if they have any; and then we can easily find some spot where we can alter our appearance, and come upon them as officers of justice, and give them into custody for the robbery on Lord Whiffle. By that means we shall clear the road of them."

"It will, indeed."

"What say you, Jack—will that suit?"

"Excellently well; and there are our men in advance of us; don't you see them, Claude, down in the hollow, there?—and they don't seem to be at all alarmed."

"Not they, indeed. Why, I do believe they see us, and are waiting for us. Perhaps they think they will have some more booty. That would be a rich thing if we were to be stopped on the highway, after all."

"Rather so," said Dick. "Let us try it."

They galloped on now, and sure enough, about a quarter of a mile in advance, they found the four horsemen who robbed Lord Whiffle going on at an easy trot, and conversing together as if nothing were at all amiss. Twice or thrice some of them half turned, and looked rather steadily at Claude and his friends; but they did not stop.

"Jack," said Claude, "you stand a few feet behind us, and prevent them from escaping that way, while Dick and I ride past them, and then suddenly turn upon them."

"That will do," said Jack.

This little manoeuvre was executed in a few moments. Jack, with a pistol in his hand, halted, and Claude and Dick rode past the party about twenty paces, and then suddenly turning face to face with them, Claude cried—

"Stand! For your lives, stand!"

The four horsemen immediately drew up in some confusion, bustling against each other as they did so in the surprise of the moment, and one of them uttered quite a scream of alarm, which was truly ludicrous to hear.

"Now, sirs," said Claude, "I will trouble you for your money and other valuables, if you please. It is all the same to us whether you provoke us to blow your brains out first or not; but that is a matter for your own consideration quite."

"Murder!" cried one.

"As you please, gentlemen. As you please."

Two of the party turned their horses' heads apparently to seek safety in flight, but there was Jack with a huge horse-pistol in his hand, and they saw that their case was hopeless. Claude dashed up to the young man who had passed himself off as Claude Duval, and laying a hand upon his collar, said to him—

"Now, sir, oblige me by telling me who you are?"

"I—I? Who I am?"

"Yes. If you have any courage in you, you will try to do a little credit to the name you have assumed. Are you, or are you not Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"On dear, no! I am not."

"Yes you are, for you have only recently announced yourself to be such; and as I was always under an impression that that was my name, I felt just a little confounded at hearing that there were two of us."

"Oh, have mercy upon me! It was all a joke."

"Rather a practical one though, I should think. But we are disappointed. We did think that you would have had the courage to defend yourselves, and then there might have been a little sport; but this is a very lame affair indeed."

"But we don't want to be killed," said one of the party, in a voice that made Claude and Dick laugh.

"Come," added Claude; "your money and valuables at once. We are not accustomed to delays."

The whole four horsemen gave up, not only the money they had received from

Lord Whiffle, but a considerable sum of their own, as well as a gold watch that each of them had, so that upon the whole, Claude and his friends were very well pleased with their day's work.

"Now," said Claude, let me advise you, by all means, if you try the road again, not to name yourselves by any names but your own; or if you must adopt one, don't let it be mine, for the only thing I would say nothing about, were you to personify me, would be if you were to be hanged."

"And that you may be as soon as you like," said Dick.

The four horsemen looked about as silly as they possibly could, and the rueful manner in which they regarded each other, was most particularly comic, going far to disarm Claude of the rage that he naturally enough felt against them at their assumption of his name on the road.

"Good day," he said; "perhaps you will remember us in your prayers, and you may consider yourselves well off to escape as you have done. It's only, you know, the highwayman robbing the highwayman; and as we have the most right to Claude Duval's booty, we consider that what we have taken from you, we have quite honestly come by."

The discomfited robbers of Lord Whiffle made no reply to this. It was quite evident that whatever joke Claude Duval and his friends found in the transaction, they could see none whatever; and with the most ludicrously chop-fallen looks in the world, they saw all their plunder taken away.

"Now for Oxford!" said Claude, on purpose to give the four discomfited men an idea that they would not again see them, and away the friends went at a gallop, which they did not in the least abate until they got to a turn of the road which hid them from observation.

If his life had depended upon his preserving silence, Claude could not have prevented himself from stopping to laugh; and in a shout of merriment, he showed how much he had been amused at the discomfiture of the four robbers of Lord Whiffle.

"Did you ever," he said, "in all your life, come across such absolute cowards as they were?"

"Never," said Dick, "except Lord Whiffle, who I verily believe would have conquered them all if he had had the courage to flourish his whip at them only. Such fellows as that are enough to bring discredit upon our profession, and yet they must have been tolerably successful, for they had means, and were well dressed."

"They may well be successful," said Claude, "when they meet with greater cowards than they are themselves."

"That's about it," said Jack; "but do you intend still to persevere in persecuting them, Claude?"

"Do I? Yes, Jack, I do, indeed. It will be the finest fun in the world now to take them into custody. Let us dismount in this quiet spot, and make such alterations in our costume as we can, so as to look as like officers as possible. We have seen enough of that sort of gentry, I think, to be able to imitate them pretty well."

"We ought," said Jack.

The valise which Jack had at the back of his saddle, held quite an astonishing number of articles in a small compass; and as they were all skilfully got up for the express purpose of disguise, there was no great difficulty in accomplishing the object that Claude had in view.

When they all put on brown wigs of quite a different colour to their natural hair, and made a few alterations in their costume, among which was the placing a red handkerchief just within each of their coats in such a way as to lead immediately to the idea that they had red waistcoats, they looked as like officers as they possibly could.

"Have you that little gilt staff, Jack," said Claude, "that we borrowed of a fellow once who thought he would be clever enough to frighten us with it?"

"Yes, Claude, here it is."

Jack produced an officer's staff with its little gilt crown at the end of it, and Claude put it in his pocket, saying —

“If that don't frighten them a little, I don't know what will, for they seem just the sort to be terrified at it. And now let us go after them again just as quickly as we can. This will be better sport than before, though not so profitable perhaps.”



THE THREE FRIENDS DISCOVER THE COINER IN THE OLD GRANGE.

### CHAPTER CCXXX.

DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS VENTURE A LITTLE TOO FAR.

THE four horsemen, in their intense chagrin at being so effectually robbed of what they had so easily got from the fears of Lord Whiffle, did not seem to have spirit enough left in them to gallop, although they were well-mounted ; and by

the time Claude and his two friends had gone a couple of miles, they saw them a little in advance upon the wood.

"They will not recognise us," said Dick to Jack; "do you think that we are quite safe in that way?"

"I do; there is but one chance against us."

"What is that, Jack?" said Claude; "what chance is that that you consider to be against us?"

"Why, just think, if they had taken a good look at our horses, they would know them again; but I think they were in too much of a fright to know whether we were mounted on blue, black, or gray steeds."

"That is my opinion," said Claude. "You may depend upon it, that in the state of mind they were in, they were totally incapable of coming to any conclusion of that sort."

"There," said Dick, "they are looking at us now, and, behold! they have come to a stand-still; perhaps they think they will yet retrieve this day's work by a good booty, and they mean to stop us. Let us push on—this will be capital sport."

"Prepare your pistols," said Claude. "I will call upon them to surrender in the king's name, and we will take them on to Ealing, and have them put in the lock-up there for the robbery on Lord Whiffle. Forward! forward!"

He dashed on, and Dick and Jack followed him closely. The four horsemen had drawn up together in the centre of the road, and looked rather panic-stricken at this sudden charge. It was quite evident that there was no recognition of our three adventurers by the party. Claude rode close up to them, and producing the little gilt staff, he called,—

"Surrender, you ruffians, surrender! In the king's name, I call upon you to surrender: you are our prisoners."

The four horsemen looked at each other with dismay upon their countenances.

"Forward, my lads, and seize them!" added Claude; "they are desperate highwaymen, and one of them is the notorious Claude Duval. There will be a capital reward for seizing him. Shoot them at once if they resist; we must have them dead or alive."

"Stop! oh, stop!" cried one of the party; "we don't at all resist. It is all a mistake."

"Oh, dear, no!" said Claude, "it is no mistake. Lord Whiffle is raising the country on account of a robbery upon him by four highwaymen, one of whom is Claude Duval, and you are the man."

"The devil he is!" cried Dick.

Dick and Jack presented their pistols at the head of the party, and Claude flourished his staff after the most approved constable-like fashion.

The quietest and oldest of the party now, in a loud voice, said—

"My friends, this affair is getting too troublesome and serious, and it is time, now that we have encountered the officers of justice, that we should really explain who and what we are."

"Oh, we know well enough," said Claude.

"No, you don't," continued the speaker. "Is it agreeable to you all, my friends, that I tell the exact truth to the officers?"

"Yes—yes," they all said, and one of them was actually crying and whimpering, much to the disgust of Claude, who said—

"Why, you cowardly rascal, you are not fit to rob a cat on the highway."

"It's of no use disguising the matter," said one. "That is a young lady!"

"A young lady?"

"Yes. The fact is, we are all gentlemen, except Miss Kitty Juniper there, who is—a—a kind of lady, you see."

"Oh," said Claude, "I understand."

"None of your nonsense, Tom," said the lady, "or I'll lay my horsewhip about your back."

"Come—come, Kitty, be quiet. You know you can lose nothing by the affair."

"My virtue," said Kitty. "Think of that."

They all three burst out into a laugh as Kitty said those words, and she got so desperate, that with a little riding-whip she had with her, she began cutting about in all directions, until Dick stopped and disarmed her, and quickly tied her hands behind her back, saying, as he did so—

"Your name may be Kitty, for all I know to the contrary; but I daresay you are Claude Duval's Kitty, and you will be hanged for the robbery along with the rest."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude.

"But I tell you," said the oldest of the three gentlemen—"I tell you, Mr. Officer, that it is all a sham. We three gentlemen belong to the same club with Lord Whiffle; and only a few days ago he was boasting, as the discourse had turned upon highwaymen, that a dozen of them should not rob him; so we made a wager with three other men in the club that we would stop Whiffle on the road, and rob him, and frighten him out of his life almost."

"And who are you?" said Claude.

"I am the Honourable John Ratchley—that is, Lord Tom Titherleigh, and that is Mr. Lorimer, the M.P., and this is Kitty Juniper, a lady who—who—a-hem!"

"Oh, vengeance!" said Kitty. "This is the way a delicate young creature is to have her character taken away, just because, for a mere frolic, she puts on a pair of what-do-you-call-'ems, and comes out on horseback for a bit of fun."

"Never mind," said Claude. "Bring them along. Character won't matter when you come to the gallows."

"But, good gracious," cried Kitty, "don't you hear that they are gentlemen, you stupid man?"

"Yes, I hear," said Claude; "but I didn't believe one word of it. I believe that one of you is Claude Duval, and that the other two are two notorious rascals; and you, Kitty, I believe, are quite a mild, inoffensive young creature, who will be hanged, as sure as fate."

"Well," said Kitty, "I should only like to have the chance of scratching your ugly eyes out, that I should."

"But, officers," cried another of the gentlemen, "we beg to assure you, upon our words of honour, that——"

"Hold your tongue," said Claude. "We have had quite enough of your assurance. We are too old birds to be taken by such nonsense, as you being gentlemen. We know gentlemen when we see them, and we know highwaymen likewise; so it's of no use your saying anything now about it. We know what you are, and that you will all swing for the highway robbery upon my Lord Whiffle, who defended himself for a whole hour against you, as he says."

"Oh, oh!" cried they all at this. "Why, he begged for his life in the most abject manner."

"Now only listen to these rascals," cried Claude; "they have the coolness to admit the robbery."

"Of course we do; I told you that before."

"Bring them along, then—bring them along. Oh, the villains!—to try and persuade us they are gentlemen, and only did it for a joke! The law don't understand joking, and no doubt Lord Whiffle will be able to swear to them all."

"Now, get on," said Dick.

"Come, move," cried Jack.

The four gentlemen, for such indeed they were, and had given their real names, found that there was no resource but submission, and they trotted gloomily on in charge of the sham officers; but Kitty Juniper, although her hands were tied, made such liberal use of her tongue, that it was perfectly stunning. She called Claude and his two friends all the dreadful names she could think of, and abused her own friends for bringing her into such trouble as she was then in.

"It's quite enough," said Claude, "to set the question at rest about whether you are gentlemen or not, to hear this woman. No gentlemen could possibly have such a person in their company."



"Your reproach is just enough," said one, "and when we get out of this scrape, she won't find that her conduct has done her any good. We knew she was a little violent, but we did not quite expect to find her what she is. You will find your mistake about us when we can send for our friends."

"Oh, dear, no," said Claude, putting on a look of extreme stolidity; "oh, dear, no, not at all; I suppose you are Claude Duval?"

The unfortunate jokers, finding that it was all in vain to say anything, lapsed into silence, and the whole party proceeded at a brisk trot till they came to Ealing, and Claude led the way to the lock-up in that village.

The news that four highwaymen had been taken and brought in by the officers, spread like wildfire through the place, and it was quite an astonishing thing where the crowd could come from that quickly assembled. Jack whispered to Claude,—

"Let us get out of this as soon as we can."

"I mean to do so, but we must give them into safe custody; then we can be off again. What is all this?"

As Claude spoke, about a dozen persons on horseback appeared in the high-road. Three or four of them had scarlet coats on, and the whole, by their equipments, were evidently on the route to some hunt.

There might, or there might not be danger from all this; and whether there was or not was quickly apparent, for one of Claude's prisoners cried out in a loud voice,—

"My Lord Penthurst, don't you know me?"

"Hilloa!" said one of the huntsmen, "who is that? I think that's Lord Titherleigh's voice."

"To be sure it is. Here we are in custody as highwaymen—will you be bail for us?"

At these words, those who were in the costume of huntsmen, with all their friends who were not, gathered round our friends and their prisoners. Jack turned rather pale, but Dick and Claude kept their ground and their countenances very well indeed upon the occasion.

"Why, what is the meaning of all this nonsense?" said an elderly gentleman in a scarlet coat.

"Nonsense or not, sir," said Claude, "it simply means that Lord Whiffle has been robbed on the highway, and that these four persons are the robbers."

"Oh, impossible!"

"Ask them, sir."

"Yes, we admit it; but it was only a joke you see—nothing in the world but a joke."

The elderly gentleman in the red coat looked rather grave, and Claude said, very mildly—

"It is all very well for a robber on the highway to say that his criminality is a joke, but as officers of justice, we are not in a position to admit of such an excuse."

"Oh, dear no. Certainly not—certainly not. Why, what mad, blind folly has this been."

"Hilloa!" said a stout man, bustling into the throng with a constable's staff in his hand; "what is all this? Who has any prisoners, eh?—eh?"

"I have," said Claude. "Who are you?"

"I am Smithers, the keeper of the lock-up, and if you have a prisoner, you will be so good as to give him up to me."

"With pleasure," said Claude. "Take them all. Here they are, and I and my brother officers will give an intimation of the whole affair to the London magistrates. We don't wish anything but what is right, of course. Come on."

Claude got out of the throng, followed by Dick and Jack closely. There was an odd sort of pause, during which no one seemed exactly to know what to be at; but it sufficed to let Claude and his friends get about twenty yards off. At

that moment a sharp gust of wind blew off Dick's hat, and in an effort to catch it, off came his wig. A shrill voice at once screamed out—

"Why that's Dick Turpin!"

"That's a good guess," said Dick. "Off Claude—off Jack—off, and away!"

They gave their horses an impulse forward, and away they went at a tremendous speed. There was a wild shout from every throat of the crowd, in the High-street of Ealing, and the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the track of the three friends came furiously. A pistol bullet went past Jack's head. Another knocked Claude's hat off, and then he turned in his saddle and fired at the foremost of his pursuers. Horse and man both fell, and the next to him could not clear the sudden obstruction, although he made an effort to do so, and down he went, being pitched over his horse's head a considerable distance in the road.

"Hurrah!" cried Claude, for now he was fairly excited. "Hurrah! Who is for a race and an ounce of hot lead in his brains at the end of it? Ha! ha!"

Like the wind, away they sped, and the pursuit was evidently given up, for upon reaching the summit of a hill, Claude checked his horse, and pointing to the valley below, he said—

"There they are. Ha! ha!—they find it safer to talk about Gentleman Jack than to follow him. They had better follow death than me, when they don't give me fair play."

## CHAPTER CCXXXI.

### THE STRANGE ADVENTURE AT THE HAUNTED MANSION.

"WELL," said Dick, "this, after all, is likely to turn out anything but an agreeable affair. I think we had better push on."

"Oh, no—all's right!" cried Claude. "They know a trick worth two of coming after us, now. We are fairly on the hill, do you not see, and should have them at great advantage to ourselves if they were to attempt to attack us."

"Then you think," said Jack, "that there is no occasion to hurry, Claude, and that we may take things tolerably easy?"

"I do."

"I am very glad to hear it, for my horse has become lame, and I doubt whether he would carry me another mile. I don't know what is the matter with him, but I suppose it is something in his foot that he has picked up upon the road, for you see he limps dreadfully."

"I will see what it is, Jack," said Claude.

"Nay, keep your seat, Claude. Just hold him by the bridle, while I dismount and have a look. It is possible enough that I may be able to relieve him of it, if it be a stone only."

"Do if you can," said Dick, "for, notwithstanding we are upon a hill, there is no knowing how desirable and necessary a sharp trot may be in the course of the next hour or two."

Jack dismounted, and by an examination of his horse's foot, found that the mischief was worse than he thought it was. The foot appeared to have got a wound by some means or another, but he could not see that there was anything in it, although he looked carefully.

"Claude," he said, "this is more serious than I thought, and I shall have to put up somewhere in consequence of it. You and Dick had better ride on, and let me shift for myself the best way I can. We can easily appoint some place of meeting."

"No, Jack," said Claude, "that won't do. We must all keep together somehow. How long do you think it will be before your horse is fit for service again?"

"A night's rest," said Jack, "will do it; but I must have that time for the acting of a salve that I will put to his foot."

"Then let us look out for some place of shelter at once. Here is a long shady lane to the right. Let us go down it. We don't know but it may lead us somewhere where we can put up with safety. None of our horses will be the worse for a quiet night. What say you, Dick?"

"I'm willing. Come on."

"Then I will lead my horse," said Jack, as he finished tying a handkerchief tightly round the foot of the animal.

The lane into which they now plunged was one of great beauty. The trees in many places met overhead, forming a natural canopy, through which the sunlight came darting down in long pencils of beauty, and dappled the walk beneath, giving it a most sweet and extraordinary appearance. The sides of this lane were covered with wild flowers, and the birds, with unusual boldness, sung upon every branch.

"Really this is a sweet spot," said Claude.

"It is," said Jack, as he led his horse, and looked with pleased surprise around him. "I can hardly take it to be a lane at all."

"Why, then, what is it?" said Dick.

"Some neglected avenue to some estate."

Upon Jack giving that opinion of the place in which they were, they all halted, and Claude said—

"If so, we are perhaps getting what is popularly call out of the frying-pan into the fire. Is it desirable to proceed any further?"

"Why, yes," said Jack. "Let us go on—I may be wrong; and yet I cannot help thinking that the place has something of the aspect of a once well-kept avenue."

"I agree with you," said Claude. "What is this?"

They all paused to look at what had attracted the attention of Claude by the side of the lane, and they found that it was a statue upon a pedestal, but so completely covered up with wild roses, and other plants and flowering shrubs, that it was only very dimly visible, but it had a pleasing effect.

"This," said Claude, "settles the question."

"What question?" said Dick.

"Why, that this is not a mere country lane. I feel convinced now, that we are in, as Jack says, a made avenue to some estate or house. No doubt, at one time it has been well looked to, and trimly kept, but it is quite clear that for a long time everything in it has been suffered to grow wild."

"Yes," said Jack. "It is evident enough, that folks don't put up statues in country lanes. This is private property, you may depend; but yet I think we ought to go on, and see where it leads to."

"I am willing," said Dick.

"And we can but come back again," said Claude, "if we find it desirable so to do. It is not at all likely that the place is wholly deserted. Keep your eyes about you both of you, for I don't like this very suspicious stillness."

"What!" said Dick, "are you afraid of an ambuscade?"

"Not exactly, and yet—ah, what is that?"

A strange unearthly kind of cry came upon their ears, and they all paused with surprise, looking at each other for some explanation of the sound.

"What the deuce was that?" said Claude.

They both shook their heads, and Jack, as he looked rather pale, said—

"Do you think that that cry was meant as a warning to us, Claude?"

"A warning of what?"

"Of danger—perhaps of death, if we should proceed further on the course that we are now on. If it were so, we ought not to defy it."

"Oh, Jack," said Claude, "you are like the Athenians of old—you are too superstitious. Now, I don't feel at all inclined to be frightened away from this beautiful spot by a squall such as that we now heard; and as long as the danger is confined to that, it won't stop me. My curiosity is now strongly excited, and I must confess I don't feel at all inclined to go back."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"Very well, then," said Jack, "if you are both agreed, it is not for me to dissent, and I will go on with you; but I feel convinced there is some mystery about this place, whether, as far as we are concerned, it be for good or for evil."

"We will make it for good," said Claude, "whether it likes it or not. Come on. The avenue, for now we ought not to call it a lane, turns more beautiful at each step as we go on, and see, there is another statue half hidden among the trees, as we catch but a faint glimpse of it."

They paused a moment or two, to look at the other statue, which was that of some wood nymph, in an attitude of listening.

"Well," said Claude, "somebody has had this place at one time, as one upon which to exhibit a charming fancy. This walk must have been quite delicious when it was in all its glory."

"For my part," said Dick, "I think, I like it better now than I should have done at the time when it was trimly kept. There is something very captivating to me in this union of art and nature. You may depend that no skill of the most skilful gardener that ever lived, could have wreathed those wild roses round the statues, and the trunks of the trees, as nature has done them."

"You are right, Dick," said Claude, "and I applaud your taste; but here is a winding turn in the avenue, and ten to one but we came to some fine view now—Hilloa! There it is again!"

The same unearthly sound that had before attracted their attention, now broke upon their ears, and, as before, they all came to a temporary stand still from surprise; but upon this occasion, they had added to the unearthly cry a scream that was evidently human, and in another moment, a boy, in the dress of a peasant, rushed towards them, crying—

"Oh, don't—oh, murder—murder! Oh, don't—oh, oh!"

"Hold!" cried Claude. "Stop, boy. What is the matter with you, that you cry out in such a strain?"

The boy, when he saw Claude and his companions, suddenly plumped down upon his knees in the lane, and holding up his hands, he cried—

"Oh, sir, don't let 'em take me! Oh, save me from them! I won't come here any more—indeed, I won't! Oh, do let me go, sir, if you are one of them!"

"One of what? What on earth do you mean?"

"Come, come," said Jack, as he took him by the arm, "get up with you—We don't want any kneeling. Just tell us at once what's the matter with you."

"Oh, sir, nothing."

"Nothing? and yet you have been making noise enough to alarm the whole parish. What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, dear, I only meant nothing, sir, as there was nothing the matter with me; but lor'! ain't I frightened a bit!"

"What it?"

"You won't let 'em lay hold of me, will you, gentlemen? Oh, don't. They drove poor Dick Stevens mad—oh, dear, yes, they did, and—and I thought I would just go and take a few peaches—they are so nice and ripe at this time—and oh—oh—oh—let me go home! Mercy!—murder! They are coming after me. I know they are. Help—oh, oh, dear—oh!"

The boy clung to Jack with such frantic violence, that if he had felt ever so much inclined to shake him off, he could not have done so, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he was at length calmed down sufficiently to speak to them with any degree of rationality.

"I tell you what it is, my lad," said Claude, "if you don't be a little quiet now, we will take you back to where you came from, and leave you there; so now you know what to expect, you young rascal."

Upon this, the boy would have got down upon his knees again, but Jack would not let him, and holding him by the collar, he said—

"Now tell us, at once, what it is that has frightened you almost out of your small amount of wits?"

"Oh, yes, I will," said the boy. "You see, gentlemen, I'm only a poor boy, and my name is Will Baker, and I live in the village there away about a mile down the road when you turn to the left, as you go past Farmer Hastings's wheat stacks, where there's a pound, you know, and——"

"Come to the point," said Claude. "Bother you and Farmer Hastings; we want to know what frightened you here, and not where you live."

"Yes, sir—oh, dear, yes. Well, as I was a saying, sir:—the boys in the village will have it that there's lots of fruit in the old garden up this ways; and about a week ago, Stevens, sir, he went to get some, and he came home again, and he's been what they calls an idiot ever since; and he only sits and laughs, now, in the chimney-corner at nothing."

"But what frightened him?"

"Nobody knows, sir; and you see, I didn't think that it could be anything much, 'cos Stevens wasn't never very bright, so I thought I would come to-day and get a hatful of peaches, or something of that sort, you see, sir; and I comed."

"Weil?"

"Oh, dear, it wasn't well, sir."

"Ill, then?"

"Yes, sir, that's what it was. It was only about half-an-hour ago, that I came up the walk, and got through the hedge into the old garden, and I didn't see nothing and nobody to be frightened at, so I got quite pleased like; and there was such beauties of peaches on one of the old walls—oh, my eye, wasn't there?"

"And the gardener came out and caught you, I suppose, with a good stick, did he?"

"The gardener, sir? Oh, lor! There hasn't been a gardener there, sir, for eight years come Christmas next, they say."

"Who did catch you, then?"

"I'll tell you, sir. The peaches did look so nice, so I fastened my cap to my waist, and got a little way up the wall by the thick stem of the old trees, and held on while I picked some of them. I got down again, and turned round to cut away with the peaches, when, right in my way—oh—oh!"

"Weil? What was right in your way?"

The boy shook fearfully, and then in a low half-choked voice, he said—

"Right in my way was a kind of dreadful thing, all bones, with such a dreadful look, and blood coming out of the skeleton eyes and mouth, and the long, bony fingers were put out to catch hold of me; and I dropped my cap and the peaches, and I knew then that that was what had frightened poor Stevens into being an idiot, and I come out of the garden; but they called out after me, for there were more than one of them, and I nearly fell down when they called, for the horrid sound went right through me; and I shall turn an idiot like Stevens!"

"No you won't," said Jack. "Come—come, don't shake so. It was nothing, after all, but your own fancy."

"Fancy?"

"Yes, your own imagination, you know

"Oh, lor, no sir! I ain't got none."

"How many times did they call after you?" said Dick.

"Two times, sir," said the boy.

Dick whispered to Claude—

"What do you think of this affair? There is something in it, for we heard two cries."

"We did; and with you, Dick, I feel that there is something in it, but what that something is, I cannot pretend to say. I will speak closely to the boy."

"Do so. Perhaps you may get some more facts out of him."

"Now, my boy," said Claude, "attend to me."

"I will, sir. Oh, yes, sir, I will."

"Where does this lane lead to?"

"It ain't a lane, sir. It's called the Grange Walk, sir. That's what it is, and



it leads to the Grange as has been shut up ever so long, all on account of the ghosts, you see, sir, and that's one of 'em."

"Where?" cried Jack, starting round.

"Oh, it's not here, sir. I mean that was one of 'em as tried to lay hold of me, when I was getting the peaches, and as called out after me in such a norrid way."



THE THREE ADVENTURERS MAKE THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE OLD GRANGE.

"And who lives at the Grange?" asked Ciande.

"Lor, sir! nobody, in course, lives there but the ghosts. Who would live there to be frightened out of their wits like poor Stevens, and made an idiot to sit in a chimney-corner, and grin at nothing?"

"Not a very pleasant prospect, certainly."

"Oh, no, sir. If you want to go to the village, gentlemen, I'll soon show you

the way ; and there's the Barley Mow there, ever such a nice public house, as never was, sir. This way, gentlemen, this way."

"Stop a bit," said Claude : "I am very fond of a nice peach, and I feel very much inclined, notwithstanding the ghosts, to go to that garden and get one or two ; I think we are in pretty good force to resist anything in the shape of ghosts that may offer themselves ; and now that there is such a capital chance of seeing a few in the old Grange, I can't resist going."

"Oh, don't, sir, don't," said the boy, with earnestness ; "you can't tell what they may be able to do."

"We will chance that. What say you, Dick, and you, Jack?"

"Come on," said Dick.

"As you please," said Jack ; "and if you are both willing, so am I ; but we need not drive this lad out of his wits by making him go with us : that would be a needless piece of cruelty and oppression towards him."

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## CHAPTER CCXXXII.

### THE FRIENDS TAKE POSSESSION OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE.

As Jack uttered these last words, the boy looked wistfully down the lane. He was evidently in doubt as to which he should do—go home at once to the village, or accompany Jack and his friends to the Haunted Grange.

"Come," said Claude, "make up your mind. Come with us or be off. If you really have any liking for a peach, you had better come, for I tell you I have made up my mind to have some in spite of all the ghosts that can conspire to prevent me."

"Don't speak of 'em in that way, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because—because, you see, sir, they don't like it, and it is said, that when anybody speaks slightly of them, they take all sorts of vengeance upon them. Don't, sir ; it ain't, you know, gentlemen, worth while to be made idiots of, and sit in chimney corners and grin at nothing."

Jack gave a sort of nod, to the great amusement of Claude, as if he would have said, "I am precisely of that opinion." Dick looked from one to the other of them with a half-laugh upon his face, as though he did not know exactly whether to view the matter in a comic or a serious light.

"Well, I'm going to the Grange," said Claude.

"And I," said Dick.

"And I, then," said Jack, "if it comes to that."

"Well, gentlemen," said the boy, "if so be as you will promise to protect me against the ghosts, I will go too. There is peaches, and good ones I can tell, and perhaps we may get some, and then get away again before any of the ghosts think of interfering with us, you see."

"Nothing is more probable," said Claude, drily.

They all now went up the avenue, and upon making a curved turn in it, they suddenly, through the trees, came into sight of the old mansion.

It was one of the oldest of the Elizabethan structures that adorn England, and was of great extent. Ancient ivy had climbed to the top of its tallest chimneys, and where that leafy screen had not hidden their rich colour, the red bricks still shone out in the sun with all the effect as if they had been but recently put up. There was a kind of observatory at the top of the house, which had a very graceful appearance ; and but for the air of desolation about it, and a number of broken windows, the Grange would have been a stately and imposing structure.

"It's a pity," said Claude, "that such a house as that might be is abandoned to ruin."

"It is," said Dick, "a thousand pities."

"Oh, but the ghosts, sir," said the boy; "who likes to hear them following you up and down stairs and wherever you go! Oh, dear no!"

The lad kept so close to Claude, whom he probably thought the bravest of the party upon the subject of ghosts, that the horse was in danger of treading upon his toes each moment, and Claude had to warn him to keep a further distance. Jack still led his horse, and in that way they presently reached the end of the avenue, and saw before them a large and handsomely laid out lawn, in the centre of which there had at one time been a fountain, surmounted by sculptured tritons and sea nymphs, but now its jet was still, and weeds and moss covered every available spot. The grass upon the lawn was intersected and mingled with every description of rank vegetation, wound about in masses. The once trimly kept gravelled walks had yielded to the influence of time, and the grass had grown up over them rankly and luxuriously.

"This is a pity," said Dick, as he glanced around him.

"It is quite extraordinary," said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack, "and—and it only shows you,"—Jack kept a wary eye around him as he spoke,— "and it only shows you what a shocking thing it is to be superstitious."

Claude turned aside to smile at this, for he knew that superstition was Jack's failing.

"Never mind," he said, "Jack; if you can rest your horse here and get what you want for his wounded foot, all will be well."

"That I can easily get," said Jack. "The best thing to put to it will be some bruised leaves of the common flowering mallow, and I see that it is here in abundance."

"Certainly," said Claude, as he glanced around him, "there is no want of that in this place. It seems to be the favourite wild growth of the spot."

"Oh, there's lots," said the boy.

"Well, my young friend," added Claude, "we do not see any of the ghosts yet."

"Don't speak of them, sir."

"Oh, stuff; I am convinced of one thing as regards ghosts, and that is, that the more you are afraid of them the more you may be; and they never, on any account, make their appearance to persons who laugh at them."

"Do you really think so, sir?"

"I do more than think it, boy: I know it. And now you will be so good as to show us the way to the garden where all the peaches are that you speak of, for I long to taste some of them."

"It's this way," said the boy, with a kind of shudder; "but I hope you won't want me to go in, sir?"

"Not if you have any great objection."

"Oh, dear haven't I a big objection? Didn't I see the horrid thing, all bones and horrid blood, that nearly made me an idiot? Oh, sir, don't make me go into the garden. I'll wait here for you, if you please, sir. Indeed I will."

"Very good; only point out to us the way, and I promise you that I will bring you a peach or two for your pains."

"That's the way, then, sir, past that old mulberry-tree, and right on by the side of the house: you will soon come to it."

"Very good."

Claude had by this time dismounted, and so had Dick. They tied their horses to some iron hurdles that were close at hand, and then on foot made their way to the garden by the route the boy had pointed out to them. They found that they had to skirt a hedge for a considerable distance before they reached a pretty rustic gate that opened into the garden, but the sight that presented itself to their eyes when they did reach it, amply compensated them for all the time and trouble they had expended in so doing.

The garden was of considerable extent, and although time and neglect had

evidently done much to injure the neatness of its appearance, it had not been sufficient to destroy it wholly. No doubt, the produce of that favoured patch of ground would have been of a much higher character had it been well attended to; but as it was, there was much to tempt the eye and the appetite.

Clustering fruits hung in luxuriance upon the branches of the trees; a perfect wilderness of flowers adorned the ground; and upon the walls the plum, the peach, and the nectarine hung in profusion.

"Upon my word," said Claude, "this is the first time that I ever thought ghosts had such taste."

"They are well off here, indeed," said Dick.

"Come—come now," said Jack, "it's a subject that is just as well not to joke about, you know, for, after all, what do we know about it? and whether there are supernatural beings or not as long as they don't interfere with us, I think the best we can do is not to interfere with them."

"Very good, Jack," laughed Claude. "If you take the ghosts under your special protection, we will say nothing against them."

"Yes; but—Good Heavens, what is that?"

The same unearthly sound that had before come upon their ears, and which they had almost forgotten, suddenly broke the stillness of the air with the most startling effect, and this time it appeared to be quite close at hand, so that they all three started as its echoes passed them, as though the means by which it was produced were close to their ears.

"This is something more than strange," said Claude.

"It is. It is horrible," said Jack.

"Not so," added Claude. "I will not have it to be horrible. It is curious, but that it is of mortal origin, I feel convinced."

"Mortal?" cried Jack.

"Yes, I will not even yield to superstitious fancies; and if all the noises that earth, sea, or air can make were to combine to appal me, I would not shrink. I will have a peach."

"Oh, don't," cried Jack. "Take my advice now, and come away at once from this dreadful place."

"Not I."

"Oh yes, do, Claude. It is much better."

"No, Jack. You would be, in after time, the first to laugh at the great absurdity of our being frightened by a mere sound. Come, let us regale ourselves off the wall-fruit. You don't want to go, Dick?"

"Not I."

"Come on, then."

As he spoke, Duval plucked two or three peaches, and handing one to Dick, they both began eating.

"Come, Jack," he said. "You see the ghost of the old Haunted Grange has not, after all, the courage to come in person to defend his peaches. You had better eat one. They are truly delicious, I can assure you. Perhaps it is, after all, only boys that the ghost has an objection to."

When Jack saw that Claude and Dick were eating away at the peaches with impunity, he got a little ashamed of his fears, and took on, saying as he did so—

"Why, Claude, I feel quite sure that even you will admit that there is much more in supernatural matters than any of us are well aware of."

"Oh, yes, I admit that."

"Very well then, you ought not to feel surprised if I think more deeply upon such subjects than you do."

"Not at all, Jack—not at all. Only you enjoy with us this delicious fruit, and I shall not say another word to you about it."

Jack ate the peach.

"Now, if you are both of my mind," said Claude, "I shall propose that we stay here long enough to give the necessary rest to Jack's horse, in defiance of all the ghosts of the Grange."

"I say yes to that," said Dick. "But tell me, Claude, have you any suspicions of that boy?"

Claude nodded.

"I have," he said. "From the first I thought that the young rascal was acting a part, and as he went on, felt quite convinced of it. Did you notice how at times he put on the tone and language of a country boy, and then forgetting that part of the performance, he would say a few sentences as well as you or I could for the lives of us?"

"I did."

"Well," said Jack, "I confess that something of that sort struck me; but I did not think it sufficiently clear to make any observation upon it, or to think that it was of much consequence. There is one thing, though, that we have done that, as the catechism says, we ought not to have done."

"And what is that, Jack?"

"Why, if that boy has been playing a part, it is for some ulterior purpose, and we have very kindly left our horses at his disposal.

"The deuce take it!" cried Claude, throwing down the peach he was very quietly eating, "so we have."

"An oversight that," said Dick. "Let us go at once and ease our minds upon that subject. Each moment now will seem to me an age until I clap my eyes upon my gallant four-footed friend again.

This suggestion of Jack's was really so very alarming, that there was something quite ludicrous in the haste with which they all three left the garden that they had been in such rapture about, and rushed in the direction of the iron hurdle railing by the lawn, to which they had fastened their horses about ten minutes before.

One glance was sufficient. The horses were gone!

"Done, by Heaven!" cried Dick.

"Confusion!" said Claude.

"Lost—lost," said Jack, "and all owing to our own want of thought. Well, for once in a way, the whole three of us are thoroughly outwitted. But what's that lying down there? Why, it's the boy."

They all made their way to the lawn, and there, lying upon his face, to all appearances dead, was the boy. Claude turned him over on his back, and then he opened his eyes and looked wildly about him.

"Oh—oh," he groaned, "I am mad now! Oh, save me—save me!"

"Speak," said Claude, shaking him. "Where are our horses? Speak, or I will shake the life out of you!"

The boy made several gasping efforts to speak before he could do so, and then he said—

"Oh, sir, oh! You hadn't been gone above a few minutes when one of them came. Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"One of what?"

"The ghosts of the Grange. Oh, it was an awful one. All green and fat. Oh, it was dreadful! and the fat ran down its green cheeks; and its tongue was like a flame; and it just pointed to the horses, and they broke away from the iron and disappeared, I don't know where; and then three of them came, and they danced round me—they were skeletons; and then down I went, and then I think I fainted away."

"Indeed?"

"Here are the bridles," said Jack, "hanging to the iron hurdle fence. Look, here they are."

"Broken?" said Claude.

"No. They are unbuckled from the bits, and are quite perfect."

"Indeed! That was kind of the ghosts not to break our reins. Oh, very! Now, my lad, where are our cattle?"

"Lord, bless you, sir, I don't know."

"Very good. Dick, will you be so good as to collect as good a bundle of long



switches of blackthorn as you can from that hedge? Now, my boy, you will please to come with me just to this young sycamore tree, to which I intend to tie you up comfortably."

"Oh lor, sir, what for?"

"Where are our horses?"

"But I don't know, sir. Oh, murder!"

"Very good."

Claude, with one of the bridles, strapped the highly talented youth to the tree he spoke of, and Dick collected a capital handful of long switches of a highly stinging character.

## CHAPTER CCXXXIII.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE IS SOLVED.

"Oh, lor, what have I done to be wolloped!" cried the boy, when he saw that such active preparations were on foot for the accomplishment of that object.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Hark you, my lad," said Claude. "It is quite impossible for me to take upon myself to say that you have hidden our horses, or been at all instrumental in their hiding; but you must know. I have the very greatest notion of your abilités."

"My what, sir?"

"Your cleverness and talent. I have that confidence in both those qualities in you, that I cannot help thinking you will be able to hit upon some shrewd conjecture upon the subject."

"Oh, but I don't know."

"Very good. Strip, if you please. Oh, you decline? Jack, will you be so good as to prepare this young gentleman for a little wholesome castigation, which if it does him no other good, will circulate his blood, and so prove very beneficial to his general health. He don't seem thoroughly to understand it himself."

Both Jack and Dick now saw what Claude intended, and as they had their own suspicions of the lad's complotment in the affair of the loss of the horses, they were nothing loth to get the truth out of him in any way that seemed the most likely to effect that object. They entered into the affair with spirit.

"Oh, murder," cried the boy, as he tried in vain to free himself from the bonds that held him to the tree. "Oh, murder! Why should a poor boy be whacked because he don't know where some 'osses is?"

"Ah, why indeed?" said Claude. "Now, Jack."

Jack did not trouble the vivacious youth with any solicitations to aid in his own disrobing, but in a few moments prepared him very nicely for the assault of the twigs that had been collected.

"Now," said Claude, as he flashed the handful of stinging, long pieces of vegetation in his right hand. "Now, where are our horses, my fine fellow?"

"Oh, I don't know."

Whack! came the twigs, and the boy raised a shout that must have been heard half a mile off.

"Where are our horses?" said Claude.

"Oh, goodness gracious, I told you that I didn't know."

Swish, came the twigs again through the air, and the boy bellowed like a young bull.

"Where are the horses?"

"Murder! I don't know."

"Very good."

Claude did not now wait to repeat his question between the strokes of the twigs, but laid on at a rate that set the boy howling and screeching so loudly that both

Jack and Dick were really alarmed ; but Claude was not in the least moved to pity. On he went, and after about a dozen strokes, the boy shouted—

“ Oh, stop ! I will tell.”

“ Very good,” said Claude. “ Be quick about it, then.”

“ Oh dear, the horses are in the old barnhouse. I’ll take you to them. Oh—oh—oh ! Oh, lor—oh, lor !”

“ Now,” said Claude, “ that is very satisfactorily settled ; and if you had said as much half a minute or so ago, you would have saved your skin a little smarting, that I think will last you some days to come. You may now be so good as to put yourself into walking order, and show us the way to this same barnhouse ; but mark me, if we see any prevaricating, or any tricks, back you come to this same tree to have the second dose of the same medicine that you now know the taste of so well.”

Jack undid the bridle that fastened the lad to the tree, and then, with his face the colour of a peony, and great tears bubbling over his eyes, he led the way from the garden.

Jack and Dick had the greatest difficulty to smother their desires to roar with laughter, and Claude, too, found it no easy matter to keep a grave countenance. The only person of the party who looked as if he were not likely to laugh again was the boy, who had certainly received such a castigation as he could not have had any idea of in his life before.

Fretting, and groaning, and crying as he went, he conducted the friends through a kind of poultry-yard, and then round a corner of the house to a large door that he opened savagely, saying—

“ There they are. Oh, dear, I never was so served out in all my life. Oh—oh ! Oh, my !”

The three horses were in the barnhouse, standing upon a quantity of stable litter, and looking rather frightened at the intense darkness of the place in which they had been shut up.

“ All’s right,” said Claude. “ The lad has not deceived us. Now we are all right again, and you see, my lad, what virtue there is in a good handful of twigs. Whenever you think of playing a trick upon any one, you had better look out if there are any nice little twigs growing in the neighbourhood, and a strong hand to wield them.”

The boy cried lustily, for the smart of his castigation had by no means abated ; and then he managed to say—

“ Oh, dear ! I suppose I may go now ? You don’t want to keep a fellow here, after whacking him at such a rate ?”

“ Certainly not,” said Claude ; “ you may go as soon as you like now, and I beg that for the future you will remember me.”

“ Oh, I can’t possibly forget,” whimpered the boy. “ It ain’t easy. Oh dear—oh, if I had only know’d this, wouldn’t I have seen all these horses further first ! Oh—oh !”

Still ejaculating in his misery, the boy walked away, and when he was out of hearing, Dick said—

“ Would it not have been as well, Claude, to have brought that lad with us ? He may now give notice of our being here to some who may be enemies.”

“ Why,” said Claude, “ it was rather difficult to know upon what pretence to detain the fellow now. Besides, I am quite convinced that he is in some sort of connection with the choice spirits who haunt the old Grange.”

“ What do you mean ?” said Jack.

“ Why, I mean, Jack, that I am of opinion the Grange is haunted ; but that the ghosts are beings of flesh and blood like ourselves, and that we have not much to fear from them. But now we have our affairs in our own hands again, by the possession of our horses, and we can either go or stay. What is your opinion, Dick ?”

“ Why, I think that we had better stay, if it is only for the purpose of getting Jack’s horse’s foot to rights.”

"Ah," said Jack, "that is a reason which goes far, indeed, with me, and stay we must, I fear."

"Very good," said Claude, "then it is settled in the affirmative; and I propose that we take the horses into the house at once, and place them in one of the lower rooms. In that barnhouse there was plenty of straw."

"Yes," said Dick, "and there is a good hay-stack close by the lawn, that, no doubt, is the produce of a meadow that lies beyond it; so we can give them a sort of feed."

"Be it so, then," said Jack. "I will set about preparing the dressing for my horse's foot; and if it be possible to give it a night's rest, it will be no bad thing, and in the morning we can all start fresh from the place; but my own private opinion certainly is, that we shall not be permitted to pass a very quiet night."

"It's a good thing, then," laughed Claude, "that we are used to unquiet ones, Jack. Let us come into the house and see what sort of accommodation we can find for man and beast within the walls."

There were several rooms that evidently looked out upon the lawn, and several doors that opened from that side of the building, so that there could be no great difficulty in making an entrance to the Grange. After trying a couple of doors, and finding that they were undoubtedly fastened within, Claude made his way through one of the windows, and with a pistol in his hand, with which he determined to give a warm reception to any one who should attempt to impede his progress.

The door that he determined upon opening, was not far off from the room into which he had managed to penetrate, so that he reached it in a moment or two, and drew back the two bolts that held it fast, and flung it open to his friends.

"All right?" cried Dick.

"Yes," said Claude, "the house is quiet enough. I have seen no one, mortal or immortal, as yet. Bring in the horses. We can easily put them in one of the rooms, here."

The horses were led into the house, and Claude opened the door of an apartment, that no doubt at one time had been a very handsome refreshment-room, but which was then in a sadly dismantled condition; some of the old furniture yet remained in the room that had been fitted to it, and that would have been quite useless if removed; but those who had at one time inhabited the mansion, little imagined that that room would ever be turned into a stable for the horses of three highwaymen.

Claude examined the lock, and found that it was in tolerably good condition, with the key in it.

"This will do," he said, "and all we have got now to be quick about, is to get in some hay and straw. I think it would be bad policy, after what has happened, for all three of us to leave the house at once, so two can go for the hay and straw, while one remains as guard here, and we can take turn, and turn about in the duty."

This was agreed to, and Dick and Jack went first for the hay and straw, while Claude remained with the horses, and then while he went, Dick remained, and then it came to Jack's turn; and by the time they had made the three journeys, they had got as much as the horses required, and on the floor of that really handsome room, a comfortable bed was made for the cattle.

Jack went out to the garden and got in a number of leaves of the mallow, with which he made a dressing for his horse's foot, and then they felt that they had done all that they could for the comfort of the animals, upon whose health and strength so much depended.

"And now," said Claude, "that we have done our duty—and I mean to say that it is no more than our duty—to our horses, what sort of cheer, Jack, can you give us for ourselves? I am well aware that you generally have something in the vallise good to eat and to drink."

"Yes, Claude, it is well that I look after that department a little. I happen to be provided with a bottle of wine, as good old port—if I may judge from another

that came from the same place—as ever you tasted, and a few biscuits. Beyond these materials for keeping the enemies, hunger and thirst, at bay, I have nothing.”

“We won’t complain,” said Dick. “We might do a great deal worse than have a meal off port wine and biscuits. Come, Jack, unpack, and let us fall-to, for I confess that for once I have a good appetite.”



CICELY WELCOMING CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS TO THE FARM.

“And I,” said Claude.

“Well,” said Jack, “I could do a little, I think, with the wine myself.”

With this, Jack unpacked the valise that he always had at the back of his saddle, and produced the bottle of port and the biscuits.

“It won’t be any the better,” he said, “for the shaking it has had; but I

can't help that, you know, as it was forced to travel on horseback; but it is one of your light wines, that fortunately has little crust, so it may be better than one expects."

"Any port in a storm," said Dick, perpetrating a very old joke indeed; "so let us have it, Jack."

They dispensed with a cork-screw by very cleverly knocking off the head of the bottle; and then as Jack had likewise in his valise a little portable drinking cup, they were able to help themselves from the bottle very comfortably.

Claude sat upon a table in the room, and Dick threw himself into the recesses of an old arm chair that had once been covered with rich velvet, and Jack sat upon the seat of a very low chair, that had been made, no doubt, for devotional services, and was of that description commonly known on the continent by the name of a *Prie Dieu*. It was, truly, a strange scene that to see those three men and the three horses all in that room, with its remnants of faded past magnificence upon every portion of it.

"Well, Jack," said Claude, "give us a toast."

"I——"

Jack had only just opened his mouth to reply to this, when there arose in the house such a dreadful yell that they all instantaneously started to their feet. Claude was off the table in a moment. Dick struggled out of the depth of the arm-chair, and Jack, after rolling on the floor with the devotional chair, got to his feet, crying—

"What's that? What's that?"

"Hush!" said Claude. "Hush!"

To describe that sound which had so startled them would have been utterly impossible, because in such description we can only proceed upon comparisons, and there was nothing like unto it. In all their experiences, neither Claude, nor Dick, nor Jack, had ever heard anything that at all approached it. It was a yell that no one for a moment could believe to be human; and for some moments the echo of it seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere of the place, and to have taken entire possession of their brains. The horses started with affright, and one of them made a dash across the floor of the room, and had to be caught by Dick, who had some difficulty in soothing the creature. The other two trembled excessively.

"What in the name of all that's horrible," said Jack, "can be the meaning of this?"

"I will find it out before I leave this house," said Claude, "or I will know some very special reason why. I will not be made the fool of a mere sound in this way."

"Nor I," cried Dick. "I am quite convinced that there is something in the shape of trickery in this matter; and I think with you, Claude, that we ought not to dream of leaving this house until we have found it out."

"Oh, be careful," said Jack, "what you do and what you say. There is certainly more in Heaven and on earth than we know of. How can we take upon ourselves to say what that sound was?"

"No how, Jack;" said Claude, "but if it really should proceed from supernatural beings, I cannot conceive what gratification it can be to them to terrify our horses, and attempt to terrify ourselves."

"Hush! Do not speak of them in such a way. Oh, Heaven! there it is again!"

A second time the wild shout came upon their ears, and the horses, now thoroughly alarmed, snorted and made an attempt to dash out of the room through one of the windows. It took all that both Claude and Dick could do to stop them, and then Claude cried—

"Oh, that I had kept that boy here! Who knows but that another application of the twigs would have procured from him a solution of this mystery as it did of the other connected with the disappearance of our horses?"



## CHAPTER CCXXXIV.

CLAUDE AND DICK SEARCH THE OLD GRANGE, AND ENCOUNTER A GHOST.

"THIS sort of thing," said Claude, "will not do for me. The evening will soon be here, when anything that may be attempted against our peace may be done with ten times the facility that daylight affords. It is necessary that we should settle all this affair before night."

"And it shall be settled," said Dick. "I am not going to be made a fool of by a mere noise."

"You both speak," said Jack, "as if you felt quite assured that the noise you have heard was mortal, and was a mere human contrivance. You cannot take upon yourselves to say it is such."

"Jack—Jack," said Claude, "once more I beg of you not to give way to superstition. I do not see that we can do anything else but, with our pistols in our hands, search the house through; and the sooner such a job is set about the better. Jack, will you mind the cattle while Dick and I go through the building?"

Jack evidently hesitated.

"Well," added Claude, "shall I go alone?"

"Not so," said Dick; "that would be hazardous. Suppose we carefully fasten up this room and all its windows, and then the whole three of us can go? I think that will be the best plan. We can take such measures as to make the room pretty secure."

It was evident enough that Claude did not much relish the idea of leaving the horses; but as it was equally evident that Jack was really not in a frame of mind to be left alone in case of any attack upon them, that he might consider in his heated imagination to be supernatural, there was no other resource but for them all to go on the expedition through the house, for neither did Dick like the idea of not going, nor did Claude fancy being without so bold and efficient a companion in the adventure.

"We must chance it then," said Claude, "and all go. Help me, Dick, to secure the windows of the room as well as possible. Oh, there are good shutters, I see, and strong fastenings. There will be no difficulty, and now I leave the cattle with something like confidence."

The room was well fastened up, but Jack was rather silent, for he could not help feeling that he was rather to blame for his superstitious fears; nevertheless he could not get sufficiently the better of them to insist upon staying with the cattle, and Claude said to him, kindly—

"It's all right now, Jack. See, I have locked the door, and both lock and door are strong, so that there need be no fear for the horses. Besides, I believe that we shall give whoever is in the house quite enough to do, now, to induce them to let our cattle be."

"I hope so," said Jack.

"Cheer up, Jack," cried Dick. "You will be the first to laugh at all this to-morrow, when we have found out what is the meaning of it. I quite agree with you, Claude, that if we only had that boy here again, we should find out all about it by virtue of the twigs that in so miraculous a manner brought us to the barnhouse where our horses were hidden. That one circumstance is quite sufficient to convince me that the whole affair is of mortal origin."

"And me, likewise," said Claude; "and if Jack will but think a little, it will convince him too. Come, Jack, what say you to that?"

"I own it staggers me," he replied; "but then, what possible explanation can you give of that truly awful noise?"

"None, at present; but we shall not be for long, I hope and expect, in that state of ignorance. If I mistake not, we shall soon find out all about it; and now let us commence a systematic search of the old house."

It was a great advantage to them that they had still daylight in which to

prosecute their search in the Grange, for there were none of the uncertainties and the shadows of an artificial light to perplex their perceptions. Moreover, the very presence of daylight is such a foe to superstitious fears, that even Jack could not feel what he might have felt if the sun had fairly sunk.

Immediately outside the room in which they were, was an irregularly-shaped kind of hall or passage, from which opened a variety of doors. At one end of the hall or passage, there were steps, conducting to the domestic portion of the house, which seemed to be just a little below the level of the other part. From the middle of the hall—taking a grand sweep into it, so as to have an imposing commencement—was the staircase that led to the upper floor.

When the three friends got fairly into the hall, they paused to listen if there were any sounds in the house which might guide them in their operations; but after about a minute thus spent, they heard nothing, so that they could only proceed as systematically as possible in searching the various rooms.

“Come,” said Claude, “we will look through all the rooms on this floor first, and I should advise that we take some means of propping all the doors open as we proceed.”

“That will not be at all difficult,” said Dick. “Here are plenty of bits of wood and litter of all sorts lying about, with which I will, with the aid of my knife, fashion a few wedges that will answer that purpose well enough.”

While this was being done, Claude opened the door that was the nearest to him, and walked into a room that was of beautiful proportions, and still very handsome in some of its decorations. At the farther end of it was a large glass door; that opened into a conservatory.

He glanced round the room, but there was no indication of the recent presence of any one.

“Push open the door, Dick,” he said. “It’s all right here.”

“Stop a bit,” said Jack; “before we proceed any further, I see that there is a door that leads to the offices from the hall here. I propose that we fasten that up as best we may before we go any further in our search. There is a key in the lock, and a bolt upon this side.”

“Do it, Jack. It is a good thought.”

Jack advanced to the door, and had just got the bolt shot into its socket, when from some upper portion of the house, as they thought, there came two of the most dreadful shrieks that any of them had ever heard. These two sounds differed very much from the strange cry that had before made the house vocal with its echoes.

“Ah!” cried Claude, “they are trying it again.”

“Good gracious!” said Jack; “but those cries are horrible!”

“They may be; but I am not going to be shouted or scared out of this house. Come on. Let us continue our search.”

Jack looked very pale, indeed; but he made no sort of opposition to the search being carried on through the house, although both Claude and Dick knew perfectly well, of course, that he would much rather have been out of it. Claude thought that as those cries had come from the upper part of the house, they were either made for the purpose of preventing their ascending the staircase, or to attract them up at once, so as to stop them from pursuing their search in those rooms on the ground floor, where they had thus begun it; so he resolved to disappoint both expectations by gently continuing the search where he was, and when that was concluded, but not before, ascending to the upper rooms.

Dick, with one of the little wedges that he had made, effectually propped open the door of that first room that they had examined, and then they passed through it, and took a look in the conservatory beyond; but all was quiet there, and as the conservatory only opened again into the garden, they did not think it worth their while to proceed further in that direction.

Returning, then, to the hall, they opened another of the numerous doors leading from it, and, suffice it to say, that they went into no less a number

than seven rooms—all of which were, more or less, in a state of delapidation—without being rewarded for their perseverance, with any discovery.

“So far so good,” said Claude, “and we have found out nothing. Now for up stairs. I think if we are to have any success at all, it will be there, surely, since we have not achieved it here.”

“I do sincerely hope,” said Dick, “that we shall not be obliged to leave this place without discovering what it is that has produced those diabolical sounds. I should feel very much dissatisfied, indeed, if we could not find out the author of them.”

“Never fear,” said Claude. “A little perseverance will do wonders.”

“I don’t know,” said Jack. “If those sounds are produced by mortal agency, I grant you then, that there will not be much difficulty in finding out who has produced them; but that is of itself a point that you know is not settled.”

“Quite settled, Jack,” laughed Claude; “so now let us come up stairs at once.”

They ascended the grand staircase, but they had not got above half way up it, when one of the strange cries, similar to those that they had at first heard, came upon their ears. Jack was compelled to hold by the balustrade of the staircase to save himself from falling, and both Claude and Dick, so really terrific was the sound, could not at the moment keep from feeling something like alarm.

“What on earth can it be?” said Claude. “I will not be made a fool of in this way any longer.”

Raising his voice then, he cried loudly—

“Be you whom you may, and let your object be what it may, I warn you that we are not to be terrified by cries or shrieks. There is not a room in this house into which we will not penetrate; so you must adopt some other mode of scaring us than by ugly cries.”

After this speech, Claude waited with the expectation of there coming some sort of answer to it; but in that he was disappointed, for all was profoundly still as before.

“Come on,” cried Claude, “come on,” and he sprang up the remainder of the stairs, and reached the landing-place, from which opened several doors. The moment Claude laid his hand upon the lock of one of them, he heard a voice from within say—

“Help—help! Oh, will nobody save me?”

Claude dashed the door open, and made his way into the room, where he found, to his great surprise, a lad of about fourteen years of age, securely tied to a table that was in the centre of it. The lad was crying bitterly; and when he saw Claude, he called out—

“Oh, don’t kill me—don’t kill me!”

“Who are you?” said Claude.

“Oh, dear, sir, take me away—do take me away from here! I will never come any more to the garden!”

“Oh, you have been in the garden, have you?”

“Yes, sir. My farther is Mr. Dale in the village; and I came a birds-nesting, sir, and a man told me if I came into the house he would show me an owl’s nest, and so I came; but when we got into this room, his face all changed into a skeleton’s, and he put his dreadful mouth close to my ear, and made—oh, such a frightful cry, that I think I must have fainted away; and when I came to myself, I found that I was tied to this table. Oh! gentlemen, come with me to the village, and my father will be so thankful, and so will my poor mother, gentlemen, for they don’t know where I am; and my father will come back and help to look over the house, and bring his friend Mr. Clements with him, too, so that it will be much better.”

“Dear me,” said Claude. “It was too bad to frighten you in such a way, my boy.”

“Oh, yes, sir, it was; but come away at once, gentlemen. I will show you the way out, and then we can all come back again and search the house.”

Claude whispered a few words to Dick, who immediately left the room rather to the consternation of Jack; and then Claude said to the boy—

“I suppose, after what has happened to you here, you would like very much to find out all about it—who it is that makes the strange noises, and all that sort of thing?”

“Oh, yes, sir, I should indeed like it. And by the time we come back it will be all right, no doubt, sir.”

“Not a doubt of it. Oh, here you are, Dick.”

“Yes,” said Dick, as he re-appeared with the bundle of twigs that had been use in the castigation of the other boy. “Yes, it’s all right. Here I am, Claude, and here is the persuader.”

“Now,” said Claude to the boy, “I will show you a much readier way of getting at all the information you require, and that we require, likewise. It is not worth while for us to go to your father, nor to his friend, Mr. Clements. Jack, will you hold his heels, and Dick, will you hold his arms? and between you, it will not be at all difficult to make him lie on this table, as I have loosened the cord that held him to the leg of it.”

“Oh, dear!” said the boy, “what are you going to do? I will go home to father at once, if you please, gentlemen.”

“We want to know,” said Claude, “the meaning of the strange sounds in this house, and how they are produced, and by whom?”

“But, lor, sir! how should I know?”

“Up with him!” said Claude.

Jack and Dick lifted up the boy, and placed him upon the table; and Claude rendered him to a condition, as regarded apparel, in which the switches were likely to be very effective.

“Now, my lad,” said Claude, “I shall not trouble myself to keep asking you. You are quite well acquainted with what we want to know, so you can stop these proceedings at once by telling us. Is all right, Dick?”

“Yes; all’s right.”

Claude immediately applied the twigs, with an energy that made the boy burst into such a roar, that it was perfectly ludicrous to hear him; and after about half a minute he could stand it no longer, but shouted out—

“I’ll tell! I’ll tell! Oh, I’ll tell!”

“Very good! Go on, then,” said Claude.

“It’s my father who is here. He is a coiner, and I’ll take you to him, and he makes that horrid noise by blowing through a large cow’s-horn. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I didn’t think I should come to this. It’s very horrid! Oh! Oh! Oh! Let me go; do, sir, let me go! I can’t stand any more of it.”

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## CHAPTER CCXXXV.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE COMPELLED TO GET RID OF THE COINER.

JACK and Dick were so very much amused at this capital plan of Claude’s in the way of getting information from boys, that they roared again with laughing; and, probably, Jack now laughed, or affected to laugh, the loudest, for he felt thoroughly ashamed of his fears upon the subject of the haunted house, and was afraid, now, that Dick and Claude might refer to them.

“Oh, that is capital!” he cried. “Capital!”

“And so,” said Dick, “it is by bellowing through a cow’s-horn, that the noise is made?”

“Oh, dear, yes,” said the boy. “The other boy you met was my brother Bill. Why didn’t you whack it all out of him, instead of giving me such a teaser?”

"Why, my lad," said Claude, "we did try it with your brother Bill, and found it equally successful as with you, so far as we asked him for information."

"Oh, dear! then he ought to have told a fellow how you managed things, that he ought. I never was so served out in all my life behind, before."

"You have your own obstinacy to thank for it; and now, as you have explained all that we want to know, you will perhaps be so good as to fulfil your promise of taking us to your father, the coiner. Come, will you do so?"

"Oh, dear, yes," said the boy, who had now scrambled off the table, "anything you like, sir, so that you put those twigs away."

"Oh, you don't like the look of them?"

"It ain't the look of them, sir," said the boy, as he made a wry face. "It's the feel of 'em."

"Very good—I have no wish in the world to administer another dose, unless it should be absolutely necessary. It was a very ungenerous thing of your brother Bill, not to give you due notice of our mode of transacting business."

"Oh, yes, sir, it was; but then you see, sir, he was afraid I might laugh at him, and I dare say he wanted me to catch it, too. That was it! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Lead on, then, and we will follow you."

"This way, gentlemen, this way. I am rather in for it now, I think, for I suppose, when you are gone, father will begin upon both me and Bill, so I think the very best thing we can do is to run away."

With this sagacious remark, the boy led them from the room on to the landing-place again, and after proceeding some little distance, he came to a door, at which he tapped three times in a very peculiar manner. A voice from within immediately said—

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Yes," said the boy, mournfully. "Oh, yes, it's me. I only wish as it wasn't, that's all; and that somebody else felt what I feel now."

The door was opened after a little fuss in undoing what, no doubt, were some very secure fastenings on the inside, and a man, with a very grimy face, made his appearance. Claude and his friends had remained perfectly still, so that he had no idea that there was any one there but the boy, and the moment he caught sight of the strange faces, he called out in a loud voice—

"Ah! am I betrayed at last, and by my own flesh and blood, too?"

"No!" said Claude. "Don't be hasty—It is not so. This boy has been enforced to conduct us to you. But lay aside your fears; we will not be of any disservice to you. Our intentions are by no means against you. All that we want is to remain here, and rest ourselves in peace and quietness for the night, and your secret will be quite as safe in our keeping as in your own."

"How am I to know that?"

"No how, except by experience of the fact; but a fact it is for all that. We are not men who care one straw whether you make money one way or another."

"If I could only feel assured—"

"Pho!—pho! man, you may feel assured. Here are three of us, well armed, and if we meant you any mischief, I should rather think there would be no occasion to temporise with you, or to lie about it."

"That is true."

"Very well. With that belief, then, you had much better put your mind at ease concerning us."

"I will. And I am armed, too; but what could I do against so many?"

"Nothing, but make a fool of yourself."

At this juncture, the boy thought it necessary to say something to his father in vindication of himself, and in a whining tone, he said—

"Oh, father, I couldn't help it. I should have been all cut up into bits soon if I had not told all about it. Indeed I should, father."

The father looked at him angrily.

"What do you mean," he said, "by being forced to tell all about it? You



do not mean to tell me that you had anything really to fear from these three gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes, he had, though," said Claude.

"What? You do not mean to tell me that you would have taken the life of a boy for keeping his father's secret?"

"Certainly not. We have a much better plan than that. We did not attempt by threats to induce him to tell, nor would he have yielded to them very probably; but we appealed to his sensations in another way. Did you not hear a noise?"

"I heard some one roaring out as if in pain."

"Oh, lor!" said the boy, "that was me, and wasn't I in pain, neither!"

"Yes," added Claude. "We whipped the secret from him, and found it wonderfully effective."

The man bit his lips, and looked vexed; but after a moments pause, he said—

"It is ridiculous of me to say, now, that I will trust you, for I cannot help it. Pray come in, and make yourselves at home in this room, which has not been intruded into by a stranger for many a month. I am a coiner of base money, I freely confess it; and by terrifying the country people regarding this house, I have made them all ready to swear that it is haunted, and they will not come near it, so I have it all to myself."

"Exactly; but we are not the right sort to be frightened; so you see, here we are; and if you keep quiet, you may go on to-morrow just as usual."

With these words, Claude and his companions stepped into the room, where they found a fire lighted, but no indications of the employment of the coiner. He was quite alone, top, and Claude said—

"Where are your tools? If you manufacture base money, you must have the means of doing so."

"Yes; but as a matter of common caution, when any one approaches the place, I conceal everything as quickly as I possibly can. I do not intend to remain here myself, for, however I have braved it out for a length of time, now I am quite convinced that there are noises in this house which are not human."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I am sorry to feel obliged to give way to such a belief, but circumstances force it upon me."

As he spoke, Claude, without appearing to do so, kept the most careful watch upon the actions of the man without appearing to do so, and he saw that he put his hand behind him, close to the wall, and touched a bell pull that hung to it. The moment he did so, there came from the lower part of the house one of the horrible sounds which had been explained by the boy while he was under punishment, but which the coiner did not know was so well now understood by his visitors.

"Oh, there it is!" he cried. "There it is! Tell me, my good friends—oh, tell me, if you can, what you can ascribe that dreadful noise to? It appals me!"

"What, that bellowing we heard just now?" said Claude, in the most indifferent tone he could assume.

"Yes, oh, yes."

"Oh, that's somebody blowing through a cow's-horn, I am quite convinced. I have no doubt at all upon the subject. It is your son, Bill, I shouldn't wonder."

"The devil!" said the coiner.

"Come—come," said Duval, "it is of no use your trying this sort of thing any longer with us. We don't intend to be frightened out of the house; and if there should happen anything that we don't quite understand, our friend Joe, here, will explain it to us after a little persuasion with a few twigs."

"Oh dear, don't think of it," said Joe.

The coiner shook his head.

"Humph!" he said, "so I find he has told you all. Just you wait a bit, Joe, that's all. You and I can come to an account to-morrow."

"There," said Joe, "I said so. I shall catch it from everybody now, and be flayed alive, that I shall. Oh, I can't stand this sort of thing. It's too horrid."

"Allow me," said Claude, "to intercede for Joe. In a ridiculous kind of way he has been quite sufficiently already punished, I assure you. It was not possible that he could hold out against the inducements we offered to him to tell us all."

"Not possible?"



JACK PERCEIVES THE OFFICERS MAKING FOR THE FARM-HOUSE.

"Oh, no," said Joe, "I'm quite sure of that."

"Under such circumstances, then," added Claude, "and as no real harm will come of it, I hope that you will forgive him, and take no further notice of it."

"I presume I must."

"And Bill, likewise, for he has been subjected to the same persuasion; and under great compulsion that way, he told us where our horses were hidden."

"The rascal ! he came here and said you had gone about yourselves till you heard one of them neighing, and then, of course, lit upon where they were."

"Oh dear, no. It was quite the contrary. It was Bill's neighing that gave us the information."

At this moment a footstep was heard upon the stairs, and then the father cried out—

"Is that you, Bill?"

"Yes, father. Have they gone away?"

"Come here and see."

Bill bounced into the room, and he was tolerably staggered to see Claude and his friends there.

"Well, Bill," said Claude, "where is the cow's-horn?"

"Oh, lor!"

"You did that last bellow pretty well, but it did not come near up to the natural shout that you made when you were tied to the tree below, did it now?"

Bill looked uncommonly sheepish, and Joe, with a look of some satisfaction, said—

"Well, I am glad that you had it as well as me, Bill, so you can't laugh at me now, you know, old fellow, and you told about the *osses*, if I told about father and the cow's-horn."

"Yes," said the coiner, "all is known now; but these gentlemen say they will keep our secret, so get a table ready, and let us see how we can manage to entertain them, my lads. We owe them some sort of reparation for the trouble that we have given them."

"A great deal too much trouble they have had," said Bill. "If I could only have thought they wouldn't be in the way, I should have liked to spare them one part of their trouble, since they have been about this old place."

"And so should I," said Joe, with a rueful look.

"Let bygones be bygones," said Claude. "I will make you some amends for the twig business before I leave the house."

"You are very good, sir," remarked the coiner, "but, indeed, they don't deserve anything. Come, boys, bustle—bustle. We will do the best we can, at all events, although our larder is not very well stocked."

A furious ringing at a bell at this moment claimed the attention of them all.

"Pray," said Claude, "what do you mean by that?"

"I!" cried the coiner. "I know nothing about that, I assure you. It is none of our doing. Oh, I am lost—lost! I shall be taken and dragged to a jail, at once. Oh, save me—save me!"

The terror of the coiner was too genuine to be suspected, and Claude said at once—

"It is possible enough that whoever is ringing the bell in that style, is an enemy of mine, if not of yours. What had better be done in such a case? Surely it must happen that sometimes strangers come to the house?"

"Oh, yes, yes, and then Bill always meets them with terror in his looks, and tells some story about coming to gather blackberries, or something of that sort, and how he has seen something that has nearly frightened him out of his wits; and in nine cases out of ten, the people shuffle off again as quickly as they can."

"Let him try it now, then."

"Go, Bill. Go, my boy, and do your best, and remember that you give us notice with your whistle if they are too obstinate for you. Go and terrify them with some of the stories that I have taught you to tell of the old place."

"I will, I will, father. It ain't very likely that they will think of the sort of way of getting at secrets that these gentlemen did. Oh, dear! me, it's horrid to think of."

## CHAPTER CCXXXVI.

## THE NIGHT OF DANGER IN THE DESERTED HOUSE.

As the boy spoke, with so vivid a recollection, of what he had suffered at the hands of Claude Duval, there came another desperate ring at the large bell at the hall-door, and it became quite evident that whoever was there, was not disposed upon light grounds to leave the spot.

"Go at once, boy," said Claude, "and stop them, if you can. If you cannot, and they should turn out to be enemies of mine, I am not one that will very tamely submit to their dictates. Look to your pistols, my friends."

"Ah!" said the coiner, "you will repel force by force, then?"

"We will."

"Will you tell me, then, who you are? Surely you may trust me, now?"

"If there were any occasion to trust you," said Claude, "I for one should not hesitate a moment; but there can be no possible use in your knowing our names; and if we were to tell you, you have no means of satisfying yourself that we tell you the exact truth in the matter."

"Well, I will be content. Let us listen for Bill's signal. If he be successful in getting rid of whoever is ringing at the door, he will blow a shrill clear whistle, which we cannot but hear if we are only tolerably attentive."

Upon this they all remained profoundly still, listening for the whistle, and in about five minutes it came, breaking in upon the silence with a startling effect.

"All's right," said the coiner; "he has frightened them."

"Are you sure of that?" said Jack.

"Quite sure. We shall have him here soon. Go, Joe, and listen at the head of the stairs for your brothers' footsteps."

Joe left the room, and after he had been gone some little time, the coiner, with an air of uneasiness, said—

"What can have become of the boys? I will go and seek them."

"Hold!" said Claude.

"What would you say? What do you suspect?"

"Nothing. But in order that we may continue in that blessed state, I beg that you will have the goodness to stay with us. You will recollect that we are but very slight acquaintances, indeed, and until we know each other better, I do not like to part with the whole of the family at once."

"As you please. I did not think of anything wrong, for I apprehend that I have much more to dread than you can possibly have. But I hear a footstep. It is one of the boys. Ah, they are both here, I fancy. Yes, here they are."

Bill and Joe both came into the room, now, and the former said—

"I have frightened them away, although there was a sort of constable among them."

"A constable, Bill? You don't mean that surely? How did you know he was one?"

"He said he was, and he said something else, too, that perhaps these gentlemen might not like."

"Whatever it is," said Claude, "let us have it. It is the constable's saying, not yours, so we cannot blame you for it."

"Yes," said the father, "say it at once, Bill."

"Then," said the boy, "the constable said that he was on the look out for Claude Duval, who was in this neighbourhood along with two friends of his, and he said that he would give one hundred pounds to anybody who would give him any information that might place him on their track, if he caught them."

"Claude Duval, the famous highwayman!" cried the coiner.

"Yes, and his two friends."

The coiner glanced knowingly at Claude and his companions, and the two boys, who were cunning beyond their age, likewise looked at them with eyes full of meaning.

"So," said Claude, "all this means now that you suspect I am Claude Duval, and that these are my two friends that the constable spoke of? Is it not so? Speak out."

"It is," said the coiner.

"It is," said Bill and Joe, both in a breath.

"Oh, what mistakes people do make in this world," said Claude. "The idea of mistaking three commercial travellers for three of the most desperate highwaymen! Why, I tell you that that very Claude Duval you speak of, has got the most of my money in his pocket."

"What, then, has he robbed you?"

"He has got possession of all I had, if you call that robbing; and as for my two friends here, they would not like to meet Duval on a dark night all alone, I can tell you."

"There's five hundred pounds reward for him now," said the coiner, "and there was at one time fifteen hundred pounds, but a lot of it has been withdrawn by the different parties as they cooled down in their feelings after he had robbed them. The five hundred pounds, though, is a good sum, and would be no bad day's work."

"Yes, if it could only be earned," said Claude. "But you promised that you would get us something to eat, and we shall be glad to see of what your larder consists. How dark it gets."

"Yes," said Dick, "the twilight is going fast. The long shadows are in the old garden now. We shan't see each other's faces for many minutes longer."

"Light up, Joe," said the coiner. "We don't make much of a flare when the night comes, for fear it should be seen; but we have light enough to look at each other by, at all events. And now let me tell you, that whether you be the persons mentioned by the officer, or not, you are safe here. I am not the man to betray any one, and if ten times five hundred pounds were to be got by it, I should expect every guinea of the ill-gotten money to stick in my throat. I would rather go on at my own trade of coining."

"You are right," said Jack, "for I rather think that something would stick in your throat, if it were not a guinea."

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick.

The coiner affected to laugh heartily, and Joe, by dint of clambering upon a table, lit a solitary candle that was in the remains of what had once been a very handsome lamp, hanging from the ceiling. When lit, that candle gave but a dim light, which was only just sufficient to enable those in the room to see each other, and not to run against its furniture.

"This is darkness visible," said Dick.

"It is, rather; but as Bill is going to the village to make a few purchases, he can bring us a candle or two. Now, Bill, mind you get exactly what is wanted."

"Yes, father."

"And be as smart and as quick as you can; and, of course, as you always are, you will be upon your guard."

"Yes, father."

"Be off with you, then, and get back as soon as you can. Don't forget the brandy and the candles. That will do."

Bill left the room, but he had not been gone a moment or two, when the coiner called out,—

"Bill! Bill! stop, I forgot—I quite forgot: bring in some whitening with you. Confound the boy, he don't hear me. Bill! Bill! I say!"

He ran out of the room and went down the stairs with a great clatter after Bill. Joe remained in the room, and looked rather silly as he eyed Claude out of the corners of his eyes. In the course of a few moments, the coiner came back.

"We use whitening in our work," he said, "and I send to the village so very seldom for fear of exciting any suspicion of who Bill is, that I always wish him to bring in everything at once, if possible. He is asked at times who he is, and



then he names some farmer a good way off, and says he is with him, and that satisfies the people."

"You cannot do better," said Claude.

"Well, in this world, of course, we always do the best we can—ah! ah! All's right, I rather think."

The coiner said those words, 'All's right' so significantly, that Claude and his companions could not help thinking they had some hidden meaning, and if they had, it was, in all probability, one that was not over-favourable to their safety.

Duval would have been glad of an opportunity to say a few words in private to Jack and Dick, to ask, in fact, their opinion regarding the present posture of affairs, and how far they thought the coiner and his hopeful family ought to be trusted, under these circumstances; but he could not very well get such an opportunity. If it had not been for Jack's horse, he would have at once left the place; but anything in the shape of lameness in any one of the animals, upon whose speed and powers so much depended, was not a thing to be trifled with in any shape or way.

The coiner, and the boy whom he named Joe, busied themselves in spreading a cloth upon the table; and from a cupboard in the room that was capitally concealed in the panelling of the wall, they took out some bread and some cold meat. The meat was mutton, and by the manner in which it was cut, it looked wonderfully like as if some grazier had suffered for it.

It had evidently not been cut up according to the ordinary rules of butchers' craft.

"Come," said the coiner; "all you have got to do, is to eat, drink, and be merry, and quite at your ease. Bill will soon be back with the brandy, and more lights."

"I think," said Joe, "that you ought to have told Bill, father, not to put up with the bad brandy at the Rose and Crown, but to ask for something strong."

It was quite evident that Joe in his own mind, looked upon this as something of a joke, for he grinned as he said it, in despite of certain smarting sensations that reminded him of a recent event.

The coiner gave him a kick under the table to be quiet, which made the matter only rather more suspicious.

"Jack," said Claude, "have you any objection to step down stairs, and take a look at the cattle?"

"Not the least; I was thinking of doing so."

Jack rose, and Claude did so likewise.

"We will go together, Jack," he said. "I dare say our kind host will excuse us for a few moments."

"Don't mention it," said Dick, answering for the coiner, who did not seem quite at his ease at this movement of Claude's. Dick knew well enough that Claude wanted to say something to Jack, and he was willing to give him the opportunity of so doing. In another moment they had left the room, and proceeded down stairs to the room where the horses were placed. It was in the same state in which they left it, and Claude was well enough pleased to see that the whole of their horses were laying down and comfortably resting.

"Jack," said Claude, "what do you think of our new friend, the coiner, and his two hopeful sons?"

"That he is as great a rogue as needs be, and that he is bringing them up in the same way," said Jack.

"But does it strike you, Jack, what Master Bill has gone to the village for?"

"Why, no, not exactly."

"Well it does me; and in my humble opinion, Jack, it is for the express purpose of getting together a force to try and take us prisoners."

"You don't really think that, Claude?"

"Indeed but I do."

"Then we must be off at once. My horse's foot would be eventually the

better for a little longer rest; but if it can't have it, it can't, and there's an end of it."

"Do you think the creature could take a canter?"

"Oh, yes, now it could, or gallop, for the matter of that; but, as I say, rest would be a good thing for it, no doubt. If, however, you have suspicions of the sort you name, let us go."

"Recollect, Jack, that they are only suspicions."

"Yes; but the more I think of them, the more likely they look. That he suspects, to the extent of knowing, who and what we are, I can well believe, and the reward has tempted him. He, no doubt, calculates, too, upon his own offences against the law being passed over with impunity, on account of, aiding in our capture."

"That may be, and, doubtless, is a part of his calculation; and so, Jack, I will tell you what I was thinking. It will be, in my opinion, advisable to change the place where the horses are now, and to place them somewhere that we only know of; so that, at the urgency of a moment, we could seek them, and mount and be off."

"Good!"

"Very well. Then I propose that we remain in this house until we have the most irresistible and positive evidence that our suspicions are quite correct."

"Let it be so then, Claude. I only hope we shall get safe out of this abominable house; I think the ghosts that we thought at first were in it were more endurable than the flesh and blood that we really find here."

"Don't say we thought the ghosts were here, Jack," said Claude with a smile.

"Recollect that you had that all to yourself."

"Well—well! We will say no more about that."

Claude and Jack were both such practised hands at the management of horses, that they got all the three animals up, and saddled and bridled, in the course of a few minutes, and then they conducted them quite gently out of the house and fastened them to the lattice-work of a little summer-house in the garden that was close to the lane.

## CHAPTER CCXXXVII.

CLAUDE AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE BELEAGUERED IN THE OLD HOUSE.

"HARK!" said Jack, "I hear something in the lane. I only wish Dick was with us instead of keeping company with that rascal of a coiner, we would be off at once."

"Perhaps it is Bill coming back?" said Claude.

"Listen!—Listen!"

R "You are right, Jack. There are persons in the lane, and they are coming on with such caution, too, that we may well suspect them to be enemies."

"You may depend," said Jack, "that Bill's kind errand to the village has been for the express purpose of getting a force, by the aid of which to arrest us. I half-suspected it before."

"And I, too; but I never like to give way to suspicion, for one's fancy is so very apt to mislead one in circumstances of danger; but now I think there can be but little doubt of the fact. Oh! that Dick were with us! There is no help for it, though, Jack. Let us go back to him, for we have succeeded in getting the horses into a handy position, and that is everything. Come on."

Jack followed Claude quickly into the house again, and they made their way back to the room where Dick was keeping company with the coiner. Upon their entrance, Dick spoke, saying—

"Is all right with the cattle?"

"Quite," said Claude, "and Bill is coming, I think, for we fancied we heard a footstep or two in the lane."

"Oh, I am glad of that," said the coiner, "we shall be so very nice and comfortable, when Bill comes back, I do think."

"Well, so do I," said Claude. "It will be the only thing that it is at all wanting to our felicity. But don't you run considerable risks here, my friend, at times, from the curiosity of strangers, who may come into this house?"

"Oh, no, not much. This room can be well fastened up. Don't you see that there is an iron bar inside the door, here, that I have had the precaution of putting up myself, so that no one here can get in without my leave. But here is Bill."

At this moment that precocious young gentleman found his way to the room: He was quite alone.

"Oh, gentlemen," he said, "I am afraid that your horses are frightened at something."

"Indeed!" said Claude.

"Yes, sir, they are making quite a kind of disturbance on the floor of the room below. I would have gone in and seen what it was, but I was afraid, you see, sir, that they might kick me; but it will be better for you to go at once."

"Why, the fact is, Bill," said Claude, as he stepped to the door of the room, and put up the bar that the coiner had unbarred, "the fact is, my fine fellow, that we always let our horses amuse themselves in their own way."

"Why are you putting up that bar?" said the coiner, with rather a flurried kind of look.

"Oh, just as a little measure of security, that's all, my friend. And now, Bill, we want a little bit of information from you, and we sincerely hope that you will give it to us without putting us to the trouble and you to the pain of a process of getting it, which you know by experience is very efficient, indeed."

"Oh, this is some joke," said the coiner. "Ha! ha! It is some very good joke, indeed, this is."

Bill looked very red and fidgetty.

"I—I don't know anything, gentlemen," he said; "but, of course, if I find I do, I will tell everything to you in a moment, if you will only be so good as to say what it is."

"Certainly, Bill; we won't keep you in suspense about what it is for long, you may depend. How many persons, now, have you brought with you from the village to capture us?"

"How many?"

"Yes. We want to know what force is opposed to us, that we may take our measures accordingly."

"Oh, now, that's too bad," said Bill. "Do you think that I would do such a thing? It's quite wrong, sir—indeed, it is. Why, father don't want people out of the village here, I'll be bound."

"Indeed I do not, my child," said the coiner, with a look of great candour, "and I am quite surprised that the gentlemen should think of such a thing—quite. Oh, it is too bad, after we feel inclined to do all we can to make them comfortable for the night. But come, my son—since the gentlemen think that we are not good and honest company enough for them, we will go to another room, and there pass the night; and in the morning, when they find that all their suspicions of us are groundless, they will then apologise to us for our entertaining them."

"Yes, father," said Bill, in the same canting tone. "It's a shocking thing to be suspected, when you are doing your best to be kind and obliging to people."

"It is, my dear son, but you will find that such is the way of the world, and that virtue and charity must be their own rewards, for the world will not appreciate either. Come, my boy. Let us come away and leave these gentlemen to themselves."

"Wait a bit," said Claude, "we are very much afraid that you will be rather dull without us, so we cannot think of parting with you or Bill."

"But my dear sir, allow me to say ——"

"Whatever you please, in a little while—but at present we have something to do. Jack, have you got a good strong piece of twine?"

"Oh yes," said Jack. "I always carry some nice, round, strong whipcord with me, and here it is."

"Very good; now, Mr. Coiner, I intend to take the liberty of tying your hands behind your back."

"Tying me!—Me!"

"Even so, you; and then, if you are prudent enough to be quite quiet, you will receive no injury, but if you are otherwise, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of wasting a charge of gunpowder in blowing out your brains, if you have got any."

The coiner turned ghastly pale.

"Oh," he said, "this is too bad. What on earth can you suspect of me? Am I not a criminal, and would it be at all possible that I should bring down upon you the police, whose efforts would be as much directed against me as against you?"

"I don't know that," said Claude. "You have a suspicion that I am Claude Duval.—Have you not?"

"I know you are."

"Exactly; and I know likewise, that the government is sufficiently anxious for my apprehension to look over the pettier offences of any one who may be instrumental in giving me up. Come now, confess, Master Coiner, that you sent Bill to the village to get a sufficient force here to apprehend us. Is it not so?"

"Oh, no—no! I appeal to Bill."

"Certainly not," said Bill. "Such a thing would have been very wrong indeed. Oh, my—I could not have done it."

"Very well," said Claude. "Of course it is a matter of fact, and not of opinion. You will be so good as to sit here, Mr. Coiner."

Claude Duval had securely tied the wrists of the coiner together behind his back, and now he placed a chair exactly against the door of the room, and intimated that it was there he was to seat himself. The fellow hesitated for a few moments, and Claude said mildly—

"I have no objection to give you a reason for seating you there. The fact is, that if officers are in the house they will be pretty sure to threaten to fire through the door if we will not open it, and you, as you sit against it, will catch the shots, you see."

"Oh, murder, no!"

"Nay, my friend: if there are no officers in the house, you will be in no danger. Tie him to the chair, Jack, by his ankles to the legs of it, and then he won't be able to get up upon any emergency."

The coiner looked rather agonised, and licked his lips nervously.

"Oh, Bill," he said, "is not this dreadful treatment for a son to see a father endure?"

"It is, father," said Bill, in an oratorical kind of tone, "and the heart that can witness such things without a pang, is—a—a—that is to say—I quite agree with you, father."

"Yes, my dear; and now tell me, Bill—Did you see any suspicious persons prowling about the house, for I rather think you did?—Hem!"

"Why yes," said Bill, taking the hint, "I did, and I was going to tell these gentlemen so, when they all of a sudden took it into their heads that we were acting a base part towards them. As I got to the end of the lane, father, I did fancy I heard footsteps."

"Then," said the coiner, "let us all unite and resist the common enemy. Claude Duval, I will fight by your side, and so will Bill, I feel convinced."

"Yes," said Bill; "and if we all fall, let it be as friends. Oh, father, the

idea of any one suspecting you of sending for the officers is enough to bring tears from a flintstone, it is."

At any other time, when their danger had been less imminent, Claude Duval and his friends would have been highly amused at this conversation between the father and son, for it was about as fine a piece of duplicity as could very well be



CICELY HAS FOREBODINGS OF DANGER TO CLAUDE IN THE FARM-HOUSE.

imagined ; but as it was, the danger that Claude and his friends were in made them exhibit an amount of impatience that they would not otherwise have yielded to, and in a voice that had quite enough passion in its tones to convince them both that he was perfectly serious, Claude spoke—

"This hypocrisy is thrown away," he said. "I and my friends are perfectly



convinced that you have thought it worth your while to betray us. Come, Bill be so good as to confess it at once, and let us know the number of persons who, no doubt, are even now below."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear," said Bill. "How can I tell what isn't?"

"Very good," said Claude. "I think you have got the twigs, Dick?"

"I have. Thinking they might be useful, I brought them into this room, and here they are."

"The twigs!" said the coiner. "What is the meaning of the twigs?"

"Oh, father," said Bill, "they whack a fellow with them till he is glad to say anything to get them to leave off. Really I don't know anything, do I father? There's nothing to know."

"Certainly not, my son, and it will give me much more satisfaction to see you suffer for the truth any amount of punishment, than lose your character by telling a falsehood. Never mind, my son—your reward will be in a better world than this."

"But the whacking," said Bill, "in the meantime, is horrid."

"You should look upon it, Bill, as one of the trials in this life we have all to undergo. I recollect when I was a Methodist preacher in London, I often used to preach upon the necessity of having patience under grievous trials."

"Well, now," said Jack, "if I didn't think that you had been a Methodist parson! Come, Bill—we are sorry to be so very troublesome to you; but having found, by experience, that the only way to make you speak out is to make you smart a little first, you can't blame us."

"If you say anything but what you ought," said the coiner to Bill, "I shall take the first opportunity of thrashing you within an inch of your life."

Bill burst into a howling cry, as Jack laid hold of him by the shoulder, and dragged him over to the table, while Claude began the operation of the twigs.

"Oh, murder! murder! I can't stand it! It's worse than before. I'll tell—I'll tell! There's six officers down stairs, and they mean to have you. They are going to wait for two more, and then come up. Oh, murder! murder! dont—dont—"

"Did your father tell you to bring them?"

"Oh, no—no! Oh, lor! don't—don't!—Yes, he did—he did!"

"Oh, William," said the coiner, "I am surprised at you telling such very infamous falsehoods; I would rather have seen you flogged by those twigs than I would have heard you say what you have."

"Oh, dear, yes," sobbed Bill. "I daresay you would; but I never knew what a whacking was till to-day. It's enough to make a fellow say anything, to lay into him in such a way. Oh, oh! I might as well have told at first without all this. Oh, dear, I have caught it!"

At this moment, some heavy blows came against the door of the room, and a voice from without cried—

"Open—open! Open the door this moment! We won't stand any nonsense! Open the door!"

"Who's there?" cried Claude.

"Oh, never you mind who's there. Open the door, I tell you, and that will be the very best thing you can do. There are eight of us here, and we are all well armed, and won't be trifled with."

"Well," said Claude, "there are five of us here, and we are well armed, and won't be trifled with."

"In the king's name," said another voice, "I summon you to open this door, and surrender yourselves. In the king's name, recollect!"

"Oh, we shall not forget it," said Claude.

"Come, come, it is of no use trifling with the law in this sort of way. We give you fair warning that if the door is not opened within the next few minutes, we shall fire upon you."

"Oh, don't!" howled the coiner.

Claude stepped up to him and placed the muzzle of a pistol against his forehead, as he said, in a low tone—

“Hark you, my friend—it is to us highly desirable that we leave this place as quickly as possible. We are going to adopt an extraordinary means of doing so, and now I warn you that if you utter one half word that in my estimation is calculated to have the effect of letting those without know what we are about, I will blow your brains out without mercy!”

“But don’t let me stay here against the door to be shot.”

“Tell them that you are against it, and then, perhaps, as you brought them here, they will be considerate enough to let you alone.”

Claude now hastily whispered a few words to Dick and Jack, and they at once commenced operations in the room, while he talked to the men without in a loud voice, so as to drown the noise that they made. The coiner, in the way of his business, had several tools about the place, such as files and chisels, and so on. It was astounding with what quickness and dexterity Jack, who was a capital workman, got off some of the skirting band of the room, and then pulled up a couple of the planks that belonged to its flooring. The joists were not very wide apart; but it is astonishing what a small aperture a tolerably bulky body will go through with a little squeezing. It was the intention of Claude and his friends to make a hole in the floor right through to the room below, and so escape. The coiner quickly saw not only what was doing, but he saw, likewise, that it was even likely to be quite successful. If he had only dared to do so, he would that moment have given the alarm; but the threat of Claude was uttered in a tone of voice that convinced him it was anything but a joke, and that it would, without the shadow of a doubt, be carried out, if he should be so indiscreet as to give occasion for it.

He was forced to content himself with conversing in a very low tone of voice, which, as it had no effect upon anybody, and gave the officers without no sort of information, Claude did not take any notice of.

After the floor boards was removed, it was not a matter of any difficulty to knock through the lath and plaster of the ceiling of the room below, and so make a clear aperture.

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## CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ESCAPE FROM THE HAUNTED VILLA.

“All is ready,” said Jack.

“That will do,” said Claude. “You and Dick get through as quietly as you can—I will follow you.”

“This won’t do,” said the officer without. “I will fire through the door if you don’t open it. I tell you, Claude Duval, that we know you are there, and that there is no chance, whatever, for you to escape. We must have you this time. There is but this door to the room, I know, and you cannot escape us. You had better surrender without resisting, and so causing bloodshed—Listen to reason, Duval!”

“So I will. How many did you say there were of you?”

“Eight, and in the course of a few moments there will be twenty more people, at least, from the village. If you surrender now, we will undertake that the villagers shall not treat you and your comrades with any violence; but if you are foolish enough to resist, I cannot answer for the consequences.”

“Where do you want to take us?”

“Direct to London—where you know you will get a fair trial, so I don’t think that, in the long run, you will have anything to complain of. Come, come! be reasonable.”

“Certainly I shall not complain of anything after I am hanged,” said Duval. “I suppose, Mr. Officer, that is what you mean by stopping my complaints? But

I will just say a word or two to my friends, and perhaps, after all, we may think it better to chance what may happen afterwards, than to have a row with you here, as you say you are well armed."

"We are, indeed, Claude Duval."

By this time, Dick had got through the aperture in the floor, and Jack, who was less bulky, was preparing to follow him. Claude made a sign to him to go quickly, and then suddenly taking hold of Bill by the collar, he turned to the corner, saying—

"We are so fond of Bill that we shall take him with us. You may or you may not care for his life; but if you do, you will be careful not to give any alarm to the officers, regarding our mode of escape, until sufficient time has elapsed for us to be off. If you listen, you will be able to hear our horses' feet in the lane. When you do hear such a sound, you may say anything you please; but if before that they come upon us, we shall know that we have you to thank for it; and as it will be all in the family—we will shoot Bill."

"Oh, dear! I'm to be served out for everybody else?" said Bill.

"Exactly so," said Claude. "Below, there!"

To the great consternation of the boy, he dropped him through the aperture in the floor, and Dick caught him below. The officers were getting impatient, and their spokesmen cried—

"Come, now, Duval, none of your tricks, my fine fellow; you can't help yourself, you know that well enough. The bravest thing a man can do is to give in, when he feels he can't help himself."

"I think so, too," said Claude. "Wait a minute, that's all. You will soon get your answer, and I hope it will be satisfactory to you."

With these words, Claude himself got through the hole in the floor, and alighted safely on his feet in the room below.

"All's right," said Jack. "Let us be off, now, as quickly as we possibly can. How shall we get Bill along?"

"I'll manage that," said Dick, as he took hold of one of Bill's ears. "Now, my boy, the more trouble I have in getting you along with us, the harder I pinch, that's all."

"Oh, I'll come—I'll come," said Bill. "Anything but the twigs. I never was so served out as I have been to-day. I'll come along as quick as you like—indeed I will. But—but——"

"But what, you young sinner?"

"I'm afraid—that is, I suspect——"

"Well, what are you afraid of, and what do you expect?"

"That the officers found out where your horses were in the room close to here, and put 'em away somewhere."

"No, you don't suspect any such thing, my dear boy. Bill, you know, you rascal, that you told them where they were; but for your special gratification, you will find that we are one too many for you, my boy, and we removed them ourselves; so we shall get clear off in spite of you."

Bill groaned.

During this little bit of conversation between Dick and Bill, the whole party had moved on at a rapid pace, and getting into the room where the horses had been, they left it again by one of the windows, and rapidly crossing the garden, found the three animals quietly waiting for their masters by the little gate to which they had been tied by their bridles. To mount was the work of a moment with the three friends; and then Dick got Bill up behind him, saying—

"We are going at a decent pace, Bill; so if you don't want rather an awkward tumble, you will do well to hold on like death, for we mean to give you a little ride, as a kind of recompense for all your kindness towards us."

"Off and away! Hurrah!" cried Claude.

They were in the lane. The impulse was given to the horses—Jack was a little afraid of the lame foot of his steed, but he found that it went much better than he expected; so they got off at a canter that covered a great deal more

ground than it seemed to do. Bill was in the greatest fright imaginable, and clung to Dick as though he considered that was the only hold he had of life. If he could only have been sure of alighting in some soft place, and escaping the horse's heels, he would have gladly done so; but he dreaded to make the experiment; so he continued a prisoner, notwithstanding it was quite at his own option not to do so. The end of the lane was quickly gained, and Claude and his friends took the high road to London, well enough pleased at their escape.

They rode four miles without a pause, and then Jack cried out—

"Can we ease the pace a little? Pursuit is out of the question, and I am rather afraid of my horse's foot."

"Certainly," said Claude, "there is no hurry now; but what shall we do with our friend Bill?"

"Oh, let me go, now," said Bill. "Do let me go now, and I will never do so any more—indeed I won't."

"You are the most treacherous young rascal," said Claude, "that I ever remember to have come across. In the most cool and villanous manner you have tried to do all the mischief you possibly can; and when you were defeated at one scheme, you tried another; so that if we were even to take your life, it would be no more than what you fully deserve; for it was at our lives that all your plans and actions were aimed. You are an educated lad, I can see, although at times you have thought proper to put on the appearance of a country lout, and to affect the language of one. Now, say freely what you think we ought to do with you?"

"You have got away," said Bill, "and so I think you ought to let a poor boy go now. Besides, you know, I caught it rather with those twigs, and I feel it yet."

"A good job, too, Bill. Now, we will be more generous to you than you deserve, rascal as you are. That you will come to some bad end it don't require a conjurer to prophesy. Is that a labourer's cottage a little ahead there, Jack?"

"It is, and a man is at the door of it."

"Very good. Let us speak to him."

"But you mean to let me go now?" said Bill. "It will be a long trot back, you know, and before I get there, you can be half a dozen miles off, so I can't do you any harm if I wanted."

"We shall see, Bill—we shall see."

They all rode on till they came to the cottage that was on the rode-side, and as it was not far off the dawn, they could just see it, and the little patch of garden-ground that joined it to the main-road. Indeed, in the eastern sky there was already a long streak of strange coloured light, which was at each moment widening, so that in a very little while the new day would be in the heavens.

"You are early up, my friend," said Claude, to the man who was at the cottage-door, and who seemed to be finishing his toilette there.

"Yes, sir," he replied; "my work begins as soon as I can see it, so, you see, I am obliged to be up betimes."

"Ah, to be sure. Well, have you any objection to earn a guinea in the next half-hour? It will be easily earned, and it will be doing a good action beside."

"Objection, sir? Oh, dear, no. I haven't so much as seen a guinea for I don't know when, sir. I hope it is nothing wrong that you want me to do?"

"Certainly not. Don't I tell you it's a good action?"

"Ah, then, sir, I shall be main pleased to do it."

"Very good. You see this lad? He is a very bad fellow, and if we did what was right, we ought to take him to prison. He has tried to get us impeded upon our journey by pretending that we are highwaymen. Now, do we look like it?"

"Oh dear, no, sir."

"Well, we think that a little wholesome correction will do him more good than anything else, so if you will give him a capital flogging, and then let him go, you will deservedly earn the guinea of us."

"What!" shouted Bill. "More of it! Oh dear, no. I have had enough of that to last me all my life. Oh, let me off, do! I promise better behaviour for the future."

"You hear him? Will you earn the guinea?"

"Won't I? that's all!" said the labourer, advancing to the side of Dick's horse, and collaring Bill. "If I don't give him a good lesson, it shan't be my fault. Come, my young fellow, it will all be for your own good in the long run."

"There is the guinea, then," said Claude, who was hardly able to restrain his laughter at the rueful face that Bill put on. "I will trust entirely to your honour to perform your part of the bargain; and so good morning, for we are rather in a hurry."

With this, Claude and his friends trotted off again, leaving Bill in the hands of the labourer. When they had got to some little distance, they simultaneously stopped to laugh.

"Upon my word," said Dick, "although that young rascal fully deserves his punishment, it was enough to make a cat laugh to think how he had been half-flayed already. You may depend upon it such a retribution will not again overtake him in this world, and the chances really are, that it will make him very cautious for the future how he engages in acts of treachery."

"If," said Claude, "his punishment has that effect, we are not his worst friends, after all. Hillo! what's that?"

"Why, Bill howling, to be sure."

Claude laughed, and so did Jack, and they all three went off again at a hard trot, that quickly took them out of hearing of the guinea's worth of castigation that Bill was duly receiving at the hands of the conscientious labourer.

They had not got far before they met a man on horseback, who, the moment he got up to them, cried out—

"Are they taken yet, gentlemen—are the highwaymen taken? I have been for some help, and there's half a dozen gentlemen on horseback coming."

"It's a pity they are too late," said Claude, "for the highwaymen are not only on the road again, and perfectly free, but one of them is about to blow your brains out, if you have got any."

To the intense horror of this man, who had so unexpectedly spoken, Claude held a pistol to his head.

"Oh, spare me," he said; "spare me; I have a wife and family!"

"You ought to have thought of them," said Claude, "before you made yourself so busy in hunting to the death, if you could have done it, others who have done you no harm; but you will be spared on condition that you ride on with us, and when we meet the mounted men, you spoke of, you will be so good as to pass us as friends of yours. Upon no other terms will I spare you."

"Of course," he said, turning very white, "I accede to those terms. If I have been a fool, I must take the consequences."

"Just so," said Claude; "and now come on. Ah, there are your friends, I presume?"

"They are, and but for my folly, Claude Duval would have been taken to-day."

"It is possible; but the best thing you can do now is to provide for your own safety. Mark me, when I say a thing, I mean it, and if you attempt any tricks, I will shoot you with as little compunction as I would a mad dog."

At this moment half a dozen men rode up in haste, and the foremost of them cried out—

"Hilloa, Simpson, I thought you were in such a hurry to get back that you could not wait for us, and here you are with your horse's head the other way!"

"Why, these are friends of mine! No, hang it! They are no such thing. Blaze away! One can but die once."

Duval was too much struck with the courage of this man to find it in his heart to deliberately murder him, although he had said that he would do so. He lowered his pistol as he said—



"I spare you, and leave it to your conscience to do as you please. You can go."

"Then, by Heaven, I repent that I have said a word."

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried one of the fresh arrivals. "Are you all out of your senses?"

"No!" said Claude, in a voice of thunder. "The meaning of it just is, that I am Claude Duval, and you stop the road, gentlemen. Forward, my gallant friends! Charge them!"

Without, then, giving the six, or rather, we ought to say, the seven horsemen, time to think what to do, Claude and his two companions dashed forward among them, and succeeded in making their way through them. The man who had been Claude's prisoner for so brief a space of time, shouted out—

"Off with you, Duval, and good luck to you. I won't pull a trigger or move an inch after you."

The others were by no means so scrupulous, for in the course of the next few moments three or four pistol bullets rattled about the ears of our adventurers. Claude felt that one of the bullets touched his cheek, and a slight exclamation from Dick led him to think that he was wounded.

"We cannot stand this," said Duval. "Fire upon them!"

He turned, and so did Dick and Jack. They all three fired, and then, amid the smoke of their own pistols, without waiting to see what execution they had done, they went off at a gallop.

After this taste of the quality of the highwaymen, no one seemed very much inclined to follow them. After half-an-hour's fast riding, they thereupon thought proper to decrease their speed, and examine into the amount of damage done by the pistol bullets.

"Is any one touched?" said Claude.

"No," cried both Jack and Dick, "there's no mischief worth the speaking of done, at all events. Let us push on for London at once, or the road will be too hot for us soon."

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## CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

CLAUDE GOES HOME FOR A FEW DAYS, AND THERE MEETS WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

CLAUDE's idea was to get to Ealing now as quickly as he could, and taste the luxury of repose for a day or two at the farm, where Cicely, he knew, would be overjoyed to see him.

He felt a little backward, though, in saying as much to his two friends, so he rather hinted it than absolutely said it.

"I suppose, now," he said, "you would think me but a lazy fellow if I were to lie by for a day and a night at Ealing? Come, speak the truth. Will you relish being my guests for a little time at the old farm, or has the road too many attractions for you both?"

Jack looked at Dick and laughed. "The road is all very well," he then said, "but if you, Claude, will really take us into comfortable keeping for a day or two, I don't know anything that will be a more desirable change. What do you say, Dick?"

"I say yes to the proposition, with all my heart," responded Dick, and from his manner, it was quite clear that he spoke his real sentiments, and not from any show of complaisance to Claude Duval merely.

"Why, then," said Claude, "you both of you do me a very great kindness, and since that is all settled, let us push on as fast as we conveniently can."

"Recollect my horse's foot," said Jack.

"Certainly. No one would be less willing to forget any ailment of a horse, than I. We will entirely accommodate ourselves, Jack, to your horse's con-

venience and pace, and you shall go first, so that we may do so with a degree of certainty that we could not otherwise aim at."

"That will do," said Jack. "I don't mean to say that I am going to crawl, but I like the creature to have its own pace when it really has anything the matter with it. And now, Claude, just see what a nice little rent in the sleeve of my coat one of the bullets of our acquaintances on the road has made."

"It has, indeed. An inch deeper, Jack,—"

"And I should have had a broken arm; but a miss, you know, as the old saying has it, is as good as a mile."

"It is, Jack, and take things on the long run, I will say it, that we have all of us the most extraordinary luck."

"Well, now," said Dick, putting on a very philosophical look, "you may call it luck, if you like, but I rather differ from you there. I think it solely arises from the fact of our not flinching."

"Indeed, Dick?"

"Yes. You see when a bullet leaves the barrel of a pistol, it takes a particular course, in a curved line, and, of course, if you or I happen to be in the line, we catch it; but there's many chances to one that we are not in it, and as we keep steady, it passes us, when most folks, if they fancy a bullet is coming, dodge about in an extraordinary manner, with the idea of avoiding it, when, in point of fact, by so doing, they are only giving it a further chance of hitting them."

"There's something in that," said Jack.

"To be sure there is," cried Claude, laughing; "but not much, for you forget, Dick, that you may dodge out of the way of the bullet as well as into it."

"Never mind that. It is not a good plan to try to get out of the way of a shot; and I have heard folks who have been in the army, and who have heard them whistling around them, say the same thing. Those who have tried all sorts of schemes to avoid the shots, have almost always caught one, while those who took no notice have escaped."

"Well," said Claude, "I shall think it a capital theory so long as I am not hit; but the moment I am, I am afraid I shall alter my opinion upon the subject. But here are some passengers. What are we to do, my friends?"

"Let us be respectab'le, for once in a way, and allow them to go in peace," said Jack. "There is a coach, too; but it is a poor-looking affair, after all, and at no time would be worth the stopping."

"I am of your opinion."

The carriage which had induced these remarks was, in good truth, rather a miserable affair. It was drawn by a horse that certainly ought to have been past all service; and the set-out, take it for all in all, was of so violently shabby a character, that you would not have given a five pound note for the whole of it. Some sort of groom, or serving-man, went in front of it, mounted upon such another horse as the miserable-looking one that drew the carriage. He had on a faded livery, out at the elbows, and looked the picture of starvation.

"A luxurious turn-out, with a vengeance," said Dick to Claude.

"Yes. The carriage-windows are close shut. Shall we take a peep in before letting it go?"

"Oh, it is not worth while."

"Well, perhaps it is not. Let it pass. We are too near our place of destination to make it worth while to get into a disturbance for nothing."

Acting upon that principle, they did not offer the slightest obstruction to the passage of the carriage, and when it was fairly past they did not think themselves called upon to restrain their laughter at the odd character of the whole equipage.

"I'd lay any sum, now," said Dick, "that that affair belongs to some old maid who, perhaps, has seen better days, or who, even upon slender resources, tries to get the reputation of keeping a carriage, with the hope that the very name of it will attract some loving old bachelor."

Both Claude and Jack agreed that this might very likely be the case, and in a few minutes they dismissed all consideration of that carriage from their thoughts.

Little did they suspect that its passing them was, in reality, to be the most important event that had happened to them for some time, and that it was to Claude Duval a matter of almost life or death.

Within that miserable vehicle, in company with an old toothless hag who had



THE THREE ADVENTURERS HIDE FROM THE OFFICERS IN THE STABLE.

taken him into a kind of keeping, was no other than Tom Brereton, and through numerous interstices in the blinds, he saw with ease the face of Claude Duval.

Well did Tom Brereton know the large rewards that were still offered by the government for Claude's apprehension, and with an ardent wish to earn them, he only waited until the carriage was out of sight of the three friends, in consequence of a turn in the road, and then, making an excuse to the old lady, who was

half asleep, he hastily alighted, and slinking along by the road side, he continued to keep Claude and his friends in sight.

The important consequences of this system of espionage practised by Tom Brereton will soon develop themselves, and, in the meantime, we accompany the unsuspecting trio to the farm at Ealing Common, where Cicely was waiting day by day, with the hope of hearing the well known sound of Claude Duval's voice.

Claude always approached this home of Cicely's with the greatest possible caution. He not only did so for her sake and for his own safety, but he considered that he owed it to the people who granted to her an asylum in so generous a spirit, to be as careful as possible that they should not suffer from it.

The common mode of proceeding which Claude adopted was first of all to ride right across the common, then abruptly to turn and go about a third of the way back to the commencement of a bridle-path, that led to the back of the farm, and where, in a very few moments, he could completely hide himself from all observation among the trees.

In daylight, such precautions were much more necessary than at night; and now, little fancying that any one was specially watching him, he went with his two friends by the route we have mentioned, with the full idea that he was being eminently successful in getting to his destination unobserved by any one.

Tom Brereton, however, had, at the commencement of the common, got right into a hedge, from the recesses of which he watched the whole proceeding.

"Good," he said. "If I don't have Duval now I'm a Dutchman. There is only one house beyond all those trees, and that is where he has gone to. Now for London."

It so happened that, in a few moments, a stage-coach that came from Wycomb made its appearance on the common, and Tom Brereton, hailing it, got up on the outside, and was soon at a good pace whirled into the metropolis.

In the meantime, Claude conducted his two friends to the little gate that led to the stable-yard of the farm; and then turning to them, he said, with a pleased look—

"This place, amid all the storms and disasters of my life, is a true haven of rest for Cicely."

"Long may it continue so," said Dick.

"Amen!" said Jack; and he did not say it lightly or jocularly, but with the real feeling that the word should inspire.

"I thank you both for your good wishes," added Claude. "Only once has this house been invaded by the enemy, and to only one is the secret confided beyond you two and the inhabitants of the place; and yet, each time that I come here, I tremble for the result, and have a dread that some one may, after all, have an eye upon me."

"Banish such a fear," said Jack. "I looked back upon the common, and no one was at hand."

"And I looked forward," said Dick, "and all was clear."

"Well," said Claude, with a satisfied look, "I do believe that, for once in a way, I may be content, and consider myself quite safe."

It was strange that, upon the only occasion when his danger was very great, Claude should consider that he was unusually safe, and free from all sorts of peril.

Claude was so familiar to the place in which he was now, that he opened the gate, and rode in, accompanied by his friends. It was only the angry barking of a dog that summoned some of the family out to the yard to see what was amiss; but at the sight of Duval, he was hailed with pleasure. In the course of a few moments Cicely, looking quite fresh and blooming, was in the farm-yard, and the pleased flush upon her face at the sight of Claude lent her more beauty.

"Thrice welcome, Claude!" she said. "Thrice welcome!"

"You are quite well, dear Cicely?"

"I am, indeed. But tell me—is this a mere passing call, or can you and will you stay awhile?"

"I thought of staying a day or two."

"Ah! that, indeed, is welcome news. And your friends, too—they will stay and take a rest in the old place?"

"Yes. I have ventured upon saying that they would be welcome here, and I think and hope I have not been wrong in doing so, Cicely?"

"Far from wrong.—But come in all of you—the whole of the family are not at home; but those that are will make you most welcome. This way—this way. We have cut a new path, you see, Claude, right through the flower garden."

Poor Cicely was really so delighted to see Claude again, quite well, and to hear that he purposed staying a day or two at the farm, that she ran on talking and hardly knew what she said while the bright tears stood in her eyes, and she could have wept for joy.

Some of the lads took charge of the horses, and the three adventurers, little expecting what was brewing for them in London, quite gave themselves up to what they considered the serenity of the hour and the place, and did not dream of danger.

A hasty dinner was prepared in the ample kitchen of the farm-house; and to just take a peep at the party assembled there, no one could possibly have believed that three out of the lot had prices set upon their heads by the authorities.

Time soon flies when it is laughed away in agreeable society, so that the remainder of the day passed, and the evening shadows crept over tree and flower of the old farm, before Claude or his two friends thought it possible it could be so near at hand. Even Cicely seemed to share in the general confidence that all was safe; and, contrary to her habit, she did not suffer herself to entertain any of those gloomy fancies that usually beset her concerning the safety of Claude.

Alas! what a fatal serenity that was.

"I tell you what we think of doing," said Claude, as they all walked in the flower garden, to watch the last rays of the setting sun. "We will remain here until midnight to-morrow night, so that that will make two whole days and one whole night, and the greater part of the evening of the second day. Will that do, Cicely?"

"Ah, Claude, if you must then go, it shall and must do; but I lead a life of continual apprehension when you are away."

"Nay, then, that you should not. You should reflect upon the many dangers I have gone through, and you should tell yourself that it is hardly possible that I should again encounter such serious ones, so that you should consider me safer now than I have been."

"No, Claude, I cannot reason myself into any such fallacy. It is here that you have run the most serious past risks; but they, in their remembrance, only suggest what dangers may be still to come."

"But recollect that now," said Dick, "we go together, so that we are really strong enough to repel slight dangers."

"And, if I mistake not," said Jack, "we mean to keep together, too. Is it not so, Claude?"

"With all my heart."

"And with all mine," said Dick. "It is a lonely thing to be by one's self upon the road, knowing that the whole of society is in arms against you, and that in every man you see an enemy, while there is no one with whom you dare to exchange a kindly word."

"I have felt that," said Claude; "but then my heart used to fly here—(he pressed Cicely's hand as he spoke)—and then I was not lonely, but full of busy and happy thought."

Cicely looked at him gratefully for that speech. It was a tribute to her affection which she felt she deserved, but which was none the less delightful and welcome upon that account.

"You know where our horses are, Claude, in case of any alarm?" said Jack, with a sudden seriousness.



"Oh, yes; but it is fit and proper that you both should know likewise, although, as for any alarm here, I think, for a very small sum I would consent to insure your safety. What makes you, Jack, all in a moment, begin to have apprehensions?"

"That I cannot tell you, Claude. All I can say is, that the idea suddenly crossed my brain, and beyond that I know nothing; and as for apprehensions, I certainly cannot take upon myself to say that I have any."

"Well, we will have a peep at the horses for all that, Jack, and I am glad that you thought of it, for in my feeling of over-security in this place, I dare say it would not have crossed my mind to take you to the stables. But come on, we will go at once."

It was certainly strange that some obscure notion of danger should lay hold of Jack's mind at such a juncture; but it certainly did, and he could not shake it off either. The stables were duly visited, where the three horses were enjoying themselves with every luxury that could be placed before them. Jack would not say anything else to damp their great hilarity, for, to tell the truth, he felt rather ashamed of his own fears, and he dreaded that Claude and Dick should begin to banter him about them.

By ten o'clock they all retired to rest, and a profound silence reigned throughout the farm.

## CHAPTER CCXLI.

SHOWS HOW TOM BRERETON WENT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

WE will attend very briefly to the proceedings of Tom Brereton after he had fairly seen, or as good as seen, Claude Duval and his two friends housed in the farm.

For once in his life, Tom was determined to do the thing well, and as he knew that his information was very acceptable indeed in certain high quarters, he made up his mind as the Wycomb Coach rattled down Oxford Street, to go to the best market he could with his news, and make a thorough good bargain for himself.

"I won't mince the matter," said Tom. "I will go to the Under-Secretary of State at once, and tell him all about it, and get him to move in the business himself. There can be no cavilling then about the reward, or about who gave the first information, and all that sort of thing. Yes, I'll do it that way."

Full of this intent, Tom got off the coach at the corner of Bond Street, and making his way up that then much more fashionable thoroughfare than it is now, he turned into Grafton Street, where he happened to know the private house of the official personage he wished to see was situated.

"I'll see the secretary himself," muttered Tom; "and I will tell him all about it, and if I can't see him, I won't tell it at all; but when they find me obstinate, they won't hold out, I know; so it will be all right."

Now, this was a very good notion of Tom's, for if he had gone to a police office, he would just have got surrounded by officers, who would each have strove to have some hand in the affair, so that in all probability, with their eagerness and their avarice, the matter might have been completely spoiled; but, by going to the highest authority, he at once established his own position in the matter, as well as keeping it out of low hands in the carrying out.

There was only one little difficulty, and that was, the manner in which official personages are surrounded and made difficult of access—a fact that we cannot wonder at, for if they were at all easy of access, the space of time they would have left for the transaction of real business would be small, indeed.

Just at that time, though, it so happened that the political aspect of the country was rather stormy, and there were many rumours of plots against the government, and conspiracies, for the purpose of assassinating the king; so that in th

respect, Tom, as will be seen, had an advantage, and his application to see the secretary was not so likely to be slighted as under quieter circumstances.

Giving his hat, then, a more knowing look, by placing it rather on one side of his head, and opening his waistcoat a button or two, to show his well-pleated shirt-frill, Tom strutted up to the door of the secretary, and executed a rather alarming knock, after which, seeing a bell-handle with a little brass plate under it, upon which were the words, "Ring also," Tom laid hold of it, and worked away at it until the door was flung open by a couple of powdered flunkies, who thought that some very great person must be at the door, and yet they wondered they had not heard the sound of carriage wheels.

"A-hem!" said Tom, setting his arms a-kimbo. "Is his lordship within?"

The two footmen were so completely astounded at any one on foot, and with anything but an aristocratic air asking if his lordship were within, that one of them did nothing but stare at Tom Brereton in the face, while the other one walked completely round him in mute wonder.

"Come—come, flunkies!" said Tom, "no nonsense. I want to see his lordship, and I must and I will."

"And, pray, sir," said one of the footmen, with an affected drawl, "who may you be?"

"How do I know," said Tom, "who I may be? I only know who I am. I have business of the greatest importance with his lordship, and I won't tell any one else on any account."

"Ah!" said the footman, taking a pinch of snuff. "Does it concern the—the country?"

"Rather," said Tom; "the country roads in particular."

Tom Brereton took care to utter these last words rather aside, so that they did not reach the ears of the footmen.

"Ah!—ah!" said his interrogator, "in that case you will tell me, and I will tell his lordship's secretary's clerk, and he will tell his lordship's secretary, and he will tell his lordship. Ah!"

"Very well," said Tom Brereton, buttoning his coat slowly up to the chin, and then giving a decisive blow to his chest, "very well; just as you please. When the story all comes out, and there is the very devil to pay about it, it will then be fully understood that I was repulsed at his lordship's door by his lordship's footmen. Very good, indeed!"

"Stop!—stop! Ah—that is to say, stop!"

"What for? What is the use of stopping?"

The two footmen looked at each other with rather puzzled expressions, and then the one with the snuff-box, as he regaled himself with a pinch, said—

"Sir, it—ah—may, or it—ah—may not, be quite right and proper that you should see somebody, and so you shall; I must take upon myself the rather frightful and—ah—I may say, serious responsibility of introducing you to somebody."

"You had better," said Tom.

"And—ah—if it should turn out to be really—ah—nothing of any importance, I shall never forgive myself, and his lordship is very likely to say to me, 'Thomas, you are—a—a—'"

"An ass!" said Tom.

"Upon my life, sir," said Thomas, rapping the lid of his snuff-box. "Upon my life, I must say that you take very great liberties, indeed, sir—very great liberties, I may say."

"I tell you what it is," said Tom Brereton, "if you don't be quick about introducing me to your master, it will be too late, and then I won't exactly say what the consequences may chance to be."

Upon this intimation, the gentlemen in plush bestired themselves. They had of late heard so much about conspiracies and plots against the government, that they were quite in a state of agony upon that subject, and the idea that their per-

tinacious visitor might have something frightful to disclose in that line, had been gradually taking possession of their faculties for the last five minutes.

"Yes. Oh—ah—certainly," said the one with the snuff-box. "Just step this way, sir, if you please."

"All's right," said Tom, as he again carefully unbuttoned his coat, and flung it open with an air of importance. "All's right now, I rather think—ahem!"

Strutting after the footman with all the importance of his little despicable nature, Tom flattered himself that at last he had done the thing rather cleverly, and that not only should he achieve his revenge against Claude Duval for the many slights he had put upon him, and the frights he had given him, but that he should gain a good round sum of money by the transaction.

"Ah," he muttered to himself, "this is the way to do business, I rather think—hem! Always go to the fountain-head, and then you are sure to be all right—hem!"

The footman conducted Tom into a waiting-room upon the ground floor, which was fitted up upon the same principle that the waiting-rooms of physicians houses are, namely, with everything of so big and bulky a character, that if the cleverest appropriators of other folks' goods that London could produce got into the place, he would not be able to take anything away with him.

"If you will be so obliging as to wait a few minutes, sir," said the footman, whose respect for Tom, in proportion as he thought he might really have something important to tell, increased, "you will be attended to."

"Oh, don't hurry—a minute or two, or perhaps three," said Tom, "may not be of much consequence; but three is the outside, young man—quite the outside, now."

"Certainly, sir—of course, sir—no doubt of it."

Tom was left alone, and full of the importance of the tidings that he came with, he threw himself into an easy chair, and strove to look as important as though he were himself a secretary of state, and the owner of the house into which he had made his way.

"This affair," he said, "will strike up a kind of acquaintance between me and the government, so that it will be obliged to provide for me as it provides for other great men out of the taxes. I don't at all like paying taxes, but I have no objection in the world to being provided for out of them. Indeed it is rather a pleasant idea than otherwise, I should say, and I shall feel it my duty to——"

"Well, sir, what is it?" said a voice.

Tom sprang up from the easy chair, with the full conviction that his lordship was before him, for there stood a quiet looking man in black, with a pen in his hand, which looked, Tom thought, very Secretary-of-State-like.

"Oh, my lord," said Tom, "I beg your lordship ten thousand pardons; but the fact is, I was rather just a little tired, you see, and so I sat down. That was all, my lord, upon my word."

"It's of no sort of consequence—you are quite welcome. I am not his lordship; but you can, with perfect safety and propriety, tell me what you come about."

"You are not his lordship?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I'll see you at the bottom of the sea before I tell you. I have news for the ear of the Secretary of State. I came here to tell it to him, and if he won't listen to it, I can go away again, that's all, so tha's flat."

"But my good sir——"

"It's of no use your speaking to me—not a bit. Not a bit. Hold your row. It's of no use, I tell you, at all. I won't tell you or anybody but the Secretary of State himself."

"Very good, sir. Is it a matter connected with the state of the country?"

"It is a matter connected with the state of the country—roads," added Tom to himself. "Of that I give you my most particular word of honour."

"Very good, sir. Will you be so good as to wait?"

The gentlemanly-looking man in black left the room, and once again Tom Brereton sunk into the recesses of the easy chair, and then wagging his head to and fro for a few moments, he said, in what he considered was an enormously sagacious tone of voice—

“Ha, ha! They won't get the better of me. Oh, no! I am not going to let any whipper-snapper of a clerk stand between me and the reward. Oh, no!”

“Well, sir!” said a voice.

Tom started to his feet again, and beheld a bald-headed elderly man, elegantly dressed in evening costume, in the centre of the room. “That's the fellow!” thought Tom, and he executed a very low bow.

“Your lordship is very good,” said Tom. “I hope I have the pleasure of seeing your lordship quite well, and—and that is to say quite well?”

“Pray, sir, do not mistake,” said the bald-headed man in the most bland accents. “I have not the honour of being his lordship. I am only his lordship's secretary.”

“The devil!”

“Sir?”

“Oh, no offence; but I thought really that I had got the ear of the right man at last. And pray, sir, who was the gentleman with the pen in his hand who came here only a little while ago?”

“That was my clerk.”

“Your clerk?”

“Precisely so, sir. I hope and trust that I may be permitted to have a clerk without that point being at all offensive to you?”

“Oh, you may have a dozen; but I tell you what it is, Mr. Secretary, I don't mean to let you know what I come about any more than your clerk. I have got a piece of information to give to the Secretary of State, and if I do not see him and tell him personally, I can carry it away again with me, and the country—roads” added Tom in a low tone, “must take the wretched and most diabolical consequences.”

The secretary looked grave.

“Allow me to assure you, sir,” he said, “that whatever you say to me goes directly to the Secretary of State, without anything being added or taken from it. It is my special duty to be to that distinguished personage a faithful reporter of facts, and under such circumstances I do hope that—”

“Bow! wow!—don't bother! I tell you, I won't, and there's an end of it if I had only known there had been half so much bother as this, I would not have come at all. But I can go—yes, sir, I can go as I came, with my information here, sir—here!”

Tom rather fiercely struck his forehead as he spoke, and the very polite secretary looked rather puzzled to know what to do in the matter. After a pause, he said,—

“Well, sir: pray be patient for a few minutes, and I will see what can be done. I will speak to his lordship, and very probably, as you say it is information connected with the country, he may feel inclined to see you. Pray be seated, sir.”

## CHAPTER CXXLII.

### THE ALARM AT THE FARM.—CLAUDE'S GREAT DANGER.

TOM BRERETON was again alone.

“Ah!” he said, “I shall do it at last, in spite of them all, I know—the vagabonds! Lord, I know 'em well! They would swear me out, among them, that I had never been here, after a little time, and pocket the reward among them.”

One would really think that Tom Brereton must have, at one time or another, been in public life, to have acquired so capital and accurate a notion of the mo-

rality of it; and we cannot but admire the perseverance with which he insisted upon seeing the secretary, who could not very well flinch from any promises he might make concerning the reward for the apprehension of Claude Duval.

Tom was determined that this time he would keep an eye upon the door, so that when the secretary should appear, he might not be taken by surprise; and it was well that he did so, for in the course of about three minutes, the door opened, and an odd-looking, red-faced, vulgar looking man bustled into the room.

Tom stared at him in amazement.

"Now, sir, what is it?" said the man; "you would insist on seeing me, and here I am."

"What, are you his lordship?"

"I am the Secretary of State for the Home Department, sir, and I shall feel obliged if you will be brief in what you have to say to me, as my time is very much occupied."

Tom shook his head.

"How am I to know you are the Secretary of State? You say you are, but how am I to know it?"

"Tut—tut; what folly this is, to be sure. Then, sir, do you see that portrait on the chimney piece?"

"Oh, yes, I see it."

"Well, look at it, and then look at me; it is flattered a little, but still is sufficiently like for you to see that it is intended for me, and it is not very likely that any one else's portrait but that of the master of the house hangs in such a place. Are you satisfied?"

Tom made a low bow, as he said,—

"I am, my lord."

"Very good; that's settled. Now, sir, what have you to say? what is your information?"

"Well, then, my lord, as I feel now quite convinced that you are my lord, and as there can be no possible mistake about it—"

"Quick, sir—quick."

"And as by the portrait, which is nearly as ugly—I mean nearly as handsome—as your lordship, it is quite easy to perceive that—"

"Do you want to keep me here all the day, sir? I tell you my time is appropriated to the last moment. It is as much as I can do to eat or drink, or sleep, sir; and yet, here you are dallying with the minutes, as though they were of not the slightest consequence."

"Then, my lord, I beg to state, that if you will make me feel sure of the reward, I will take anybody you like to send to where they may lay their hands upon Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"The very same."

"And why, in the name of all that is abominable, sir, could you not take your information to the police-office?"

"Oh, my lord, you don't know what rogues they are at police-offices. They would have jewed me out of the reward as safe as eggs are eggs, so I thought I would come to you."

"A pretty affair, indeed, that I am to be consulted about thief-catching! At the same time, I admit, sir, that the government is anxious for the apprehension of this Claude Duval. As long as he remains at large, it is a disgrace to the police of this country."

"Just so, my lord."

"And he has committed some of the most daring and violent attacks upon persons in a high station of life that it is possible to conceive. Sir, I do not at all undervalue your information; but, yet, there was no occasion for such an amount of pertinacity in seeing me upon the subject."

"Oh, dear, yes, there was! I have no notion of not getting the reward, you see,



my lord. My name is Tom Brereton, and I really want the money, I assure you ; so I hope I may have your lordship's word that if I really do give Duval into the hands of the officers, I am to get what has been offered for his apprehension ?”

“Most assuredly.”

“That's all right, then. It's as good as settled ; and I tell you what I can do



THE PURSUIT FROM THE FARM-HOUSE.

as well—I can give you two other highwaymen that are with him into the bargain, for I happen to know where the whole three of them have gone, and no mistake !”

“There is one thing, Mr. Tom Button,” said his lordship, “that I hope you are right in, and that ——”

“Brereton, my lord.”

“Oh, it's no matter—Bacon or Button. They will do equally well. But I was

going to say, that I hope you are quite sure of the identity of Duval with the persons you say you can deliver up to the officers of justice?"

"Oh, yes, my lord. I happen to know him rather too well. It isn't at all likely that I shall make any mistake of that sort, I can tell you."

"Very good, then. As you have my word for the reward, which was what you wanted to see me for, I presume you can make the particulars of your communication to the secretary, if you please; and I beg to bid you good-day, Mr. Tom Burnett."

Before Tom could interpose another word to detain his lordship, he had abruptly left the room.

"Confound it," said Tom, "what does he mean by calling me Bacon, and Button, and Burnett? Does he mean to try and swindle me out of the reward by raising a cavil about my name? Oh, what a thing it is that people are all such rogues!"

No doubt Tom Brereton had arrived at this conclusion regarding human nature by an attentive self-examination, for the reader is already aware of several little passages in Tom's history, that are by no means of an exalted character.

Very shortly afterwards the respectable looking secretary with the bald head made his appearance, and took down in writing the exact information that Tom could give about the whereabouts of Claude Duval; and when that was concluded, he said,—

"I have received his lordship's orders upon this affair, and since there is, from what you say, every reason to believe that this place you mention is one at which Claude Duval will remain the night, it is determined to make the seizure an hour before midnight. It will take nearly an hour to get to Ealing Common; so, you will do so good as to come here at ten o'clock this evening."

"What? me?"

"Yes. It is thought desirable by his lordship, in order that there should not be the shadow of a doubt concerning the reward, that you should accompany the party."

"Oh, well, if I must, why—a—a—I suppose I must; but I am not at all good at the fighting business."

"Concerning that, you need not trouble yourself. We will provide a sufficient force to take all that difficulty off your shoulders."

"Oh, then, in that case I have no objection in life to go, and you may expect me to the minute quite punctually."

Having made this arrangement with the secretary, Tom felt pretty well satisfied with the manner in which he had conducted the affair. We may at once skip over the hours that intervened between this and ten o'clock at night, and fancy Tom once again at the door of the Secretary of State, about a minute after the metropolitan church clocks had agreed that it was ten.

This time Tom Brereton did not find the same difficulty that he had before experienced in making his way to the interior of the mansion. The clerk to the secretary was waiting for him, and the moment he saw him, he said, very politely—

"I am to accompany you, Mr. Brereton."

"You?" cried Tom. "But do you think that you and I can lay hold of such a fellow as Claude Duval?"

"Certainly not, sir. I should for one be very sorry to make the attempt; but I will take you to where you will find quite a sufficient force to settle the business."

"Oh, that's quite another thing."

"Exactly—I hear the sound of carriage-wheels at the door. His lordship is kind enough to accommodate us with one of his private carriages as far as Hyde Park, and after that we will go on horseback."

"Horseback!" said Tom to himself. "Somehow, I never feel very happy on horseback." That was no time, however, to start any frivolous objections, and as Tom knew that at the least the rewards for the apprehension of Duval were a

thousand pounds, he was far from wishing to throw any obstacles in the way of carrying out the affair.

In the course of a couple of minutes, he and the clerk were being wheeled off at a rapid pace to the Oxford Street corner of Hyde Park; and so swiftly did they go, that the distance appeared to be a mere nothing. The night was rather dark and blustering—now and then a smart puff of wind, that was strongly indicative of rough weather, would come across the faces of the horses, and make them almost pause; and when Tom and the clerk alighted, the trees in the park were agitated furiously by the breeze.

"A roughish night," said Tom.

"Yes, we shall have wind and rain enough on our progress, I daresay; but that cannot be helped," said the clerk. "Be so good as to step this way, if you please. One party was to be stationed a little way down here, beyond Tyburn Gate."

Three minutes' walking took Tom Brereton and the clerk through the celebrated gate; and then, to their surprise, but greatly to the comfort of Tom, he found that, drawn up close to the roadside, was a party of twenty-five of a Light Cavalry Regiment that happened at that time to be quartered at Kensington. Along with these soldiers there were six mounted police-officers, so that the party altogether that went upon that occasion to capture Claude Duval, was really one of a very formidable description indeed.

"Hiiooa!" said Tom, "this is coming it strong, rather."

"Yes, Mr. Brereton," said the clerk. "If your information be quite correct, I think there is very little doubt of the capture of Claude Duval, now, and his associates; and if once captured, he will soon be disposed of."

"Yes; this will be a settler, I rather think."

"Mr. Anderson," said the clerk, in a higher voice, "are you there, sir? Mr. Anderson!"

"Yes, sir," said one of the mounted police-officers. "All's right, sir. We have been waiting some little time. Here are the led horses, sir."

"Very good; now, Mr. Brereton will you be so good as to mount, and we will start at once upon the expedition."

A very tall horse was brought to Tom Brereton, upon the back of which he did, after no inconsiderable difficulty, succeed in scrambling; and there he sat, perched up, at an amazing and perilous height from the ground, and feeling anything but comfortable or pleased with his situation.

"It's all very fine, Mr. Clerk," said Tom, "but if there are any bullets flying about, I rather think I am in just the proper place to catch a few of them."

"Oh, no—no, not at all. It's all luck in such matters, my dear sir; I don't think, if you are to catch a shot or two, that do what you will you can avoid them."

"Really?"

"No; and, of course, in such little affairs as this, there must be some danger. But if you are hit, it will be still a great satisfaction to you to feel that it is in the service of your country, and in the protection of legitimate rights of property."

"Oh, very great! Confound the rights of property! What the deuce is property to me with a pistol bullet in my brain, I should like to know? Nothing at all. I tell you what it is, Mr. Clerk—I did not bargain for any danger in the affair; so after I have pointed out where the fellows you want are to be found, I shall make bold to be off to a distance."

"Well, I am certainly surprised at you, Mr. Brereton."

"Surprised? What at?"

"Why, that you should not have enjoyed a little fracas."

"Are you?—then you don't know me. I like peace and quietness, and plenty to eat and drink, and lots of money and nothing to do. Fighting is not in my line. Dear me, how fast we are going."

"Delays are dangerous."

“ Yes, but it’s much more dangerous, don’t you think, to be jolted off the back of a trotting horse, as high as a first-floor window ?”

Tom Brereton’s remonstrances produced no sort of effect upon the party, They went on at a rattling pace, and he found, that unless he held on with all his skill and power, that he ran a risk of being left behind in the middle of the road ; so he put up with it the best way he could with a good grace, although the bumping he got was really something seriously alarming. In this way, however, and at such a pace, the ground was soon got over. The village of Acton was passed through as the old church-clock chimed the half-hour past ten, and several heads were thrust out of the cottage windows at the sound of the unwonted bustle made by the horses’ feet in the road-way.

The cavalcade of soldiers and civilians, however, swept past before any one could hazard a conjecture upon the subject of their destination ; and in a very short time Ealing Common was in sight, looking wide and black and mysterious in the night air.

The wind was rather whistling over the common with a melancholy sound that made Tom Brereton shiver again.

“ Halt !” cried the officer commanding the party of cavalry, and then turning to the civilian who answered to the name of Anderson, he said,—“ Now, sir, where are we to go ? I was to come to Ealing Common, and there wait your directions, and here I am.”

“ This is the gentleman who will guide us to the house, I presume,” said Anderson, singling out Tom Brereton. “ What I shall then request of you, captain, will be to surround the premises in the way your own judgment may suggest, so that no one shall be able to escape—that’s all. We, of course, will go in and make the capture.”

“ Very well. I will undertake that no one passes the cordon that I will establish without ; and whoever attempts it, must just take the consequences of their indiscretion, for my men will not be very particular, I daresay.”

“ It isn’t necessary that they should, captain. No one will try to escape from us that we don’t want to nab.”

“ Now, Mr. Brereton,” said the clerk, “ lead on if you please, sir.”

“ Oh, dear, yes,” said Tom. “ How pleasant this is, to be sure ! Don’t you think you could find the place, now, if I were to describe it to you ?—for, to tell the truth, I have just recollected that I have an appointment in London of very great importance, indeed. It’s a fact.”

“ You must break it then, sir, if you please. Pray lead on. No possible description of the place we are to attack can come up to actually showing us. Recollect the reward.”

“ Oh, dear, yes ; that’s the only thing that I do want to recollect in the whole affair ; but, I suppose, there is no help for it, and even I must go. This is the way, gentlemen. Let me beg that you will be so good as to make as little noise as you possibly can in the way, for that Claude Duval has very sharp ears.”

“ Caution !” said the captain.

The cavalry adopted a step that was very light, and which could not have been heard at any distance. The horses seemed quite perfectly to understand what was required of them ; and certainly more noise in going across Ealing Common was made by the half-dozen police horses than by the whole twenty-five cavalry.

This alteration of pace, though, was a very welcome thing to Tom Brereton ; and but for the fact that he felt he was approaching rather to a dangerous proximity with the farm-house where Duval was, he would have felt now tolerably comfortable. He took the party to the shrubbery that skirted the farm, and then, in a low voice, he said—

“ Oh, gracious ! Here we are.”

## CHAPTER CCXLIII.

TAKES A PEEP WITHIN THE FARM-HOUSE, AND GIVES AN ALARM.

It is necessary now that we should see what our friends in the farm-house are about.

The intense feeling of security of which we have before spoken, and which in some strange manner had taken possession of Claude Duval, spread its influence over every one but Jack, and he, from constitutional nervousness, did not participate in it. Yet, as he felt that upon many occasions he had raised a feeling of alarm where none should have existed, he did not like, upon the present occasion, to damp the feeling of general satisfaction that was evidently in the breasts of the whole of the people at the farm-house.

The countenance will speak, however, if the eyes do not, and Claude could not but see that Jack was ill at ease. Dick likewise observed as much; but then, knowing Jack as well as they did, they naturally enough set it down to the infirmity of his nature.

Claude tried at supper to rally him out of the feeling, and he did succeed to some extent in doing so.

"Come, Jack," he said, "you must not look so dull and downcast now. Recollect that if all the world is in arms against us, this is a haven of rest and security."

"I hope it is," said Jack.

"You only hope?"

"Well, Claude, is not that sufficient? I say I hope it is; and if you think it is, I am content to believe as much; and yet——"

"Well, Jack, and yet?"

"I think that even here we ought not to neglect all precautions, and if you won't take it amiss that I do so, I will keep watch during the night round the farm, while you and Dick rest yourselves from your late fatigues."

"Now this is really too bad, Jack," said Claude.

"Very much too bad," said Dick.

"Well," added Jack, "I really can't see how it is too bad. If nothing comes of my forebodings, why, I lose my night's rest for my pains; but if anything does come of them, I have the great satisfaction of having been, by my caution, useful to my friends."

"Now, Jack, listen to me," said Claude, with a smile. "Our fatigues are no greater than yours, for we have all three been together precisely through the same adventures, and exposed to the same adversities; therefore, if there were any real occasion for watching, we ought to take that business by turns, or rather, I should say, that I ought to do it wholly, as I must be the principal person whose name brings danger upon you two."

"Oh, I demur to that," said Dick. "If we are to mount guard during the night, let us take it turn and turn about in the regular way. I certainly will not submit to Jack being made the victim."

"Nor I," Claude cried, "so give it up at once, Jack, for we really all need a night's rest."

"Very well, I give it up," said Jack; "let us hear no more about it; and now let us enjoy ourselves as we best can, for, as you say, it is not often we can sit down with the same feelings we do now at any table."

Claude and Dick were tolerably well satisfied with the change that now took place in the manner of Jack, for there was a degree of hilarity about him which they had seldom witnessed; and whether it were acting or a reflex of his real feelings, they had no opportunity of coming to a judgment.

The evening now deepened into night, in the midst of rather sprightly conversation, and at length a general move was made to retire, and in the course of another quarter of an hour there was a profound silence in the farm-house, for everybody had gone to rest.



It was then about a quarter past ten o'clock.

The room which had been appropriated to Jack was a small apartment at one corner of the house, and which had a little window that opened upon the sloping roof of an outhouse, over which grew a very luxuriant vine. There was another window likewise to the room, that looked to the back garden. When Jack retired to this apartment, Claude went with him for a few moments, and remained talking to him while he took off his coat and boots.

"Now, Jack," he said, "take a night's rest, for I am quite sure you want one, and don't let any fears disturb you, for it is one of the most unlikely things in all the world, as you know well, that any enemy can possibly be aware that we are here."

"You are right, I think, Claude."

"I know I am. Here we have been a number of hours in this place, and no one has come to it upon any real or pretended business, so that there has been no chance of anything going amiss. I merely wish to assure you of my most perfect and entire confidence in our safety; and now good-night, Jack, and a good rest to you."

"Good-night, Claude, the same to you. All's right."

"Poor Jack!" thought Claude as he left the room, "he has never recovered that hanging business, and I suppose he never will now, poor fellow. But I think I have quieted him down, now, as regards any fears for to-night, and he will sleep calmly and soundly enough, I dare say."

Jack calmly waited until Claude's footsteps had died completely away, and he was satisfied that there was no likelihood of his return to say anything, and then calmly and deliberately he pulled on his boots again, and put on his coat.

"It is all very well, Claude," he said, "for you to feel so much confidence in your safety in this place, but I cannot conquer the feeling that has been growing over me for hours, to the effect that some disaster is at hand. If I were to go to bed I should not sleep, so that it is of no use vexing myself by trying. I don't go so far as to say that I am a believer at all times in what are called presentiments of danger, but I will say that I never felt so strongly persuaded as I do now, that something will happen."

Jack was cool and collected enough, notwithstanding this strong feeling of danger to himself and his friends that had taken possession of his mind. The firm resolution that he had taken some hours before of keeping watch for its approach nerved him.

By the light of the candle with which he was provided, he now set about looking carefully to his pistols, and as they had been loaded now for some hours, and exposed to the jolting of a hard ride, he carefully drew the charges and reloaded them.

"It's as well to have all right," he said, "and then one feels a degree of confidence that enables one to be cool and calm."

Jack's next effort was to hammer the flints of his pistols, so that at a moment's notice they would do duty without the possibility of a failure, and then he considered that he had everything in readiness, come what might.

His fixed intention was to keep watch round the farm, but as he did not wish his friends to have any suspicion that he entertained such a project, he resolved upon waiting until it was a matter of positive certainty that they were all asleep. He had taken a good survey of the position of his chamber before, therefore he knew perfectly well how to get from it with the least noise or alarm.

It would have been an odd sight to Claude, if he could only have seen Jack sitting in his room there by the light of a candle that was getting an alarmingly long wick, fully armed, and waiting until repose had stolen over the senses of all in the place, before he should sally out as though his object were a hostile one, instead of a protecting one.

But neither Claude nor Dick had the smallest suspicion upon the subject, and went to their rest with the full idea that Jack had likewise gone to his.

As he (Jack) there sat, there came yet more strongly on him each moment the presentiment of danger. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"No," he said, "I will not, and I ought not to disregard this feeling that is far from dissipating, but, on the contrary, grows upon me each moment with the greater strength—I will not cast aside this most mysterious warning of approaching danger, for, in good truth, it does amount to that—I will meet it!"

Jack now considered that he had waited long enough for the whole of the house to be in a state of repose, so, after opening his room door, and listening for a few moments, and hearing nothing, he at once commenced his arrangements for leaving his chamber.

His first act was, to close his door, and fasten it upon the inside, and then he cautiously opened the little window that looked out upon the outhouse roof. All was still without, and the little rain that fell had the effect of completely prostrating what small amount of wind there might have been. Jack heard that rain faintly pattering upon the large vine leaves that completely covered up the roof of the outhouse.

With an extreme caution, that his habits of life had taught him well how to assume, he now crept through the window, and carefully let himself down by the roof of the outhouse, until he came to its lowest edge, when he jumped into the garden. He was quite satisfied that he had been successful in doing all that without creating the smallest amount of alarm.

"That will do," said Jack to himself. "Now I shall be able to keep a good watch, and no one will be any the wiser, although, I flatter myself, that every one will be something the safer. Claude and Dick need never know that I was on the move all this night; but I would ten times rather have been prowling round this house than tossing upon my bed in all the fever of sleeplessness from apprehensions of some unknown danger."

There was no difficulty in walking completely round the farm-house to those who were acquainted with it. A couple of little gates, which Jack knew well how to open, were the only obstructions to his progress; and when he had set them wide open, he could take his slow march completely round the premises easily.

There was something very grateful and pleasant to the senses in the cool freshness of the night air, impregnated as it was with that soft, balmy rain that pattered gently upon the leaves of the trees. Jack leant against one of the little gates, and rather enjoyed the scene. The freshness of the air effectually kept off all feeling of fatigue from him; and he was just upon the point of trying to look at his watch, amid the darkness, to note the time, when a dull sound came upon his ear from a distance.

Jack placed himself in an attitude of listening, and he felt satisfied that imagination had not deceived him—Tramp—tramp—tramp! From afar off, he felt satisfied that he heard the sound of horses' feet.

From that moment, Jack felt certain that all his prognostications of some danger had not been for nothing; and that in keeping watch that night, he was really doing good service to his friends who slumbered in fancied security.

Slowly he bent down to the ground, until he lay at full length upon it, and placed his ear flat against it. Then he could, as plainly as though they had been just on the outside of the gate of the farm, hear the tread of horses' feet, each moment becoming plainer and plainer, which was as good a proof as needs be that they were approaching that spot.

One thing, however, was just possible, and that was, that the party of horsemen approaching might not, by any means, be going to stop at the farm. There was nothing to lead directly to that conclusion. It was possible that they might be going right on; and if such were the case, he (Jack) felt that it would be, as yet, quite premature upon his part to give any alarm.

"There is time yet," he said. "There is time yet. I will wait a little while, and judge more accurately of what are their intentions."

That the mounted party was coming by the high road from London to the

common, Jack's accurate knowledge of the topography of the spot enabled him to feel certain; and his object, therefore, became to get as near to the road-way across the common as possible, for the purpose of noticing their movements. He accordingly at once began to make his way. To do this he had to pass through the stable-yard; as he went, he assured himself that the stable where the three horses were kept was easily accessible. He then made a rapid passage through the plantation, which so effectually screened the farm from the common, and from the sight of all persons passing along its high road to the village, and soon emerged upon the common itself.

Jack now threw himself flat upon the grass, and listened. The footsteps of the horses sounded alarmingly close at hand, and he immediately rose.

A very few minutes, now, must, he felt, decide the question effectually, as to whether the horsemen were going straight on, or were going to swerve from the path, for the purpose of attacking the farm; and during those few minutes, poor Jack endured hours of suspense.

The path, or rather the high-road across Ealing Common, as it might now properly be termed, was a considerable distance from the plantation that shut in the farm, and upon the extreme edge of which Jack was only just within the shadow of the trees. From that high-road there diverged a path that led directly to the farm, and in the dim night air, Jack could just see the head of that path, by means of a stunted pollard that he knew grew there, and which sent up a few straggling branches into the night sky. He kept his eyes fixed upon that spot, as though upon it depended his destiny in all time to come.

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## CHAPTER CCXLIV.

### THE ATTACK UPON THE FARM BY THE POLICE AND MILITARY.

It is rather a curious subject of inquiry, that of presentiment. We are apt to be led astray by coincidences of the purest accidental character, that it is almost impossible to come to a conclusion upon the subject.

Philosophers tell us, that if any result follows a certain action for a great number of times, we are justified in calling it a law of nature that it should do so, and certainly as regards presentiments of coming evil, the experiences of every one are sufficient to convince them that they are not unfrequent, and that the occurrence of something very unusual after them, seems to favour the supposition that they were a mute kind of warning of the coming distress.

But be all this as it may, certainly Jack had upon that night felt particularly uneasy, and a conviction had stolen over him, in a manner that he could not succeed in shaking off, to the effect that something would happen.

"I knew it," he muttered to himself, as he still kept his eyes fixed upon the old tree; "I knew it well. I would not have slept to-night, and cheated myself into an idea of security, for worlds."

The night air swept past him with a strange and mournful kind of sound, as though unseen spirits were upon its noiseless wings, sighing for the evil that was about to ensue, which their pure natures enabled them to plainly foresee.

Jack trembled a little, but it was not for himself that he did so. It was for others that he held dearer than self.

Not very long, however, had poor Jack to reflect upon the situation in which he was, or to vex himself with anything in the shape of imaginative or unsubstantial terrors, for in a very few moments he saw the dark throng of people pause at the corner of the path across the common that led up to the farm.

Whether that pause were accidental or on the contrary, Jack only now awaited to see, and that was a question which was very speedily put to rest, by his observing the crowd of heads, that were only very faintly relieved against the night-sky,

slowly advancing towards the plantation, upon [the skirts of which he was then concealed by the deep shadows of the old trees.

"They come," said Jack, "they come."

With these words, he turned at once, and p'unged through the brushwood back to the house.



JACK CLIMBS A TREE TO RECONNOITRE THEIR PURSUERS.

From that moment, Jack seemed as if but one impulse could possibly animate his mind, and that was to awaken Claude Duval and Dick Turpin to the frightful danger that they ran. All fear seemed to have vanished from him ; but mechanically he went on until he reached the part of the garden into which he had descended from the roof of the little building immediately beneath the window of the apartment allotted to him as a bed-room.

He began to climb up by the aid of the vigorous shoots of the vine that were there in abundance to assist him in so doing.

Jack felt that now the least alarm of a noisy character would only have the effect of bringing the enemies of himself and of his friends with the greater activity to the attack; and from their numbers, if it should really come to an encounter, there could be but little doubt as to which way it would terminate. If anything was to be done to save them, it was quite evident that it could only be by silence and caution.

Jack, full of this conviction, and it was a true one in every sense of the word, made his way to his chamber-window in a much shorter space of time than probably, under other circumstances, he would have been able to reach it. He sprang into the room. A touch at the door was sufficient to convince him that it was just as he had left it.

It was at this moment that a frightful pang shot across the heart of Jack, from a thought which, however unjust it was in reality, was not at all unnatural under the circumstances. He thought that it was just possible there might be some treachery in the house, which would account for the attack upon the farm.

If anything could be calculated more than another to unnerve Jack for a few moments, it certainly would be such an idea as that, and he was compelled to lean against the wall for support while he made the attempt to reason himself out of it.

"Oh, no—no," he said. "It cannot be. It is only a frightful idea engendered by this peril. Who is there here who would stoop to such an act? No, no! I will dismiss it from my thoughts."

It was much easier to say that he would dismiss from his thoughts such a notion than actually to do so; but, at all events, Jack made the attempt, and if he succeeded but ill, he would not let that non-success interfere with what he had to do, which was to rouse Claude and Dick.

The lock of his door readily yielded to his touch and he passed out of the room into the passage beyond it, from which he knew opened the bed-chambers of his two friends. At the first door he came to, he knocked rapidly, saying in a subdued voice, and yet one loud enough to be plainly heard by any one within the room—

"Up—up, I say. There is danger on foot.—Up—up, and leave this place at once!"

Jack then heard a loud noise as though some one had fallen out of bed on to the floor; and, in fact, such was the case, for it was Dick Turpin's bed-room that Jack had got to, and as Dick happened to be reposing very near to the edge of the bed, he had, upon the first surprise of the moment at hearing Jack's voice in such alarming accents, made a sudden turn that had precipitated him to the floor.

"Awake—awake!" added Jack. "Awake, there!"

"I am awake," said Dick. "What the deuce is the matter? Is the house on fire?"

"Worse!"

"Worse than that? Oh, you must be joking, Jack—for I think it is your voice."

Dick had scrambled to his feet by this time, and opened the door, where, by the light of a small oil-lamp that was upon a bracket in the corridor, he saw Jack.

"Good Heavens, Jack," he cried, "you look as pale as death. What has happened? Are you ill?"

"Oh, no—no; but in a few minutes—perhaps even now, as we speak, the house is surrounded by our foes. I saw an armed party on the Common, and the destination of it was this place."

"You saw, do you say, Jack?"

"Yes, I was keeping watch."

"I'll be hanged if I didn't think you would, and told Claude so, but he thought otherwise, and would not say anything further to you about it. I will



dress as rapidly as I can. The next door is Claude's—wake him up, Jack, directly, that's a good fellow."

"I will—I will."

There was no occasion for Jack to make any efforts to awaken Claude, for the little commotion, and the kind of disturbance that had taken place in Dick's rooms, had had that effect; and feeling certain that something was amiss, Claude had hastily dressed himself, and now came out to see what was happening.

"Hilloa! Jack or Dick," he said, "or both of you, what is amiss?"

"Save yourself, Claude," cried Dick; "save yourself. The house will be surrounded by a force that it will be madness to try to cope with. Every moment is precious."

"Ah! say you so, Jack?"

"I do, indeed, Claude. You know the premises well, and I beg of you at once to make use of that knowledge to leave them as quick as you can. It is you, and probably you only, who are sought. Oh, Claude, away with you—away at once!"

"Hush! Jack, you know not what you say. Everything is to be lost by precipitation and nothing gained. Tell me exactly what the danger is, and how you discerned it?"

"Ah," said Dick, who was busy priming one of his pistols, "that is it. Let us know all about it, Jack."

"Alas! alas!" said Jack. "These may be precious moments, but if you must know, you shall. I could not sleep, and I went to walk in the plantation skirting the common."

"Or in other words, Jack," said Claude, "you went to keep watch, while we slept. Is it not so?"

"Well—well, do not heed that at present. It does not matter much; but as I was there I saw a throng of people in regular marching order making their way towards the farm."

"By the cross-path, Jack?"

"Yes, I waited in order that I might not raise a false alarm, until I saw them turn from the road into the cross-path, and you know that that conducts to nowhere but to here."

"True—true."

"Then the danger is sufficiently great," said Dick, "and I am now quite ready to meet it."

"Cicely!" said Claude; and then he at once returned to the chamber again which he had left. Cicely had heard that something was wrong, and had availed herself of the time that Claude had been conversing with Jack and Dick to dress herself, so that when Claude went back to the room, he found her up and ready to leave it. He had formed something like a determination as to what to do in the event of such an emergency as the present arising, and now he spoke earnestly to Cicely to induce her to carry it out.

"Listen to me, Cicely," he said; "Jack brings us the news that the officers are about the place. Now, let me beg of you to believe that you cannot aid me, but that, if I have the anxiety of your safety to add to my own perils, I may very likely fall. What I wish you to do is, to go at once to the sleeping-rooms of some of the females of the family here, and there remain until you hear from me, and not on any account to interfere with us in the conflict that may ensue."

"But you will be in danger?"

"Yes. It is my vocation to be in danger, Cicely. Heed it not. You and I have passed through very much greater dangers than this together. Let me not have the frightful feeling that you are involved in the dangers and chances of the conflict."

"Then it is veritable?"

"Perhaps not. I would not say as much to Jack, on any account, as it might have the effect of wronging his good and honest feelings towards me, but as the alarm comes from him, I feel that it is apt to be rather exaggerated than otherwise."

"Oh, Claude, you give me a faint hope by saying that."

"Let me hope, then, Cicely, that you will act upon that feeling, and go at once as I wish, to a place of safety, and leave me and my friends to settle this matter, as best we may."

"Yes—yes, I will—I ought."

"Now, indeed, I feel easy. Dear Cicely, I shall not forget this ready acquiescence to my wishes. Go at once. Do you know the way?"

"Oh, Claude, you forget that this house is most familiar to me now. There is not a nook or a corner of it that I do not know full well."

"Go, then, dear one, at once."

Cicely, after an embrace from Claude, left the room hastily, and proceeded, as he had directed her, to the rooms occupied by the family, who were not yet aware of anything being amiss in the place. She, however, could inform them, so that they could take the best course their judgments and their feelings should suggest under the circumstances.

In a moment after he had thus—to the greatest extent in his power—provided for the safety of Cicely, Claude was with his two friends, who had occupied the time they had been by themselves in seeing that all their pistols were in good order.

"Any more news?" said Claude.

"No," replied Dick, "but the best thing we can do now, I think, is to make our way to the stables, and get out our cattle. If we are to leave, the sooner we do so the better."

"Come on, then," said Claude. "If we lose our horses, we lose everything but our lives; and I don't know that they would be worth much after that. But let us once get mounted and be off, and I don't care."

"Nor I," said Dick, "the danger will be then by no means a special one. Is this the way?"

"Follow me," said Claude, "I know it well."

They both followed Claude to the lower part of the house, and he was upon the point of unbolting a door that led into the stable-yard, when Dick suddenly laid his hand upon his arm, and said—

"Hush!"

"What is it?" said Claude.

The question answered itself, in a manner of speaking, for at the moment that he (Claude) asked it, he heard the tramp of feet in the stable-yard, and a voice said in short, authoritative accents—

"You will keep careful watch here; and you will understand that you are to make prisoners of whoever shall attempt to pass your post, and if any resistance be offered, you are to use your arms."

There was then the clash of some weapon upon the stones in the stable-yard, and Claude said in a low tone—

"Why they have brought the military upon us."

"It seems so," said Dick.

"It is but too evident," said Jack. "This is a planned attack, and one that will give us no small trouble."

"Never mind," said Claude, "we will beat them yet. Never despair. The soldiers don't go about this affair with a good heart."

"But we had some trouble with them at Winchester," said Jack.

"Yes, and they had some trouble with us, and I think that, upon the whole, they were the worst off."

"They were," said Jack. "They were, for it cost a few lives upon that occasion."

"And it may cost a few more upon this," said Claude, in a tone of determination. "If society hunts me, I shall not be very tender as to how I treat the hounds, I can assure you."

"But the horses—the horses!" said Dick; "what can be done to save them? Are we quite helpless as far as they are concerned, now, do you think, Claude?"

"I am afraid so; but there is something that is hopeful in this affair, and that is, that no interference seems to be made with them at present. A guard is posted in the yard, but the horses are not touched."

"That is something."

"It is everything. As long as our horses are safe, surely we can fight out everything. But I confess that this affair is one that looks a little serious, and that, in all likelihood, will call up all the energies and the means of defence that we possess."

"It will, indeed," said Jack. "Hush!—hush! Is that a bell?"

## CHAPTER CCXLV.

### A SERIOUS FIGHT TAKES PLACE IN AND ABOUT THE FARM.

JACK was right. A bell rung fiercely, or, at all events, in the silence of the night, it seemed to ring fiercely, whether it really did or not.

"Where is that bell?" said Dick.

"It is at the front door of the farm," replied Claude, "and its being rung at all, is a very tolerable indication to me that the place is surrounded."

"We are lost," said Jack.

"Not so," cried Claude, in a higher tone than in truth it was at all prudent to speak in. "Not so, Jack. No one is lost until he gives up himself, and that is a thing that I do not intend to do."

"Pardon me," said Jack, "I ought not to have thought what I said, and if I did think it, this was not a time in which to say it."

"Make no excuses, Jack," said Claude; "we all know very well that you never shrink from real danger, whatever you may say about it beforehand. It strikes me, though, that if we are to make an escape at all, it will be at this point where we are now."

"But the sentinels?" said Dick.

"I am sorry for them," said Claude.

The tone of voice in which Claude Duval uttered those few words was quite sufficiently indicative of what he meant, and both Jack and Dick were from that moment fully possessed with the conviction that Duval meant to make his way past the sentinels, even at the expense of their lives, if needs were.

Before, however, anything could be concluded, the party was perceived by one of the young men of the farm, who, with consternation in his face, said—

"Oh, Claude, what will now become of you?"

"I don't know, my friend," said Duval. "The only thing that very particularly vexes me is, that I am bringing trouble and annoyance upon your house. That is what I would, indeed, fain have avoided."

"Do not mention that. But my brother thinks that by your all three putting on smock frocks, and so disguising yourselves, you might pass for persons at work upon the farm."

Claude shook his head.

"That I doubt," he said. "It would be a very faint hope, indeed. I think, rather, that if you can manage to detain those who are at the front door in any way, we will make an attempt to leave this place by the back of it here."

"It shall be done. You know much better than we can, possibly, what is proper and what is not. I will go at once, and let my brother know what you wish us to do."

At this moment another furious ring at the bell announced that those who were at the door waiting for admission were getting rather impatient than otherwise. Indeed, it was quite a wonder that they had waited so long; and they certainly would not have done so, but that they had so completely surrounded the house by

a chain of sentinels, that they believed the escape of those whom they came to capture to be the next thing to an impossibility.

"Now," said Claude, "I will not kill this soldier who is in the stable-yard if I can help it. He is only here in pursuance of orders that he dared not disobey, and I have no doubt but that the job is as distasteful a one to him as can very well be imagined. I hope he will have the discretion to know when he is beaten, and not insist upon being killed."

"Will you go alone?"

"Yes, Dick. But you and Jack can follow closely. You will soon see what kind of a fellow I have got to deal with. The only thing will be to prevent him from firing his carbine, if he has one, or his pistols, if he has not, but that he has fire-arms of some sort is almost certain. Not a word now—caution is everything."

Claude now waited until he heard the sentinel walking away from the door, and choosing then that moment, he cautiously, yet quickly opened the door, and they all three passed out into the yard.

"Stand close up against the wall," whispered Claude. "We must let him pass again before anything can be done with him."

Fortunately, that side of the house was in very deep shadow, indeed, so that the three friends, when they stood quite close to the wall alongside the door through which they had issued, could scarcely have been seen by any one not previously aware that there was some one there to see.

The path of the soldier was about half-a-dozen paces from the house, a little removed from the shadow that it cast, so that he was in sufficient light, even upon that rather dark night, to be seen with something like distinctness.

It was the intention of Duval to pounce upon that man, and, if possible, disarm him before he could give any alarm of the presence of an enemy upon his post.

That the soldiers he would have to contend with were dismounted cavalry, Claude felt assured, as they were just the sort of troops that would be sent upon such a duty; and, besides, he well-knew that while the cavalry were frequently called upon to act upon foot, the infantry were never by any accident mounted; but what he wanted to find out before he made his attack upon the soldier was, what kind of arms he had. If it were a carbine, it would be much easier to rush upon him and disarm him, than if he had pistols merely.

With a slow and steady marching step, the soldier now made his appearance again; and as Claude watched him, he not only saw that it was a horse-pistol he held in his hand, but he found that the man's head was rather suspiciously inclined towards the door at which he, Claude, stood.

It seemed as though the sentinel thought that he saw something there, but was not quite certain of that fact.

Under these circumstances, Duval hit upon a manœuvre, which answered the object of completely directing the attention of the man in another direction. He took from his pocket the largest piece of money he had, which was half-a-crown, and then threw it over the sentinel's head among the bushes beyond him. In its descent, the coin made a sudden crashing noise, that at once arrested the soldier's attention, and turning instantly in the direction of the sound, he cried—

"Who goes there? Answer, or I fire."

With one bound that at once cleared the space between him and the sentinel, Duval was upon him, and they fell heavy to the earth together; but Claude had got hold of the pistol, and wrenching it from the soldier's grasp, he cast it from him, and then fastening his hand upon his throat, he said in quite calm, clear accents—

"Your life is in my power, but I have no desire to take it. On the contrary, I would fain do you no injury; but if you will not be beaten, and insensible to what is going on here, how can I help it?"

"What do you mean?" said the soldier.

"Why, that you have only to shut your eyes and be stunned, that is all; and if you don't like to be so as you are, why, you will be so in reality in another minute; so you can take your choice."

"Confound you, you have nearly broken every bone in my body as it is. Be off with you at once, and don't say how you got away."

"I won't talk about it. You lie still—that is all we want of you, my man. It will be your best course."

"I know that," said the soldier. "It's better to lie still without a knock on the head, than with one, I take it."

"You are a sensible fellow," said Claude, "and that is just what I mean. It is no shame to you either, for here are three of us, all strong and well armed men, so you can have no chance."

"Ah, it's all right. Be off with you, but don't take my pistol, as that would soon be missed."

"Certainly not. You shall have nothing to complain of on that score, and no one need be one bit the wiser when we are gone, if you keep your own secret."

"Ah, all's right. Be off."

"I rely, then, upon your honour," said Claude. "Dick, where are you, and you, Jack, where are you?"

"Here, here."

"Very good. Get the horses out quickly as you can, and then there will be a chance for us."

"As quick as thought," said Jack.

Both Dick and Jack went to attend to the horses, while Claude thought it prudent to keep the soldier company, lest he should rise and make some attempt at annoyance.

"I suppose," said the discomfited sentinel, "that you are the man we came after on this wild-goose errand?"

"Probably. But who did you come after?"

"Claude Duval, the highwayman."

"Then you are tolerably right, for I am that man, my friend; and if I mistake not, you would gain nothing by my capture, but the doubtful reputation of having assisted at it."

"That's true," said the soldier. "We, that is myself and comrades, are only ordered her to assist the constables, and we get nothing for our pains but the trouble."

"Precisely so; and now I would advise you, when we are gone, that you resume your march to and fro in this stable-yard, and it will be your own fault if any one knows anything of what has taken place here."

"I shan't blab it, you may depend."

"And you may equally depend that I shall not," said Claude, who was not a little pleased to find the soldier so reasonably compliant with his wishes.

At this juncture, Jack came up to Claude, and said—

"The cattle are quite ready, and the sooner we are off now the better. Come this way, Claude."

"All's right. There's nothing now to fear from the soldier. Good-night, my friend."

"Good-night," said the man, "and I think myself well out of the scrape."

Claude followed Jack to where the horses were standing, now ready saddled. Dick had mounted, and Jack had his foot in the stirrup, when the door at which Duval and his friends had got from the farm into the stable-yard, opened, and there sallied out two of the police officers, and a party of the soldiers. A voice rose above other sounds, in accents that Duval knew well.

"I tell you, it is no mistake, for he is here, somewhere. I am quite certain about it."

That voice convinced Claude at once regarding who it was that he owed his present embarrassment to, for he knew it to be the voice of Tom Brereton.

Claude had not harboured for one moment any suspicions regarding the good faith of the people of the farm towards him; but yet it was pleasant to be so completely confirmed in his opinion of them and their honour towards him, as the fact of finding who it was that had brought the police and the military upon him did.



How Tom Brereton had acquired a knowledge of his presence at the farm, he did not very well know, as he had no idea that he had been watched by that eccentric individual; but that such must have been the case, was now but too painfully apparent.

The officers had lights with them, so that there was a tolerable glare cast into the stable-yard, by the aid of which Claude certainly mounted his horse with rare celerity, while it at the same time had the effect of giving quite light enough to reveal him and his companions to their foes, whenever they might cast their eyes in that direction.

Rapidly Claude calculated in his own mind what obstacles were in the way of his progress to the common, and it was a gratification for him to know that there was no formidable obstacle. A little gate, and a very low hedge of privet, were the only hindrances to the path, and both could be leaped with ease by the well-bred cattle that Claude and his comrades called their own.

Like statues of men and horses, Claude and his two friends stood waiting the time when, by chance, the officers should cast their eyes in that direction, and see them. The light of the flambeau that one of them carried, shone so fully upon Duval, that every particle of his clothing to the minutest button was visible.

"Hilloa, sentinel!" said one of the officers. "Has any one passed, or tried to pass this way?"

There was no reply.

Upon this, the soldiers made a dash into the yard, and one of them shouted out—

"Sentry, where are you?"

"He is killed!" said another. "Here he lies dead!"

They all gathered round the soldier, who thought it best to take Claude's advice, and seem to be stunned, if he were not. The opportunity for Duval and his friends to get away, was now very tempting, indeed, and was not likely to occur again.

"Come on," said Claude, "come on at once."

He spoke in a too low tone to be heard by any but his two friends: They, however, could quite distinctly catch every word that he uttered; and at once they put their horses in motion to follow him. Upon the ground there was a quantity of litter, that sufficed to deaden the effect of the horses' feet, which otherwise, upon the stones with which the stable-yard was paved, must have produced an effect that would in a moment have discovered them to the soldiers, and so they succeeded in proceeding in silence until they got to the little gate. Duval hesitated about the leap, for he thought it would be more brave and honourable of him to be the last to leave the stable-yard; but Dick, who was immediately behind, said—

"For Heaven's sake, Claude, go on."

"Pardon me, both of you," said Claude. "I will follow you on the instant."

Before Dick could get his horse forward, or say one word for or against such a proposition, there came a loud cry from one of the officers, of—

"There they are—there they are!"

"We are found!" said Claude.

"We are lost!" said Jack.

It was strange that they should both really mean the same thing, although they expressed it in such very opposite terms; but there was no time for reflection.

"Forward!" cried the sergeant, who was with the few soldiers that had been sent to search the stable-yard. "Forward!"

"Yes!" cried Claude, in startlingly loud accents. "Forward is the word. I want you after me. Come on!"

As he spoke, he sprung at once over the little gate.

## CHAPTER CCXLVI.

CLAUDE PLAYS A GOOD TRICK UPON THE SOLDIERS.

Dick and Jack were not slow in following the example of Claude. The sudden escape of those whom they had all but believed they had in their grasp, quite infuriated the officers, and they made an united kind of rush through



THE DEATH OF TOM BRERETON.

the farm-yard. The sergeant, with his men, found in a moment that to pursue men on horseback would be quite absurd, so he gave an order to fire.

The soldiers were sufficiently aggravated to do anything that could bring the affair to an end, and levelling their pistols, which they had brought from the holsters of their saddles, they sent a rattling volley after Claude and his friends.

Luckily, in the darkness of the night they could not take a very good aim, and if they had done so, the pistol is a weapon that certainly is not to be depended upon at any distance.

The discharge certainly failed to do any mischief.

"On—on," said Claude. "On, for your lives!"

As he spoke, the bugle of the military sounded one long note, and it was evident that it was for the purpose of giving notice to the party that still remained mounted upon the common to interrupt the fugitives. Claude had in his own mind a well-grounded suspicion that such was the case, and after proceeding a short distance he drew in.

Dick and Jack did the same.

"Hark ye, my friends," said Claude. "It is of no use to attempt to get away."

"Not attempt to get away?" cried Dick.

"No. I can imagine very well what the tactics of the enemy are. They have, as they think, driven us from our retreat in the farm-house, and the only thing they will think of doing now, will be to interrupt us on the common, where they, no doubt, have a force of horse ready for that purpose."

"It is so," said Jack; "and again I say we are lost."

"No. Here we are among the trees. The night is dark. If we can only persuade the horses to lie down among the brushwood, I think we might be safe yet."

"If that is the object," said Jack, "I know how to make any horse lie down in a moment. It is rather a secret; but I can do it."

"Do it, then, Jack, in the name of all that's good, for here comes the foe as closely upon us as possible."

Again the bugle sounded, and from the tramp of feet, it was quite clear that the dismounted soldiers were leaving the farm. Jack was not slow in carrying out his assertion that he could make the horses lie down. By taking hold of one ear of his own steed, and lifting one of the fore-feet, he gradually coaxed the creature to go quite down, and he then did the same by Claude's and Dick's steeds, and the creatures lay as still as possible, while their masters crouched down by their sides.

To be sure, three horses lying upon the ground, took up some space; but then the soldiers might not take that exact route, and if they did not, there was nothing to give them the least idea of the immediate vicinity of our friends.

Of course, they (the military) would be looking for some one on horseback; and with a complete faith in the notion that they had galloped right away on to the common, they would not be likely to be very particular in exploring the little woody spot which divided the farm from the common, and where Claude and his comrades were hidden.

"Forward, my men!" cried the sergeant. "You will find your horses where you left them, no doubt."

"Your comrades won't let the highwaymen pass, I suppose?" said a voice, "for now that they are fairly mounted and off, there will be no sort of chance of us officers taking them."

"Why, the best thing that can be done," said the sergeant, "is for the remainder of the troop to shoot them on the common. We don't want a twenty mile run into the country, I can tell you."

"Twenty mile!" said the officer. "They would think nothing of giving you a fifty mile run if once they had you in a line."

"The deuce they wouldn't!"

"No. Not they."

"Why, what sort of cattle, then, must they have?"

"I don't know, but sometimes I think their horses must be fiends, for they carry them through dangers and difficulties that would break down most completely any other steeds. But, Mr. Sergeant, everything seems to be wonderfully quiet on the common."

"So it does. Sound the bugle again."

The man who had the bugle sounded another long note as a signal to the mounted troop on the common to pursue the enemy; but as the said mounted troop could find no enemy to pursue, they merely looked sharply about them, and kept their station.

In the course of half a minute more, the dismounted soldiers had passed the spot on which lay the three friends and their steeds so quietly. The slightest sound from man or horse would have betrayed them. Upon themselves, of course, the adventurers could depend; but it was a very different thing regarding the cattle, and it was only a piece of extraordinary good luck that the horses made no sort of noise at that moment of the passing of the soldiers.

In the space of about two minutes after they had passed, neither of the three friends spoke; but then Claude in a whisper contrived to say something. His horse heard his voice, and immediately neighed.

"There," said Claude, "that would have done us."

"It would," said Dick.

"But what did you say?" said Jack.

"I was remarking," said Claude, "that the best thing we can do now is to go home again, as our enemies have left."

"Home again!" exclaimed Jack.

"Hush, Jack, not so loud. Be cautious."

"Yes—yes—I will; but what on earth do you mean, Claude, by going home again? It is so extraordinary a word for us to use, or to hear."

"Why, back to the farm, to be sure, I mean."

"Back to the farm?" said Dick. "You are not serious, Claude, surely, in that idea?"

"Yes, I am, though: and so will you be as soon as you have sufficient reason for being so. There can be no doubt now of two things."

"What are they?"

"One of them is, that the officers and the soldiers have pretty well searched the farm, and the other is, that both officers and soldiers are now quite convinced that we have left it, and taken our horses with us."

"Well?"

"Very well; then, the safest place we can go to now is where they don't think we are, and that is back to the farm again."

"There is reason in that," said Dick.

"And danger," said Jack.

"Yes, danger is everything."

"But much less in what I propose than in any other case, I think," added Claude, "that we could possibly just now adopt. What I wish is, that we should get our horses up, and as quickly as foot can fall, lead them back again to the stable."

"It is a bold step," said Jack.

"It is. But I incline to think that there lies its great safety and excellence. The devil himself, if he had no supernatural knowledge, would not think of looking for us on the farm premises again."

"You have convinced me, Claude," said Jack, "and the more I think of the plan, the more feasible it appears."

"Then, let us come on at once."

"For my part," said Dick, "I am quite sure that there could not be possibly a wiser and better course pursued; and if you will get up the horses, Jack, as quietly as you got them down, all will be well enough."

"That's easy," said Jack. "Among the few things that I may say that I understand thoroughly, I may mention horses, I believe."

Upon this, Jack made a sort of chirping noise, and the three horses got up at once as comfortably as though they had been sentient beings, and understood exactly what was required of them.

Claude could not forbear laughing at Jack's skill in the management of the creatures, and he said—

"I flatter myself that I know a trifle about horses ; but you beat me out of the field regarding them, I admit."

"I have made the habits, manners, and feelings of the horse my peculiar study," said Jack, "for years, and I ought to know something about them by this time."

They neither of them mounted now, but led the horses by the bridles at a very slow pace after them through the little plantation. They trod as softly as feet could fall, and it would appear as though the cattle knew that silence was an object, for they placed their feet very gently to the ground.

Proceeding in this way for some few minutes, they reached the hedge that skirted the stable-yard ; but it was quite impossible to get the horses through the hedge, so they had no resource but to skirt it until they came to the gate, or try to make a gap in it.

After a little consultation, they preferred the latter course, and with their pocket-knives, which were very strong, they began feeling for the thick bushes of the hedge, and cutting them away. A very few minutes sufficed to enable them to make an opening that the horses might step through, and then, with a saving of considerable space, they found themselves at once in the stable-yard of the farm, and not twenty paces from the stable in which the horses had been put up for the night.

"This will do," said Claude. "Now, I propose that we place the horses in the stable again, at once."

"And you may depend," said Dick, "the very best thing we can do is to stay with them."

"Be it so."

Claude opened the stable-door, and led his horse in. He was closely followed by Dick and Jack. They did not unsaddle the horses ; but they let them each go into a stall, and then, as they stood by the door themselves, which they left open a short distance, so that they might be aware of the approach of any one, they endeavoured, by attentive listening, to ascertain, if possible, what was going on in the house and on the common.

The soldiers were evidently rather bewildered to know what to do ; for at times a bugle was blown in one direction, and then in another, and the clatter of horses' feet, as the mounted party scoured the common in search of the fugitives, announced that they were not very willing to give up the chase.

That the officers would suspect there was some trick in the affair, and that Claude and his companions were in hiding after their escape, there could be very little doubt ; but it was not likely they would think that they had had the audacity to come back to the farm, and actually take possession again of the very stable in which the cattle had been so short a time before the attack had been made upon the premises.

It was in the exceeding boldness of the act, that its great chance of safety lay.

As regarded the farm-house, all seemed tolerably quiet there for a time ; but the adventurers could not feel assured that their foes had wholly left it without some better evidence than its mere quietude, and for such better evidence they resolved to wait.

The noises on the common grew less and less each moment, and Jack had just said that they might begin to consider the danger to be at an end, when a trampling of feet came upon their ears.

"Hush !" said Claude. "Far from the danger being at an end, I am afraid that it is only about to begin."

They now maintained a profound stillness, and from the noises they heard, they felt quite convinced that the soldiery and the officers were returning to the farm. That such a case of proceeding might naturally enough ensue, had entered into the calculation of Claude, and he felt that their only safety lay in the improbability of the stable being looked into again.



"Halt!" cried a voice.

In a moment the sound of footsteps ceased. A voice then said—

"Mr. Sergeant, we would not have troubled you to come here again, but if as your men say no person passed them, it is quite clear that those we seek must be hiding somewhere about this place. This plantation is the only shelter they can get, and three men and three horses cannot creep into a nutshell."

"Look about you, then," said the sergeant; "if you find them you may, of course, depend upon our assistance in capturing them; but it seems to me that they have given you the slip, and in some way or another got past our men on the common without being seen."

This conversation was going on in the little plantation close to the stables and gardens of the farm, but it did not appear from the tenor of it that there was any suspicion that the fugitives had taken shelter absolutely in the farm premises again.

Claude still maintained the opinion that in choosing the course he had chosen, he had done the wisest thing he could, and upon the whole, his two friends thought with him upon the subject.

At all events, if they were discovered, they were not much worse than they had been situated upon the former occasion, when they had to leave the stable-yard with so much precipitation. They could but at last have a race for their lives across the common, pursued by the soldiers, whose horses were by no means likely to be so fleet of foot, as those of the highwaymen, which were chosen for speed.

Still, it was a serious sort of thing to be in the stable, and to know that so close at hand there were armed men, who were intent upon their capture, dead or alive, and who, to save trouble, would in all probability prefer the former mode of settling the affair. After all, though, there was not much time to think, and men of real courage, when in the actual presence of danger, do not trouble themselves much with reflections upon its consequences.

The officers began looking about among the underwood of the plantation, and it did not appear that the soldiers thought it any part of their duty to assist them in that kind of search, but they remained merely as spectators of what was going on—perhaps, after all, in their own minds rather pleased than not at the non-success of the civil power.

"They are not here," said one of the officers.

"But they must be," said another.

"Very well, you find them."

"Where are they, then, if they are not here?—that is the question," persisted the other. "They must have vanished, you know, into the air like three ghosts."

"Very good," said the sergeant. "My officer directed me to come with you, and to remain a reasonable time while you searched for the men you want. I think a reasonable time has elapsed."

"Then you can go," said the officer, who seemed to be the principal spokesman of the civil force, "and you can tell your officer, that if he and his men had kept a better look out on the common, that Claude Duval and his comrades would not have escaped so easily as it is quite clear they have done."

"If you have anything of that sort to tell my officer," said the sergeant, "I will trouble you to tell him yourself, my friend, and then you can take the consequences of the telling. For my part, I beg to be excused. Right about, face—march!"

In another moment the soldiers were gone.

Claude gave Jack a sort of nudge with his elbow, as much as to say—"It's all right now, you see, Jack," but they neither of them spoke; for, to tell the truth, the officers were much too near at hand to make that a safe proceeding.

It was quite clear, too, that the officers were very far, indeed, from being satisfied with the whole affair. They were divided between the two opinions of whether the carelessness of the soldiers on the common had let Claude and his companions

escape, or that they were still hiding somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the farm.

Some inclined to one of these opinions, and some to the other; perhaps they all had their doubts both ways; and that it was that made them loath to quit the farm, and the ground immediately surrounding it. A bugle note and the tramp of horses' feet gradually dying away, sufficiently proclaimed the fact that the troops were leaving the spot; and at every step they made towards London again Claude and his friends felt as if an additional piece of safety were granted to them, and as though they had taken a large lease of their lives.

The officers walked through the plantation until they came to the little gate leading into the yard of the farm. They opened it and passed through, and one of them actually leant against the stable-door, while his companions got up a sort of wrangle about what was next best to be done under the circumstances in which they found themselves.

## CHAPTER CCXLVII.

### TOM BRERETON FINDS THAT HE IS IN DANGER.

"It's all through the infernal red coats," said one of the officers, "or we must have had them this time."

"That I believe," said another, "and I thought it would be a bad job from the moment that I heard they were to have anything to do with it; but it was of no manner of use for me to speak."

"Nor me either."

"Well," said a third, "it's no use either growling or grumbling over the affair. What's to be done in it, that's the question. Are we to give it up as a bad job, or to try still to make something of it?"

"It's all very well to talk of trying, but how are you to try? To my thinking, Duval is half-a-dozen miles off here by now."

"Half-a-dozen? he is twice that distance."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder, and here I did think that we had 'em snug; for, from all I could learn, their horses were in the stable, and they had all gone comfortably to bed. Now, wouldn't one have thought they was as good as nabbed then?"

"To be sure."

"And yet here we are, and no good done—and there's the very stable they had their cattle in as empty as nothing now. Oh, it's enough to make a fellow wild, it is."

As he spoke, this officer gave the stable door a kick that sent it wide open, but luckily he did not go in, and the darkness was quite sufficiently intense to prevent any fear of the friends being seen. The door itself had an inclination to shut of itself, and as it swung, slowly closed again, or very nearly so.

"Yes," said another, "there's the nest, sure enough, but the birds have flown, and it strikes me it's about as much use our staying here as nothing at all. I think the best thing we can do, is to get back again to London, and tell the beaks that it's no go."

"Where's that whipper-snapper of a fellow who brought us here, I wonder—Tom Brereton as they call him?"

"Oh, he walked off as soon as any of the real work began, and I have not seen him since."

"Where can he have got to? But it don't matter. Let us call up the people of the farm, and see if we can get anything out of them."

"You may try it, but it won't do."

"Do you think not?"

"I certainly do. We have good reason to believe that the folks at the farmhouse know perfectly well who they have been harbouring, notwithstanding they

pretend that, having lodgings to let, they took the first offer they got, and did not know it was from Claude Duval."

"That's all the better."

"Is it?"

"To be sure it is, for if they knew Duval well, they, no doubt, know well where he is to be found, and so, perhaps, if they are paid well, they might assist us, now that we have got rid of the soldiers. Don't you know that everybody in the world is to be worked upon by threats and by rewards, and we can use both to these people."

"Try it, then."

"I will. In the first place, we can tell them that they will be prosecuted for harbouring a felon, and in the next place, we will offer them a handsome sum if they will give up Claude Duval and his friends to us, and I do think we shall prevail upon them."

"I hope so. One thing, of course, we may be quite sure of, and that is, that Duval must pay them, or they would not put themselves into a predicament to keep him out of harms way."

"Exactly, and if we offer them a better price for betraying him than he gives for keeping his secrets, they will give him up: I believe that's human nature, ain't it?"

"Rather so."

"Come on, then, and let us go into the house."

With this, the officers left the stable-yard, and made their way into the farm house, where, in consequence of the disturbance that had taken place, the family had kept themselves in readiness to meet whatever might happen in the further course of the night.

As soon as the officers were out of hearing, Duval spoke.

"Dick," he said. "This has been rather a close touch, has it not?"

"Very," said Dick.

"And it is one still," said Jack, "for they will come back again this way. What do you think of doing now, Claude?"

"Just nothing. I am inclined to think our experiences of their plans are such as to induce us to remain where we are."

"And I agree with you," said Dick. "There is nothing like the stable, you may depend upon it. They won't come in here."

"And there is another view of the question," said Claude, "that we may very well take, and that is to the effect, that I think, now that they have lost the help of their red coat friends, we might be too much for them. How many officers do you think there are?"

"Not above six or eight."

"Then, after all, it could but be a fight; and it is questionable whether three men who fight for their lives, and who are well armed, are not a match for six or eight who fight for money merely."

Dick laid his hand suddenly upon Claude's arm.

"Hush!" he said, "I hear footsteps. Not a word."

Upon this, they all three were profoundly still, and they could hear a very cautious footstep upon the flag-stones in the yard. It came in a slow, creeping manner past the stable door, and then it paused. Claude's idea was, that one of the officers, having some suspicion that those whom he sought were hidden in the immediate neighbourhood of that spot, had slunk back from his comrades for the purpose of listening for some sound confirmatory of that view.

Nothing could be more natural than that a wily officer of the police would do such a thing as that; but Claude soon found out that such was not the case. Suddenly, quite close to the door of the stable, a voice sounded, and Claude at once recognised it as the voice of his old foe, Tom Brereton.

"Oh, dear," he said, "I don't very well know what to do. This is a pretty piece of business. I made quite sure that Duval would be caught here, and that he would be comfortably hanged, while I retired to live as snug as possible upon

the reward; but now they can't find him. Oh, dear—oh, dear! and I am in such a fright, for fear he should find out it was all through me they are after him."

This was a little bit of news to Duval.

"I wouldn't have come," added Tom Brereton, "if I could possibly have helped it, only I was afraid if I didn't that they would try to chisel me out of the reward in some sort of way. I don't like danger at all, not I. Why a man possibly might get hurt where there's any danger. That's what I don't like it for."

"A capital reason," whispered Dick.

"Hush—hush!" said Claude.

"And now," continued Tom Brereton, "I may say that I am at my wits-end almost. As soon as the row began, I took good care to hide in one of the rooms, so that they did not get hold of me any of them, and now that it's all over, I just slipped out at the window; and I do think the least thing I can do, is to go to town again."

"I should like to get hold of that rascal," thought Duval.

"Ah! dear me, the reward is everything," added Tom, "and I so short of money, too, that I don't know what to do. It would be so comfortable to catch Duval, and make a thousand pounds by getting him hanged, that it would."

"Duval," whispered Dick.

"Yes—yes."

"Let us go out and bring that fellow into the stable. When we have him here, the devil's in it but we can keep him quiet."

"His fear will do that. You can go and get him in if you like, but be careful that there is no noise in the transaction, for if once he begins bellowing, he will not be able to listen to reason, and there will be no such thing as quieting him, without hitting him on the head, and that I should not like to do, he is such an idiot."

"He may be an idiot, but he is a vicious one," said Dick. "I will make him believe I am one of the officers."

"Do so. It will be good sport, at all events."

Dick cautiously issued from the stable, and just as Tom Brereton was commencing his complaints, Dick said—

"Hist! hist! Who is there?"

"Oh, murder! who is that?" said Tom. "Spare me—oh, spare my wretched life. I haven't done anything, indeed I haven't. Oh, oh!"

"Hush. I am an officer."

"An officer? Police?"

"Yes. Bow-street."

"Oh," said Tom, "I'm as glad to hear that, as if anybody had given me a guinea—at least, nearly as glad. Are you looking for Claude Duval?"

"I am. Can you give me any intelligence of him? I think you are the gentleman who gave the information to the police."

"Yes, I am the gentleman; but I'm sorry the police have not found the fellow. Do you think there is any chance of yet doing so?"

"Every chance. With your assistance, I think—indeed, I may take upon myself to say that I know we must lay hold of them."

"Excuse me, then," said Tom Brereton, "I ain't very well, and as far as the laying hold of the business goes, I'm afraid I ain't equal to it just now."

"You shrink from the danger?"

"Most decidedly I do, my friend; I don't like danger."

"But the reward?"

"Ah, the reward is all very well; but pray what would be the use of it if I had a pistol-bullet in my brains first? Let me ask you that."

"Oh, nonsense."

"It's all very well for you to say, 'Oh, nonsense.' Perhaps you are used to such things, and if you are, I can only say that I am decidedly not."

"Well then, I must adopt my other plan, which is not quite so glorious, because it is perfectly safe, and people will say nothing about our courage in the transaction, that is the annoying feature of it."

"Is it? That may be the annoying feature of it to you, but to me I can assure you it is the beauty of it, and if you have really any plan by which Duval



THE THREE FRIENDS WARNED OF DANGER AT THE VILLAGE INN.

can be caught without danger to us, you may count upon me going through fire and water. That is to say, if the fire is just upon out, and the water is decidedly shallow."

"You are quite a wag," said Dick.

"No, I ain't. You are joking now, Mr. Officer."



"Oh, no—no—I never joke. Don't say that of me. But don't you think it would be a capital thing if you and I could manage the whole affair alone?"

"No."

"No? You don't mean that? Surely it is you who are joking now, my friend. Come—come, you don't mean really to say 'No,' to such a chance, especially as it is without danger, too? Think of that."

"Why, yes; that's just what I do think of; but I can tell you that the Secretary of State has promised me all the reward, so I don't want any of the glory as long as I finger the cash. That's glory enough for me, and I'd rather be on the safe side than take any trouble for you and I only to do it."

"Well, all that is just as you please; so, I will now disclose to you my plan, and I can only assure you that in the first instance, it is founed upon positive information that Duval is still in this neighbourhood."

"You don't say so?"

"I do. I have seen him since the soldiers left."

"The deuce you have! Why didn't you lay hold of him?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, sir, I was rather afraid he would kick up a row. You have heard the old story of catching a Tartar?"

"To be sure I have; and that would be just my sort of feeling, if I were to come across him, and between you and me and the post, I rather think I should feel inclined to get out of the way: He's a desperate villain."

"He is; but just step this way, for I am afraid that what we may say may be overheard by some one, and that might bring upon us a pistol-shot or two."

"Murder! You don't mean that!"

"Yes, I do. As I tell you, Claude Duval is somewhere rather close at hand, and if he saw us, I daresay he would not by any means be very particular about how he popped us out of the way. I have been hiding in a stable close at hand to here, and if you slip into it with me, you will find we shall be able to consult quite free from any interruption, and in perfect safety, too, from any stray pistol-shot that may be sent at our heads if we stay here."

"Lord bless me, yes!" said Tom Brereton. "Let us get anywhere, so that we are safe. Danger is just about the only thing I don't like, for, as I often say, what's the use of a man's being well off, if he gets a crack on the head that unsettles his brains, or a poke in the stomach that spoils his digestion for the remainder of his life?"

"You are quite a philosopher, and I must only say that I agree with you so entirely, that I hope we shall be capital friends for the future."

"Well, I have no objection, you seem a very reasonable sort of person; but for my sake let us get into the stable as quick as we can. I am all of a perspiration with the idea of being popped at by one of Duval's pistols in the way you mention. I will follow you."

"Do so. This way, This is the very stable in which Claude Duval and his friends had their horses."

"Oh, the highway villains! Don't I wish I saw the day, when they shall all be hanging upon one beam, and the hangman ready to turn them off. That would be a sight, wouldn't it?"

"It would, indeed; but should you have no pity for them under such circumstances, my friend?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, that is a pity. But here is the stable."

With this, Dick gently pushed Tom Brereton into the stable, and kept guard at the door of it himself, so that he should not by a sudden rush, when he found he was betrayed, manage to get out of it, as he would very likely attempt to do in his right

"How precious dark it is," said Tom.

"Yes, that's the beauty of it."

"The beauty of it?"

"To be sure, because you can't be seen in it, if any one were to open the door suddenly and take a peep in."

"Oh, ah, in that case I grant you it's all right," said Tom; "and now I sha be right glad to hear your plan of nobbing Claude Duval and the two fellow that are with him, for I suppose the scheme includes them all three. It would be a pity to let the other two off, you know."

"The scheme does include all three. You may take your oath, that if you catch Duval, you will catch the other two. Now I told you that I felt pretty sure he was not far off, and to convince you of that fact, I don't mind now letting you know that he is in this stable."

Before Tom Brereton then could open his mouth to express his horror, Claude said—

"Tom, if you remain quite quiet, I won't cut your throat; but if you make any disturbance I will; so you have for the present your fate in your own hands. I am Claude Duval."

## CHAPTER CCXLVIII.

### DETAILS THE SINGULAR ADVENTURE AT THE BANK OF ENGLAND.

If absolute terror had not destroyed all power of reflection with Tom Brereton reflection itself would have induced him to be quiet; but as it was, he as nearly fell into a swoon as it was possible to do, without actually lapsing into that state.

"All's right," said Jack.

"And hark you, Tom Brereton," added Claude. "I am not perhaps so much now in the mood of showing mercy to your folly and your vindictiveness as I have been at times before, for you have sought the destruction of others just because they were associated with me; so I tell you in all seriousness to beware."

Tom Brereton managed just to gasp out the word "Mercy!"

"Yes," added Claude, "that is ever the way with those who know not what the quality of mercy is in themselves. They call for it in others the moment they find themselves in any fearful circumstances. How dare you ask for mercy of me?"

"I—I don't know! Oh, dear!"

"He is a fool," said Dick.

"Nearly an idiot in point of real intellect," said Claude, "and yet you would not believe what a world of low, malignant cunning lurks in his brain."

"Is it possible!"

"Oh, no—no," said Tom Brereton. "Spare me, do!"

"Silence, or this moment is your last," said Claude, for in his fears, contingent upon the not very bright character Claude was giving him, he was beginning to speak much louder than the safety of the confederates in the stable warranted under the circumstances.

"I'll put him in one of the horse-racks," said Jack, "and if he stirs, I will shoot him, so that he can do as he likes, you know."

"Anywhere," said Tom. "Oh, dear, kind, sirs, put me anywhere, so that you spare my life. Oh, pray do!"

Jack took him by the collar, and finding one of the racks, he placed Tom Brereton in it, and then daring him to say a word, or to move an inch, he left him to his meditations.

Claude was close to the door of the stable, and he heard the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching the yard. In a moment or two, a voice came very plainly upon his ears.

"The best thing you can possibly do," said the voice, "is to give us all the information you can."

"I have no information to give," said the young farmer in reply.

"Well, we shall stay here all night, for we don't believe yet but that Claude Duval is somewhere in this neighbourhood."

"As regards your staying here all night," said the young farmer, "you are welcome enough to do so, and if you catch Claude Duval, I shall be as much surprised as you will, you may depend. Will you walk in?"

"Oh, yes, we will walk in. The night air is none so very pleasant just now."

They all left the stable-yard, and the moment they had gone, Claude said to his comrades—

"It strikes me that now is the time for us to go. These officers will no doubt wait in the house, and we do not want a collision with them, merely for the sake of one."

"Certainly not," said Dick, "so let us be off."

"But what are we to do with our prisoner?" said Jack.

"I see no help for it, but to leave him here," said Claude.

"No," interposed Dick, "that won't do. He is just the sort of animal to give the alarm the moment our backs are turned, and then we shall be pursued, which is just as well avoided, even although we don't care much about it. My horse is quite fresh, and will carry double for a few miles without thinking anything of it, so I propose that I take him behind me and carry him off."

"If you will do it, Dick, it is the best thing."

"Oh, I'll do it."

"And I'll fetch him for you," said Jack.

Jack soon ferreted out Tom Brereton from the rack into which he had placed him, and Dick having mounted, Tom was placed behind him on his horse, and securely tied round his waist by a spare rein that Jack had in case of accidents. Then Claude and Jack both gained their saddles, and Claude, pushing open the door of the stable, said,—

"Off and away! Let us go quietly till we get over the heath, and then we will treat our steeds to a gallop."

"All's right," said Dick; "I don't see or hear a soul."

Everything seemed to be very quiet indeed in the farm-yard, and the adventurers began to have a good expectation of getting away without any collision with the officers. To be sure, Claude did not blind himself to the likelihood of the fact that the farm was well watched being no idle threat, and he kept warily glancing about him as he proceeded.

The gate that led from the farm-yard was open, so that they did not even lose the time that would have been consumed in dismounting from their horses, and they gained the little wilderness of trees that separated the grounds of the farm from the common in safety.

"This is capital," said Jack.

"Do not say anything yet," said Claude; "we don't know what may happen in a little while. Get your pistols ready."

"Oh, gentlemen," said Tom Brereton, when he heard the clicking of the pistol-locks, and felt that there was some possibility of a contest, "if there's to be any fighting, do let me go, for I don't feel well at all. You know it can do you no sort of good to keep a poor fellow like me in such a situation. Oh, do let me go, and I make a solemn promise that I will walk all the way to London, and not interfere with you in any way or say one word about you again as long as I live."

"Be quiet," said Dick.

"Oh, but do, sir, do!"

"Shoot him," said Jack.

"Murder, no! I am quiet—I won't [say another word—I am quiet, indeed I am."

After this highly practical threat, Tom thought it best to hold his tongue, but he shook so with fear that he quite annoyed Dick, who had him so close at hand; but it was of no use asking him to be still, when, perhaps, it was really out of his power to be so, and Dick, therefore, put up with the infliction.

Claude took the lead, and passed right through the little thick plantation. He was rather surprised at getting quite so far without some degree of danger or something happening to let them know that the enemy were at hand; but yet he did not venture to congratulate himself upon an escape, for he could not believe that all the worst danger could go off so easily, like a mere puff of smoke.

Jack and Dick, no doubt, shared with him that opinion, for they were perfectly still, and the manner, indeed, of the whole three of them was that of men waiting for some catastrophe that they would have to meet as best they might.

The common was gained, and then even Jack, who might be considered to be the most cautious expectant of something amiss of the whole three of them, began to have hopes.

"We shall get clear," he said.

Hardly had the words escaped his lips, when there came the sharp crack of a pistol-shot upon their ears from some distance. That this shot was a signal of some sort, they felt convinced; and that it was not actually fired at them, the distance showed pretty clearly.

"Now for it," said Claude.

As he spoke, he urged his horse on, and instead of going by the regular cross path to the high-road across the common, he struck off to the left, country ways, over the green sward itself, and hardly had he done so, than he heard the bugle sound, that at once indicated to him that if the main body of the military had left the spot, some, at all events, remained to lend aid to the civil authorities. This was a contingency that Duval had not left out of his calculation; but still, at the most, it could only involve a few pistol shots after him, and as regarded speed, he knew quite well that his and his companions horses would at any time beat those of the soldiery.

"Forward—forward!" he cried; "the red coats will be upon us."

"Murder!" shrieked Tom Brereton.

Dick gave him rather a severe poke in the ribs with his elbow, coupled with an injunction to be quiet, and Tom was still again.

Dashing on towards the village of Ealing, they all three went, keeping as nearly as possible in a line behind each other, because by so doing, if they were fired at there was the better chance of escape, at all events, for two of them. Dick brought up the rear. Jack was quite willing to do so, but Dick would not let him. Perhaps, there was a little bit of calculation for the good of them all in this manœuvre of Dick's.

"They come!" cried Jack.

At these words, Claude looked round. He was very anxious to know the exact nature of the danger that awaited them, and the number, as it could be told at a glance, of their foes. He saw that there were two mounted men in plain clothes, and five, as he thought, of the military, so that, take them altogether, there were seven to three, which was rather fearful odds, considering all things, for it was not likely that any of the seven were men who would shrink from the fight.

"We can't tackle them," cried Claude; "we must show them a light pair of heels for it. Follow me: I will double upon them as soon as I possibly can. On—on."

The slight delay that had ensued while Duval was examining the number of their foes, and the diagonal line that he and his friends took in evading their enemies, while the soldiers and officers came on the high road converging towards the same point, which was the entrance to the village of Ealing, brought the two parties in closer contact than Claude would have desired; still, he hoped to reach the commencement of the village sufficiently before the enemy to enable him to make the chase that seamen call a stern chase, and in that case he knew that each moment would be to his advantage and to the advantage of his friends—for in fleetness, the horses of the highwaymen could laugh at those opposed to them.

Yet it was rather a ticklish thing, for the soldiers urged their horses on at a gallop; but Claude did reach the village first, though not so far in advance of the enemy as he hoped.

Probably the soldiers had a shrewd suspicion that the state of affairs would be very soon changed, and that if they did not succeed in doing something at once, they would not have much chance in a little while, for they suddenly fired their carbines at the party they were in pursuit of, and the report rang loudly in the morning air.

"Who's hurt?" cried Claude.

"No one," said Dick and Jack both at once.

"That will do, then. Now, then, we can bid them good-by."

They were upon the level road, and the pace they went at was so prodigious, that they soon left the soldiers far behind them. It is no exaggeration to say that they covered three feet of ground to the soldiers' two feet, so that the progress out of their way was rather considerable.

Claude, however, had no wish to go just then right away into the country, and he knew very well that to his right hand he would soon come to a lane that would lead him round by Hanger Hill towards London again, and he slackened his speed a little when he saw that the lane was close at hand.

"This way," he shouted, as he dashed up it.

"Hurrah!" cried Dick. "Here we are."

Claude pursued the lane for a mile before he drew rein, and then gradually pulling up his horse, he cried out—

"Now, who will get up a tree, and look for the Philistines?"

"I will do that," said Jack. "My horse will stand still, and spare me one-half of the trouble. I can get upon his back, and then standing, I can reach a bough that otherwise I should be some time getting at."

"Do it, Jack, at once then. Shall I hold your horse?"

"No, he will move if you do."

Jack patted the horse for a few moments, and the creature seemed to understand thoroughly what he intended it to do, for it stood perfectly still, while Jack clambered on to its back, and then stood on the saddle. He had taken his position under the bough of a large chestnut tree, which he could then just reach, and he quickly drew himself up into the body of the tree, and gained a position some thirty feet or so from the level of the ground.

"Can you see them?" said Claude.

"Yes."

"Ah, indeed; where are they?"

"Holding a council of war at the corner of the lane. They don't seem to know which way to go yet. Yes they do. They are going along the road, but reluctantly to all appearance. One of them points up this lane."

"Then he is the wisest among them."

"The others overrule him, and they all go on. We are quite safe. They are off and away."

"Come down, then, Jack."

"What am I to do with this fellow behind me?" said Dick. "I am rather tired of him, I can tell you; and the sooner you rid me of him the better."

"We will leave him here," said Claude. "Come, Mr. Tom Bereton, you know quite well that if we were to hang you to the first convenient branch of a tree we came to, it would be serving you as you deserve at our hands; but you are such a fool, that I cannot bring my mind to do it."

Tom Bereton made no reply.

"Untie the reins," said Dick, "and take him down. He is leaning with all the weight he can upon my back."

"He is dead!" said Claude.

"Dead!"

Dick gave such a start, that his horse took the alarm, and reared and plunged so, that he had some difficulty in getting the creature to be quiet again.

"Woa!—woa!—easy! You don't mean to say that he is dead, Claude?"

"You will soon see."



Claude unfastened the rein that had attached Tom Brereton to Dick, and then Tom fell heavily from the horse to the ground.

"There he lies," added Claude. "He is quite dead, and I can easily comprehend how it has happened. The fact is, Dick, he has saved your life!"

"Saved my life?"

"Yes. When the soldiers fired, the bullet that would have taken effect in your back, took effect in his, and the distance was too great for it to go through you both, or you would both have caught it."

Dick dismounted, and looked silently at Tom Brereton for a few moments. Then he said—

"Well, I little thought when I offered to take him on my horse, that I was doing what would save me from death; but, after all, I must confess, that I would much rather him than myself caught the bullet."

"Particularly," said Duval, "as it was fired by his friends, and not by one of ours."

"Yes; that makes all the difference, I admit."

By this time Jack had dropped from the tree, and was looking at Tom Brereton.

"Ah," he said, "there's an end of him now, at all events. He won't trouble us any longer. The fool has brought his own destruction upon his own head."

"Hush," said Claude, "I hear the sound of wheels."

They all listened, and quite plainly heard the sound of carriage wheels in the lane. The vehicle, whatever it was, was not proceeding at a very great rate, so they had time to consider what they had better do.

## CHAPTER CCXLIX.

### THE FRIENDS ACQUIRE A VERY LARGE BOOTY.

THE approach of the vehicle, whatever it was, that was plainly to be heard, had the effect of hastening their resolves concerning what they were to do with the dead body of Tom Brereton.

"The best thing in the world," said Dick Turpin, "is to put it through the hedge into the meadow, and leave it to be found or not by any one who may chance to be passing across the fields."

"Very well," said Claude. "I'll take him. He and I were tolerably well acquainted while he lived, and so I don't much mind pulling him along now that he is dead. Come, Master Tom Brereton, you and I will go together through the hedge, and that is almost the last that I want to have to do with you."

With these words, Claude picked up the body, and forced it through a weak part of the hedge on to the green sward of the meadow adjoining the side of the lane, and then replacing as well as he could hastily the displaced branches of the briars, he rejoined his companions.

"Look out; it's a gig that is coming," said Dick.

Claude stood by his horse, and looked in the direction the vehicle was coming, and saw that, as Dick said, it was a gig. In it was seated a white faced man with a white cravat, so alarmingly tight, that it was evidently quite a matter of impossibility for him to turn his head in any direction without moving his whole body likewise.

At the sight of the three men and horses, the gig was stopped, and a look of intense alarm came over the countenance of the driver of it.

"Hilloa!" he said, "who are you?"

Claude walked up to him with an easy air.

"Why, sir," he said, "as you are a gentleman, we don't mind telling you that

we are on the look out for three highwaymen upon the road, and that the notorious Claude Duval is one of them.

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, I do; but, somehow, the villains have baffled us as yet, and we cannot find them, so we were just consulting what to do."

"And are you sure they are hereabouts?"

"Oh, yes; we traced them up this lane."

"Oh, what an escape for me! What an escape! I am the Reverend Peter Holmes, and am going to the Bank of England with a draft signed by the chairman and secretary of the Society for the Spiritual Regeneration of the younger children of Timbuctoo. The draft is for a thousand pounds."

"Indeed, sir! It is quite a good thing you did not encounter some unscrupulous person who might have taken it from you."

"Oh, but if they had, they would not have paid it at the bank, for they know me very well, and have orders not to pay the money to any one else."

"Then, sir, I presume that you are quite safe."

"Oh, but I have to come back with it, because it has to be decided between me and the chairman and the secretary—that is to say, we have to settle how it is to be used for the pious purposes for which it was collected."

"Exactly, sir. All we can do is to wish you good speed on your journey, and to beg of you to be very careful how you get back with the money."

The reverend gentleman seemed to be considering for a few moments, and then he said—

"Could I, do you think, in a reasonable way, make it worth your while to go with me to the Bank of England, and come back with me to my house, as a protection against the highwaymen you mention?"

"It is likely enough, sir. We should be very happy, of course, to give you any protection in our power upon the occasion, I am quite sure."

"Then, I tell you what, young man, you seem to be a very respectable officer, indeed, and I will give five guineas amongst you, if you can manage to protect me to the bank and back again, with my gig and my money."

"Allow me, sir, to consult with my brother officers a moment, and I daresay we shall find a means of meeting your wishes."

"Certainly—certainly, that is quite correct."

Duval, who could hardly keep his countenance, as he spoke to the parson who thus desired his protection, walked up to Dick and Jack, who had kept at a little distance, and said to them—

"Did you hear what we said to each other?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, I don't know a better chance of a thousand pounds than this. There is no doubt but it has been subscribed by fools, to go into the pockets of hypocrites, and we had much better have it than they."

"But how can it be done—shall we wait for him here?"

"If we all do so, he will be sure, after what I have told him, to get an escort of officers home with him. Now, what I propose is, that you two should wait here, while I go to the bank with him, in his gig, and bring him back to this spot with the money, where you two can rob us of it."

"A good joke," said Dick.

"Capital," said Jack. "Why, it wouldn't take you above two hours to go there and come back again. We can easily take a rest here until you return."

"You must take charge of my horse, too."

"Oh, yes. That, you know, you can leave us to do, Claude, with perfect confidence."

"I do, Jack; so now, I think, we understand all about it; and of all things in the world, I feel inclined to get possession of the money, that has been so stupidly subscribed to be so villainously used."

"Well, Mr. Officer," said the parson, "have you made up your mind?"

"Yes, sir," said Claude, advancing to the gig again, "my two comrades, as they have been specially ordered by the Secretary of State to remain here upon the look-out for Duval and his associates, dare not leave the spot; but I will leave my horse to their care, and ride with you to town and back again; and I can only say, that it will need to be a bold fellow who will take anything from



CLAUDE RETALIATES UPON THE BOY FOR HIS TREACHERY.

you while I am with you, for I am well armed, and so very scrupulous how I use my weapons when there is occasion."

As he spoke, Claude took his pistols from his pocket and began to examine the flints, which warlike demonstration had quite an effect upon the parson, and made him more than ever anxious to secure the services of one who would be so efficient a safeguard in case of danger.

"Very well," he said, "if you can manage to come, I shall be well pleased, and you may depend upon receiving your reward."

"You will be so good, sir, if you please as not to say anything to anybody about the reward, as we, of course, are bound to do these kind of jobs for nothing, you know, sir."

"Oh, no, I won't say anything."

"Thank you, sir, then I will accompany you with the greatest pleasure, and I certainly promise you that no highwayman shall have a chance of robbing you while I am with you."

"I am quite pleased," said the parson; "upon my life, I do feel now something like secure. The idea of me driving through these green lanes and such a hardened and diabolical ruffian as Claude Duval in them."

"It was a risk," said Claude, as he got into the gig. "Good-by, comrades. I shall soon be back with you."

"Perhaps you don't mind driving?" said the parson.

"Not a bit. I will do so with pleasure; and if you will permit me to go at a good pace, as I see your horse is quite capable of it, I shall be glad, as the sooner I rejoin my comrades the better. They might not, you see, sir, without me be quite a match for Claude Duval."

"Certainly—certainly. What is your name?"

"Bland."

"What, are you Bland, the well known officer of Bow Street?"

"The same, sir, at your service."

"I'm quite delighted, and I do believe from all I have heard of you, that you are a match for any highwayman that ever was. Now, indeed, I feel calm and secure, and I know that the money is quite safe."

"You may think of anything you like, sir, for the money is just as safe, to my thinking, as if it were in my pocket."

"Ha! ha! Mr. Bland; but I would rather have it in my own, you know."

"Of course, sir."

Claude put the horse to speed, and was soon clear of the green lane. Once upon the high-road, he knew that he was leaving his foes behind him; as, from the report of Jack, he was sure that they had gone right on towards Hanwell and Southall; so he went rapidly to London without fear of recognition.

It was lucky for Duval that he was dressed plainly. The fact was, that he always, when he went to the farm, dressed himself as unlike his general appearance on the road as possible, so that no one would be likely to know him seated quietly in the gig by the side of the parson.

"I hope, sir," said Duval, "that your benevolent intentions respecting the youthful population of Timbuctoo will be successful."

"Oh, ah, yes—to be sure."

"Is the mission a very successful one, sir?"

"Pretty well, pretty well. They are worthy ladies who subscribe to it; and as long as there is a reverend gentleman at the head of the affair, and another for the secretary, and a nobleman for the chairman, they don't mind."

"Don't mind what, sir?"

"Come, come, Mr. Bland, you are rather too curious."

"I hope not, sir. For my part I would rather see the money in your pocket, than hear of its going to Africa, for I am sure it would be of more use to you. There's an old lady, now, that I know something of, who has got ten thousand pounds to leave, and she don't know which of the societies to will it to."

"You don't mean that, Mr. Bland?"

"I do, sir."

"My dear Bland, and do you know her?"

"Quite well, sir, and she has asked me to inquire about the different societies for the conversion of the heathen, that she may be guided by my report."

Claude was merely throwing out a bait to gain the confidence of the

parson, as he was not a little curious to know how such affairs were managed.

"My dear Mr. Bland, allow me to assure you, that if you can only induce her to leave her money to our society, she will be highly gratified."

"What, when she is dead?"

"No—no. I mean that you will be highly gratified."

"I don't see how it is to gratify me, sir; for between you and me, I think all the money that is spent, or said to be spent, in converting little blackamoors, had better have been given to the poor and the destitute of our own country."

"Well, well, Mr. Bland, you are a man of the world."

"I rather think I am, sir."

"Not a doubt of it; and of course you do the best you can for yourself, like every one else in this sinful sphere."

"Rather, sir."

"Then, Mr. Bland, I feel that I may trust you with a degree of confidence that I should be very sorry to have in everybody. If you will induce the old lady you mention to leave her ten thousand pounds to our society, you shall have five hundred pounds for yourself. I give you my word for that amount."

"Five hundred pounds? That is not much out of ten thousand pounds. Make it a thousand pounds, and it's done."

"Done!"

"You will give me a thousand pounds if the old lady leaves her property to your society? That you clearly and distinctly promise?"

"That I clearly and distinctly promise."

"Then consider you have got it; and all I can say is, that if you send one penny piece of it to Africa, you are not the sort of gentleman I hope you are."

"I don't intend. Between you and me, my friend, I don't believe there is such a place at all as Timbuctoo; and if there is, all the little Heathens there may go to the —, you understand, before they get any money out of me."

"All right."

The parson nodded and laughed.

"But how do you get the people to subscribe?"

"Why, our principal assistants are Lord Crashley, and a Mr. Gabble. They are both men eaten up with personal vanity, and they have no abilities to make themselves public men in a way that men of talent can do; so they take up what is known as the 'Public Charity Dodge.'"

"And the officials pocket the money?"

"Exactly."

"But don't these men subscribe a great deal of money?"

"Oh, dear no. They only give their names as decoy ducks to others. Catch them subscribing! It's quite the other way; and it's an understood thing that they are never to be called upon for any money, so they put their names down for something handsome, and then never give it another thought. That's how they do it."

"Well," said Claude, "one must live and learn in this world; and, certainly, it don't improve upon acquaintance, I must say."

"Well, perhaps it don't; but don't you forget the old lady, Mr. Bland, and the ten thousand pounds."

"That you may depend I will not."

The horse in the gig under the skilful guidance of Claude Duval, went at a capital pace, so that Oxford Street was soon gained. There was not at that time—blessed quiet time!—one carriage in the streets of London to a hundred that are now, so that there was no difficulty in driving right on to the Bank of England, which now is only to be arrived at in any vehicle of less size than an omnibus, after half a dozen stoppages, and the risk of being smashed to pieces.

No one on the line of road took the smallest notice of Duval, although, no doubt, he passed many persons who would not have been a little pleased to have



cried out his name, and apprehended him. The parson leant back in the gig with quite a contented air, little suspecting who it was he was in companionship with in that vehicle.

The bank was reached, and while Duval waited in the gig, the reverend gentleman went to get his cheque changed, with the proceeds of which he very shortly returned. Claude was rather anxious to know if all were guineas, or if he had taken any notes, for the latter was not of much value to any one in the line of business that Duval was. The bag in which the parson had the money was heavy.

"All gold?" said Duval.

"No. Five hundred pounds in gold; and the rest in notes."

"Oh, that's pretty well; and, now, sir, I presume we have nothing to do but to get back again as quickly as we possibly can?"

"That is all, my friend; and you may depend upon your reward as soon as you get back to my house."

"I make no doubt of my reward," said Claude, "and did not from the first; and I cannot help thinking that it is a very good two hour's work."

"Pretty fair; but I hope you will sometimes have a better."

"Sir, you are exceedingly kind, and I can only say that I cordially agree in that hope, so very delightfully uttered."

"I told the officer who is on duty at the bank that I had you with me, and he said he knew you quite well, and would have come out to see you if he had had time."

"What an escape!" thought Claude. "And so he had not time to come and say, 'How do you do,' to a friend?"

"No; he was waiting to speak to one of the bank directors who was expected to come out every minute; but he told me to remember him to you."

This was a piece of real good luck, for if the constable at the bank had only stepped out to the street the plot must in a moment have been blown to the winds by his repudiating any knowledge of Claude Duval, and distinctly averring that he was not Bland, the officer.

If possible, Claude put the parson's horse more upon its mettle in going back to the green lane, near Hanger Hill, than in coming from it, so that Oxford Street was passed, and Tyburn Gate dashed through at a strapping pace. The parson, indeed, requested that he would not go quite so fast, so that Claude was compelled to moderate his speed a little; but still, with all that, the pretty little green lane was very soon in sight.

## CHAPTER CCL.

CLAUDE REJOINS HIS COMPANIONS, AND THEY GO TO A WEDDING.

"WHY, here are some soldiers," said the parson.

At that word, soldiers, Claude looked up rather hurriedly, for he had lapsed into a sort of reverie upon the folly of people who part with their money to enrich charitable and religious societies, and thus deprive themselves of one of the greatest pleasures that the world can bestow upon human nature—the pleasure of personally doing good.

"Soldiers!" he said. "What soldiers?"

"Why, soldiers on horseback. Don't you see them, Mr. Bland?"

"Oh, yes."

Rather to his chagrin, we will not say alarm, for Duval was not the sort of man to be alarmed exactly, he saw coming evidently back, tired and dusty from their fruitless chase after him and his companions, the five soldiers and the two officers who accompanied them. Claude Duval felt in a moment that he was rather in very great danger indeed, or none at all.

"Yes," he said, "I see them, sir. They must have been upon extraordinary duty, for they look rather fatigued and tired."

The great thing for Duval to find out now was if either of the officers knew him personally. The strong probability was that they did, for, otherwise, it would not have done them much good to select them to accompany the soldiery.

"Oh, dear," said Claude, suddenly putting his handkerchief up to his face; "did you ever have the tooth-ache, sir?"

"Dear me, yes, but not of late years, Mr. Bland. Have you got it now, sir?"

"I have, indeed. Oh, such a shooting pain! It is really enough to drive any one quite mad. Oh—oh—oh!"

"Well, that is very unfortuna<sup>t</sup>e, indeed. But have patience: it cannot last very long, coming on in such a violent manner."

"Oh, can't it, though! Pray, sir, take the reins; I cannot see to drive. I do hope it will go away, soon."

Duval fell as far back in the gig as he could conveniently go, and almost entirely covered up his face with his handkerchief, so that but very little of him could be seen, and then he waited the coming up of the soldiers.

"Sir!" he said to the parson, "sir!"

"Well, what, Mr. Bland?"

"I have, by accompanying you to London, sir, gone out of the sphere of my duty, for you know, sir, as I told you, I was ordered, by the Secretary of State, to keep watch for Duval in the green lanes, and as both these officers know me, without a doubt—for what officer of the police does not know Bland?—I should be glad if the did not recognise me."

"But what can I do?"

"Will you be so good as to say that I am your servant?"

"Oh, no, I cannot, Mr. Bland. I am quite surprised that you should ask one of my sacred profession to lie."

"Why, it's as easy as thieving," said Duval.

"As what, sir?"

"Nothing—nothing. I did but jest, I was thinking of the society for the conversion of the little blackamoors at Timbuctoo, that was all, sir; but without any violence to your conscience, you can say I am a sick friend of yours, for if I get the old lady's ten thousand pounds, you know, I shall be a friend of yours."

"So you will, Mr. Bland, so you will, and as I certainly do not wish to get you into any trouble on account of neglecting your duty to come with me, I will shield you as much as I can."

"Thank you, sir."

By the time this little agreement was entered into between Claude and the parson, the soldiers had reached the spot, and the officers of police rode up to the gig.

"Gentlemen," said one, "did you meet any suspicious characters on the road?"

"No," said the parson.

"Oh—oh!" said Duval.

"What is the matter with the gentleman?" said the other officer. "Is he ill?"

"Yes," said the parson. "He is a sick friend of mine, poor fellow, and he is suffering great pain from the toothache, I assure you, gentlemen. Pray who are you looking for?"

"Claude Duval and his associates."

"Then I sincerely hope you may find them. I have been to London on some business, and should have been afraid to go but for the company of this friend of mine, who was a sort of protection to me on the road."

"And pray, sir, who are you?" said the officer who had first spoken, looking rather inquisitively at the parson and Claude. "We are bound to be rather particular who we let pass on the road, I assure you."

“ You may be as particular as you like. I am the rector of the parish;”

“ You may be, sir, but we don't know it, and we don't take your word for it exactly. Pray consider yourself in custody.”

“ In custody!”

“ Come—come, no resistance, if you please, or we shall clap a pair of darbies upon you and your friend in a moment.”

“ Darbies? Who is Darbies, my friend?”

Duval very gently put his hand into his breast-pocket, and grasped the stock of a double-barrelled pistol. He was resolved that he would not be taken without a struggle, but at the moment that he thought that struggle was quite inevitable; there rode up to the spot a livery servant on horseback, who was going towards town.

“ What's the matter?” he cried.

“ Oh, that's right!” said the parson. “ You know me. I think you are Mr. Price's groom, are you not?”

“ I am, sir,” said the servant, touching his hat.

“ Well, then, I believe these police officers merely mistake me for Claude Duval the highwayman: will you have the goodness to say who I am?”

“ Oh, yes, sir, certainly; you are the rector of the parish, sir, as everyone in this neighbourhood knows quite well.”

“ There,” said the parson, “ are you satisfied now?”

“ Quite so, sir,” said the officer, with a chagrined air. “ But you will excuse us, sir, as we have a very difficult duty to perform, indeed.”

“ Don't say another word about it; as you are after that rascal Claude Duval, the highwayman, I can excuse anything that arises from zeal in the performance of your duty, in that particular; only I do think that I look more like a gentleman than a highwayman.”

The officers were very much mortified that they had made such a mistake, and kept making excuses, while Duval was in an agony at the stupid delay of the parson, now that he might proceed without any hinderance to his doing so.

“ Go on—go on,” he said, in a low tone.

The parson touched the horse with his whip, and off they went again. Each moment that he left now his enemies behind him was a moment of intense gratification to Duval, for as they were proceeding to town, and he was going from it, the distance between him and them increased with great rapidity, and he was rejoiced accordingly.

“ How is your toothache?” said the parson as he turned his horse's head up the green lane.

“ Better.”

“ Ah, I told you how it would be, but you did not believe me. Folks, when they are suffering from pain, never listen to reason; but such a sudden and violent accession of the toothache could not possibly last long.”

“ You are right, sir; it is gradually dying away.”

“ Did you know either of those officers, Mr. Bland?”

“ Oh, yes, both of them well. One of them is named Fat, and the other Taf.”

“ How very odd. Fat and Taf. Why, it's just the letters reversed.”

“ Exactly so, sir. And now here we are where we started from, and my toothache, which I do believe comes on just at the convenient moment when it was necessary for me to hide my face from my friends, has gone again.”

“ Why, you schemer,” said the parson. “ I don't now believe for a moment at you had the toothache at all, though I confess you took me in at the moment.”

“ Did I, though?”

“ Yes, you did; you acted it capitally, I will say. But I don't see your brother officers yet. They ought to be hereabouts, I think.”

“ We shall see them, sir, in good time, never fear; but now that we are in this quiet lane, where we are tolerably secure from interruption, I will let you into an secret that very much concerns the one thousand pounds you have with you.”

"Concerns my one thousand pounds! You don't mean it, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, Mr. Bland, tell it to me at once. Do not keep me in ignorance another moment."

"I do not like to tell it to you very hurriedly, for fear it should be too great a shock to your feelings."

"Bother take my feelings! I have no feeling, and never had, but for my money. Anything that concerns my money is everything to me. Pray, Mr. Bland, do not keep me in suspense, for that is the worst of all."

"I will not, then. You will recollect that when I first met you upon this spot it was I who gave you the information that Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, was about this neighbourhood."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, no one could be better able to give you that information, to a certainty, than myself."

"Of course not."

"Because I am that individual!"

"You are—that—oh, no—What—Murder!"

"I am Claude Duval!"

The parson opened his mouth and let his hands drop to his sides, as though he were about to give up the ghost. This ludicrous terror was highly amusing to Duval, who had a hearty contempt for the character of the parson, as he had himself explained it to him (Claude). For a few moments it seemed as though the rector were upon the point of fainting, but the thought, then, of the jeopardy that his beloved money was in, came over him and roused him to action, and in a shrill voice that echoed through the lane again, he cried—

"Murder!—murder!—murder!"

Duval immediately drew a pistol and placed the muzzle of it against his throat, crying—

"Another such shout, and it is your last in this world. I have but to press my finger slightly upon this little trigger, and your brains are scattered in the lane."

The parson was silent in a moment.

"Listen to me," said Claude. "It is such men as you who bring true charity into contempt when it ought to stand upon the highest pinnacle in popular estimation, instead of being considered as one of the greatest humbugs in the metropolis. Nobody on earth now shall save your money from me and my companions, but if you will have it so, your life will likewise pay the penalty of your folly."

The parson had just sense enough left to comprehend what was said to him by Duval, and with a deep groan, he said—

"Oh, that I should have been such an idiot—oh, that I should have actually carried to town with me in my own gig the very man I so much dreaded! But say it is only a joke. Tell me again that you are Mr. Bland?"

"That I cannot do, for Claude Duval I am."

With this, Claude placed to his lips the small silver whistle that he always had in his waistcoat-pocket, and blew one loud clear note. It was answered by the appearance of Jack and Dick on the other side of the hedge, and Dick called out—

"Is all right?"

"Yes, Dick. Our friend, the parson, now knows who we really are, so pray make an appearance, and bring me my horse."

"Here he is," said Jack, as he threw on one side some portion of the hedge that they had employed themselves in effectually cutting down, so that it could be moved at a moment's notice by the hand. "Here he is, and as fresh as a rose in early morning, Claude."

"Oh, it's no mistake," said the parson, "it's no mistake! I see now that I am completely deceived."

"Yes," said Claude, "and now all I have got to say to you is—your money and your life, or your money without your life. Give it up quietly, and no harm will be done you, but if you resist, we must defend ourselves. We never resort to violence if we can help it, and we don't then unless it is quite forced upon us; so now, sir, you can please yourself."

"Take it—oh, take it," said the parson; and he drew a bag from beneath his seat of the gig, and handed it to Duval, who instantly placed it in his coat pocket.

"And now," said Claude, "allow me to introduce you to my two friends. If you please, reverend sir, this is Dick Turpin, of whom you may have heard?"

"Oh, dear, yes. Oh, the ——"

"And this reverend sir, is Sixteen-string Jack, of whom, in all probability, you have likewise heard something by popular rumours?"

"Yes, gentlemen, I have heard of you all. I can't compliment you upon your honesty, but if you let me go now at once, I shall say that you did rob me, certainly, but that it was done in as gentlemanly and good-humoured a style as possible, considering all things."

"We will not deprive you of the opportunity of saying that," said Claude; "but if I might advise so clever an individual, I should say that your best plan would be to keep the whole affair to yourself."

"Why so?"

"Because I don't think it will tell well; for, if you say much about the robbery, and make a racket in the country concerning it, I shall have to publish what you were good enough to tell me as the mode in which the money affairs of public charities are managed."

"That will do. Good-day."

"Let him go," said Duval. "Ha!—ha!"

"Ha!—ha!" laughed Jack and Dick. "Ha!—ha!—ha!"

The parson put his horse to a trot, and when he got about one hundred yards off he turned round in the chaise, and in a loud voice cried,—

"Ha—ha!"

Immediately, then, he laid the whip upon the horse's back, and went off at a furious gallop, but he need not have done so, for neither Duval nor his friends wished to pursue him.

"Well, he is a droll fellow," said Dick; "what did he mean by that, I wonder? One would think that he was in no laughing humour, at all events; but it was a hearty laugh."

"It was," said Jack.

"I don't comprehend," said Claude; "but it really is of no consequence. If he can laugh over his loss, let him."

"Yes—but," said Jack, "I'm afraid he is laughing over some scheme he has concocted against us; and as now he knows us all three well, it will be but wise to get away from this spot as quickly as possible. We do not know what force he may manage to bring against us."

"That's true," said Duval, as he mounted; "let us now be off, then, at once. We can give our cattle a gallop, for they must be well rested by this time; and I suppose they have feasted upon the fresh grass?"

"That they have, Duval. But where shall we go?"

"Let us get across the country towards Harrow. At the first post-office we come to, I will post a few lines to the farm, to let all them know that we are safe; for by this time they are tolerably anxious about us, no doubt."

"But they will have faith in our good luck," said Dick; "and I daresay they fancy we have distanced our foes by this time. Ah, this is the pace I like. It is a dashing one, and makes the blood dance in one's veins."



## CHAPTER CCLI.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS MEET WITH A LITTLE DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE intimate acquaintance that Duval and his friends had with the neighbourhood was a great help to them, indeed. Without such a knowledge they could



DICK AND CLAUDE MEET WITH A SLIGHT MISHAP.

not have got across the country with the facility that they did; but now, by taking a northerly course, they in a very short time got to the Harrow Road, and halted at the little village of Harlesdon Green, which was then a very rural spot, indeed.

Even now that village, when you are fairly in it, is of a very primitive character

in some places; and the pretty rural lane leading to Willesden will well repay a visit.

Claude Duval stopped opposite the only inn which the village then possessed, and with a smile, he said,—

“I don’t know of an easier adventure than our last, or one which to us has been productive of such large results with so little trouble. In two hours we have earned one thousand pounds!”

“Don’t say we,” said Jack. “You have had it all to yourself, Duval, this time. We have had little enough to do with it, Heaven knows!”

“Yes, Jack, I say we; for are we not by special agreement bound together for the purposes that bring us on to the road? Come, I am rather tired of the saddle. Suppose we make a halt here, and have some refreshment, for I think by this time we must be all in need of it?”

“With all my heart,” said Dick.

“And me, likewise,” said Jack. “This place seems as quiet as it is possible for any place to be so near to London; and there is a garden and a pretty grass plot in the centre of it.”

“Then, let us ride in,” said Claude; “I like to see to my horse while I take some refreshment myself.”

The entrance to the garden was through a pretty little gate, and the three friends at once rode through it on to the little plot of grass that Jack had admired, and which the horses seemed to admire as much as he did, for Claude Duval had no sooner dismounted than his horse took a fancy to have a roll on his back, which he did, to the great derangement of the saddle and its appendages.

Claude laughed, and then there came bustling out of the house towards them the landlord, who was evidently in quite a passion:—

“Hilloa, gentlemen!” he said, “this won’t do. This is not the place to bring your horses into. We have capital stalls, and you will find good entertainment for man and beast; but we can’t have the horses in the garden, you know.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Claude, “they will do no harm. Bring us the best you have in the eating line in the house, and a couple of bottles of the wine you can most recommend, and one bottle of brandy.”

Such an order was to the imagination of the landlord rather magnificent, and he calmed down in a moment concerning the impropriety of the horses being upon the grass plot in the garden.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said, “of course, if you wish it, that is quite another thing. I like always to accommodate myself to the wishes of gentlemen as is gentlemen. Upon my life, it is quite a pleasant thing to see that horse enjoying himself in such a way. A very fine fellow, indeed!”

The landlord then bustled off to execute the order he had received, and Duval with his two friends sat down in a pretty little alcove in the garden, which was completely covered over by the boughs of a monster ash, of most luxuriant growth.

“Well,” said Dick, “here we are; and if the refreshment of this place is as agreeable to us as this garden is pleasant and handy, we will come here again. I wonder, now, what sort of man the landlord really is as regards being trusted?”

“You would not,” said Jack, “be so mad as to trust him, would you?”

“Oh, no; but it would be, you know, a wonderfully convenient thing to us if we could do so upon an emergency.”

“This landlord,” said Claude, “is human; and if it were worth his while to be a faithful friend to us, he would be such. Perhaps, at some other time, it will be worth the trying whether he would be so, and we must bear in mind that there are many men who would rather get from us a few guineas at a time, and often see us, than they would go through the notoriety and the obloquy of giving us up or betraying us to the police, and fingering a large reward at once.”

“That I believe,” said Jack; “but I am averse to making confidence. Hush! here he comes.”

The landlord, followed by a very pretty young girl, now came to the alcove

and laid a cloth, upon which they spread abundance of cold meat and home-made bread, together with the wine and the brandy that had been ordered by Claude.

The three friends could not keep their eyes off the girl, she was so really beautiful. There was such a look of feminine archness upon her face, and her eyes sparkled, and such pretty dimples disported around her mouth when she laughed, that they were quite delighted with her appearance.

"Your daughter, my friend?" said Dick to the landlord.

"No, sir, my niece, and a very good girl."

"If she is as good as she is fair," said Claude, "she is good, indeed."

The girl blushed at the compliment, and hastily retired to the house.

"Ah, sir," said the landlord, "she is rather a wilful girl, though I own that she is good-looking. Now, sometimes the gentlemen of the hunt will come here for a glass of our old ale, and she won't be civil to them as she might be, you know. Lor! gentlemen, that girl might bring loads of customers to the house if she wouldn't be so coy."

"Oh, she is coy, then, is she?"

"Yes, gentlemen; but as I often say, what harm is there in a kiss, when it does good to the house? It might sell me a bottle of wine."

"So it might. You are a capital landlord, and a most exemplary uncle."

This irony was rather too fine for the capacity of the landlord, and he took it as a compliment, replying to it that he always did his best, and that business was business. He then left his guests to enjoy their refreshment by themselves.

It turned out that the wine was good, so that they really did enjoy the little spread amazingly; and after they had thoroughly satisfied their hunger, Dick said—

"Was the money all in gold, Claude?"

"No, half gold and half notes; but I don't know what we shall do with the notes. I suppose we shall have to let the Jews have them, to take to the continent, at their own price."

"That will be little enough."

"Yes, but to us they will be completely useless, for coming, as they did, direct from the Bank of England, of course the numbers were perfectly well known, and they will be stopped in all directions."

"But we might change them quickly."

"Yes; but we don't know who we may victimise by doing so, and perhaps be the ruin of some honest tradesman. We rob, but we do not rob indiscriminately."

"Certainly not. You are quite right, Claude, so the Jews must have them."

"I expect so; but now that we are in a quiet place where we can say that we have a few minutes to ourselves, the best thing we can do is to divide the money, for if anything should happen to me, it is not then all lost to you two."

With these words, Claude Duval took the bag from his pocket containing the parson's money, and laid it on the table before him. It was a stout linen bag, such as is used for cash at the banking-houses, and was tied up with a piece of whipcord very tightly.

"He has taken care of it," laughed Dick.

"I dare say they tied it up so well for him at the bank," said Claude, "as he says they knew him. I wonder how I should have got out of the scrape if he had brought the bank officer out to see his old friend Bland?"

"It would have been one of the most awkward things that can be imagined, Claude," remarked Dick. "In the middle of London, too! Your only plan would have been to have run for it, and tried to reach some of the old family kens that are about Bishopsgate."

"I suppose that would have been about the only chance. But here is the money. The gold we can divide, and the notes—Hilloa!"

Dick and Jack sprung to their feet, and Claude looked in amazement at the contents of the bag. A quantity of farthings and old buttons rolled from it, together with some folded pieces of a newspaper.

"Done!" said Claude.

Dick and Jack looked as blank as possible, and then Claude, all at once, burst into a roar of laughter.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" he said. "This is good. I don't think I will ever set my wit up against a parson again. He has fairly done us, comrades. Look here—see what our one thousand pounds has diminished to! Oh—oh!"

"Confound him!" cried Dick.

"Hang him!" growled Jack.

"Well, but isn't it a good joke?"

"Joke?" shouted Dick. "No, I don't think it is a joke at all. It's a swindle. How the deuce could he take it into his head to serve us such an abominable trick as this, I wonder?"

"I can only account for it in one way," said Claude, wiping the tears from his eyes, which had started there in his mirth. "You may depend when he started from home before he met with us he provided himself with this bag of farthings in case of meeting with a highwayman on the road here, and when I declared myself to him, he thought that he might as well try it upon me?"

"You recollect how he laughed when he got to a little distance from us, and then at what a pretty rate he went off?"

"To be sure I do, and we laughed likewise; but he has got the laugh at us now."

"But he shan't have it long," said Dick. "He lives somewhere, and the money is in his house, or else he has a few brains that can be reached by a pistol-shot, I think."

"Now, Dick," said Claude, "with all due deference to you, you are talking nonsense, old fellow."

"Nonsense?"

"Yes, arrant nonsense. I am to the full as disappointed as you are, but I am not savage over it. The parson was quite justified in serving us such a trick if he could. I don't mean to say but that I should like to give him something for his cleverness; but it must be something very different from the violence of mere revenge."

"You are right, Claude—you are right," said Dick, as he sat down. "I ought to know better, but it is provoking."

"There, Dick, we agree. Hush! the landlord's pretty niece is coming this way I think, for I see her in yonder path."

The young girl approached the little alcove, and without waiting for anything to be said to her, she said in a low tone—

"Go at once. If you know yourselves to be such as other men may inquire after, with intentions of violence, go at once, and do not let this place be made the scene of death, perhaps!"

Dick and Jack half rose.

"Sit still," said Claude. "What is it, my dear, that you would warn us of?"

"Two mounted men are at the front door of the house inquiring for three such as you seem, and they tell my uncle to amuse you here as long as he possibly can."

"A thousand thanks."

"Oh, no, I want no thanks, but all I ask of you is to come here no more, for my uncle will betray you, although you are his guests, and I——"

"And you? Pray go on."

"I have no more to say. Lock to your own safety."

The girl immediately ran off towards the house again.

"This may be serious," said Claude.

"It's the parson, I'd wager a thousand pounds," said Dick.

"And I a thousand buttons and farthings," said Claude, "for here they are, and I shouldn't care who won the stakes."

"How can you joke in such an emergency as this?"

"He always does," said Jack. "I never knew him begin to be so jocular as when he did not know if his life were his own for the next five minutes."

"And why not?" smiled Claude. "I disarm fate of all he procures to injure me by laughing at him. You may depend upon it that to laugh at our misfortunes is your only true philosophy; and by continually making a practice of it, you get regularly into the habit, so that if anything happens amiss, it is quite a capital jest, and fails in all its powers of annoyance."

Claude was losing no time, though, while he was speaking, for he had risen from his seat and put on his hat. At the moment that he did so, a boy of the most scampish look raced into the garden, and deliberately taking Claude's horse by the bridle, he cried, as he tried to lead it from the place—

"Kim up—gee ho!"

"Well," said Claude, "that's cool."

In a moment or two he was behind the boy, and caught hold of him by what he thought was a fur cap he had upon his head, but it turned out to be his own head of hair.

"If you please," said Claude, "I prefer my horse here."

"Oh, dear, I'm cotched!" said the boy; and then diving his hand into his pocket, he got out a clasped knife, which he tried to open with his teeth.

"Oh, indeed," said Duval, "you are such a young viper, are you? Then I must get rid of you."

Close at hand was a blackthorn bush or hedge, that separated the public garden of the inn from the little kitchen garden of the establishment, and in a moment the boy found himself swung through the air, and then alighting exactly into the centre of the blackthorn hedge, which, with its millions of prickles, resented the intrusion in the most energetic manner.

The boy roared for mercy, but blackthorn hedges are deaf to such appeals. The noise that he made, however, was such, that the landlord cantered into the garden, crying out—

"What's the matter—what's the matter?"

"Nothing particular," said Claude, as he mounted his horse. "What's to pay, land'lord, for what we have had?"

"Oh, gentlemen, you are not going yet?"

"Yes we are. Get out of the way, unless you want to be ridden over."

"But just step into the house. I have got some rare old pictures I should like to show you, some of which will make you laugh till your side ache again. Pray dismount, and come in."

"What is to pay?" cried Claude.

"Oh, dear, they will go! It's three guineas."

"Moderate! There's one of them, then," added Claude, as he gave the landlord a cut with his horsewhip across the shoulders that made him dance with pain.

Dick and Jack followed Claude's example, and the landlord got three such slashes upon his back for his reckoning, that he roared again. The friends reached the little gate conducting into the high-road, and there they found about eight or ten horsemen drawn up to dispute their progress, while two or three country fellows, on foot, with pitchforks, hovered in the rear.

## CHAPTER CCLII.

### CLAUDE FINDS THAT THE PARSON'S FARTHINGS ARE OF USE.

THE situation of affairs looked anything but pleasant now, for the party opposed to the progress of the friends did not seem, by any means, of the sort to give way, upon a trifling consideration, to the highwaymen.

The only symptoms of consolation were to be observed among the country



fellows in the rear, with the pitchforks; and they looked as though they would just as soon be somewhere else, and, indeed, no doubt they were quite prepared to run upon the first opportunity that presented itself for so doing.

"Hold!" cried one of the horsemen. "Bloodshed in this affair would only be folly: you are our prisoners."

"And pray, what for?" said Claude.

"On suspicion. That is quite enough for us; and I beg to inform you, that when I take a thing into my head, there's no such thing as getting it out again. I am called obstinate Jones, and am well known all over this part of the country for my determination; therefore, you had better give in at once; as you see I am opposed to you."

"Perhaps," said Duval, "you may get something in your head by your obstinacy, that you will be very glad to get out of it, but will not have the chance."

"What do you mean?"

"A pistol bullet."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Now, my friends, you hear what this fellow says? We have made up our minds to apprehend him and his two assistants, for we can have no doubt of what they are. Highwaymen they were, and highwaymen they are, and we shall be doing a public good by——"

"Pray be quiet, Mr. Jones," said another of the horsemen. "All this talking is of no avail. Allow me to say, that we are in such force that we ought to go in and win. Come on, friends; let us no longer pailey with these fellows."

Upon this, the horseman made a dash forward to catch hold of Duval by the collar; but he was foiled by Claude giving just a touch to the rein of his horse, and swerving on one side, so that the man nearly fell to the road-way. Several of his friends, however, had followed him, and among the rest obstinate Jones; but, as yet, no fire-arms had been used by either side: It was a kind of failing with Claude, not to make use of his pistols until he was fired at by the foe.

The butt-end of the large horse-pistol that Claude had in his hand, very probably did quite as much execution as firing it would have done, and that he used liberally enough, for he laid it with such right good will upon the head of obstinate Jones, that down that worthy went as though he had been struck by lightning.

"Fire upon them!" said a voice.

A couple of pistols were discharged at Duval. The bullet from one of them knocked his hat off, and the other hit him on the shoulder without doing him any material injury.

"Forward!" shouted Claude, and his two friends knew perfectly well what he meant, and by suddenly applying the spurs to their horses, they all three succeeded in getting from the throng of horsemen that were pressing around them. Duval had a pistol ready for firing in his hand, but at the moment he thought of using it at the mounted men, one of the rustics with a pitchfork made a savage dig at his horse, and did indeed slightly wound the animal.

"Ah!" said Claude, "that I cannot and will not forgive."

As he spoke he levelled his pistol, and the bullet went through the fellows' head.

The occurrence had at once the effect of dispersing the men who were on foot, and they scampered off as hard as they possibly could go, shouting for help as they went.

The horsemen, however, were not so easily shaken off, for although Claude and his companions had got temporarily free of them, they were well armed, and did not feel disposed yet to give up the idea of apprehending the three friends.

"Fire! fire upon them!" cried a voice. "They will have it."

"Stoop," said Claude.

Bang! bang! bang! went three or four pistol shots, and the bullets whistled over their heads.

"That will do," said Claude; "now for our broadside, since the enemy have ried their luck — fire!"

They all three fired at the horsemen, and then without waiting even for the smoke of their own fire-arms to pass away, in order that they should see if they had done any damage, they turned and went off at full speed.

"On—on," cried Claude. "Let us get clear of our pursuers, at least. On—on. They have no chance against us at a race."

This was a fact that both Dick and Jack knew pretty well, and although Claude's horse was a little restive on account of the wound he had received from the pitchfork, he went at a dashing pace.

The effort that was made to pursue them by four of the horsemen was so weak a one, that it is doubtful if any of the four really put their horses to speed in the affair, and they soon dropped off, leaving Claude and his friends to pursue their route at leisure. When Claude found out that such was the state of things, he pulled up, and said in a very anxious tone of voice—

"Who is hurt?"

"I am a little," said Dick, as he help up his hand.

"Not much I hope?" said Claude.

"Oh, no, it's a little scratch with a bullet, that's all. If it had only hit a little lower it would have rattled about among my finger bones, and if it had only hit a little higher, it would have gone past me altogether, which would have been by far the most comfortable course for it to have pursued, in my opinion; but as it is I caught it."

Dick's hand was bleeding, and Jack at once began to tie it up with a handkerchief.

"You escaped?" said Claude, addressing Jack.

"Yes, as far as I know. If there's a bullet lodged in my brains, I am not quite aware of it, that's all I have got to say about it. But you, Claude, I'm afraid they touched you."

"On the shoulder, yes; but, after all, it is nothing. As Dick says, though, if it had only been a little lower it might have done me harm, and if it had been a little higher, it would have been a little pleasanter."

"Let me bind it up for you."

"Oh, no. It has done bleeding; but if you will dismount, Jack, and see if that rascal has done any serious hurt to the horse, I shall thank you. It was a cowardly attempt."

"It was," said Jack. "Just place your hand on my horse's bridle, Claude. I don't feel any compunction at the fate of the fellow who would attack the horse. It was a dastardly thing."

"I'm afraid I blew his brains out," said Claude; "but the fact is, I can take an injury to myself pretty calmly, as Heaven knows I have taken and forgiven many; but I cannot stand by and see any animal ill-used, or attempted to be hurt by any one. Is he much damaged?"

"Hardly a bit, Claude. The point of the fork has just raised the skin on the shoulder here, in a long furrow, that is all."

"I am glad of that, indeed; but it was a cowardly thing to touch the creature in such a way. It won't lame him, Jack?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I feel a little better, for if it had, I don't know what I should have done. You can hardly calculate the kind of attachment that I have formed towards this animal that has carried me through so many dangers."

"I can easily understand it," said Jack, as he mounted.

"And I likewise," cried Dick. "Why, I wouldn't part with my gallant little steed for the best thousand pounds that was ever laid down before any man. But what is to be the move now, friends? It seems to me as if society at large were trying to make the roads unsafe for us, instead of us attacking society."

Claude laughed.

"That," he said, "is what they say of hunting the tiger in India. It is fine sport, they say, hunting the tiger, but when the tiger turns round and takes a fancy to hunt you, it is not by any means so remarkably pleasant."

"I should say it was not!"

"Ha! ha!" cried Jack. "Don't complain of nothing to do. Here's a coach."

"A family coach?"

"As big as a house, almost.—No—it's a mourning coach."

"The deuce it is!—Perhaps it's a funeral, and if so—No—it is only a single coach; but a mourning coach it is to all intents and purposes. Jack, will it be worth while to stop such an equipage, think you?"

"Hardly," said Dick.

"I don't know that," said Jack. "If there are persons in it, they are coming home from a funeral you may depend, and there is no reason why they should not have purses in their pockets, as well as any one else."

"True—true," said Claude; "so let us stop the mourning coach."

The mourning-coaches of those days differed in no respect to those that now lumber and wheeze along our thoroughfares; as they were then, so they are now, composed of old carriages blackened over to the sombre tint of fashionable woe. The vehicle which had so very unexpectedly come into sight of the three companions, was one of the oldest and most rickety of its class; and as it came along, drawn by the two stately long-tailed black horses, it swayed to and fro and kept up such a wheezing and groaning upon its springs, that you might have heard it a considerable distance off.

"It looks like cruelty to stop it," said Claude, laughing.

"A mercy, rather, to those who are within it," said Dick.

"Decidedly so," said Jack, "for if their teeth be not all what is called on edge by this time, they have no senses."

"Come on, then."

Claude galloped up to the coach, and while Jack and Dick without a word stationed themselves in the middle of the road, and each levelled a pistol at the coachman, Duval went to one of the windows.

The coachman understood pretty well what was wanted of him, and dropping the reins in a moment, he rolled off the box with an expedition that no doubt was very unusual with him, and dropping upon his knees, the moment he got to the ground, he cried—

"Oh, spare my life. Take all I have—which is nothing—but spare my life, gentlemen—oh, do!"

Dick was rather afraid that the horses might move on, so he held them while Jack was laughing at the terror of the coachman, and pretending to be only puzzled about where exactly to hit him; but in a moment or two the coachman thought of a notable device to protect himself, and in the most ludicrous manner that can be conceived, he held his hat between him and Jack's pistol, dodging it about as Jack moved the muzzle of the weapon, as though that would save him.

Claude, when he got to the door of the coach, at a glance saw that there were no ladies, and in a voice that sufficiently showed he was not to be trifled with, he cried—

"Your money or your lives, gentlemen! Be quick!"

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## [ CHAPTER CCLIII.

### THE ADVENTURE WITH THE HEARSE, AND THE REFUGE AT KENSINGTON.

THE commotion that these words from the lips of Claude Duval produced in the coach was rather great.

There were no less than six persons in the vehicle, and they looked at each other, and then at the one man who had the audacity to attack them, for a few moments in wondering silence.

"Quick, if you please," said Claude. "I have no time to stand waiting your leisure. Your money, and watches, and rings, gentlemen, if you please."

"Well, that's cool," said one.

"Very," said another.

"Pray, my friend, are you aware," said a third, "that your conduct subjects you to the greatest suspicion of being a highwayman?"



CLAUDE COUNTERFEITS A LOVER AND TAKES UNTO HIMSELF A WIFE.

Claude could not exactly at the moment make up his mind whether those words were spoken in genuine simplicity, or were intended for a bit of grave irony at his expense; but he replied in a firm, clear tone—

"Gentlemen, I am not in a jesting mood. This is a matter of stern business with me. You see I am armed, and it is better to give up to me quietly what I require, than to force me to use violence."

"But we are six."

"If you were sixty, I would rob you. This is the highway."

"Well, that's an argument, certainly. I tell you what it is, Mr. Highwayman—gentlemen, when they go to a funeral, do not carry arms with them, and so I came without any, or you would not get my purse quite so easily. There it is. Take it."

"Thank you, sir. Now, gentlemen, be quick."

With some reluctance the purses were handed to Duval; but one, as he withdrew his hand, made a snatch at the pistol that Duval held in his left hand, and the barrel of which rested on the sill of the coach-window.

The attempt to drag it from Duval was unsuccessful, and with a shake of the head, he said—

"Now, sir, what if I were a hasty man, instead of being one with rather more than an ordinary share of temper? I should shoot you in a moment, if I were such."

The gentleman shrunk back.

"Oh, there is no danger, sir," said Claude. "I have stood a shot before now without returning it, and probably had I been in your situation, I should have tried the same thing."

"Who are you?" said the gentleman—"you are the devil himself, or Claude Duval."

"The latter, at your service."

"If I did not think so! Here is my watch. You will find it a good one, and here is my ring, that I value far more than its worth, which does not exceed a few guineas; but you must have it."

"Oh, no; keep it."

"Can you be so generous?"

"Ah, sir," said Claude, with a smile, "it is easy to be generous with what don't belong to one."

"I won't be robbed," said an old gentleman in a corner, who up to now had not said a word. "I won't stand it!"

"Oh, have I not had your purse, sir?" said Claude.

"No, nor you shan't either! There now. Be off with you, you vagabond! I never was robbed, and I ain't going to begin now."

"Then," said Claude, "I very much regret that I may possibly be of some inconvenience to these other gentlemen; but as I shall have to blow out the few brains you have, why I—"

As he spoke, Claude threw up the pan of his pistol, and sorted the priming.

"Oh, Lord, no!" cried the old gentleman. "Take the money! Oh, dear!—oh, dear! take the money: but I only hope I shall have the satisfaction of living to see you hanged some day."

"Thank you, sir—thank you. Your watch, if you please. Come, be a little quicker in your movements, if you please."

"Take it, you villain; and as I say, I only hope I shall see you——"

"Oh, you said that before, sir."

"Well, I have only to add to it that I would go twenty miles any day for the gratification, that I would."

"A very kind and christian-like idea," said Claude. "And now, gentlemen, I will bid you good day, and—Ah!"

Jack had blown a shrill call upon the whistle that he always had with him, and Claude knew that it was a warning of danger. Upon turning quickly, he saw Jack standing as high in his stirrups as he could, and looking across the fields.

"What is it, Jack?"

"The Philistines."

"Very well—I have completed the present job. Let us be off. Drive on, coachman, as soon as you like; your load is a trifle lighter, but not much."

"This way," cried Jack. "There is a strong force coming across the meadows. It is time we were off."



Duval's horse was a few inches taller than Jack's, and by raising himself in the stirrups, Claude was therefore enabled to take in a rather more extended line of vision. The sight that he saw in the meadows, about half a quarter of a mile off, was one sufficient to excite serious forebodings.

There were about twenty well-mounted men, with arms glistening in their hands, coming right on in the direction of the spot upon which the robbery had been committed.

"Humph!" said Claude. "This is a case in which it is wise to show your foes a swift pair of heels. Come on."

They did not pause another moment, but at a full gallop they dashed past the coach that was still stationary in the middle of the road, for the coachman had not yet summoned up sufficient courage to mount his box again and be off.

The speed at which Duval and his two friends went made them look more like three apparitions than living men, and they were very soon quite out of sight of the coach.

It would appear now, from the conduct of the strong force of mounted men that were coming by a short cut over the meadows, that they were well aware of the spot of ground upon which Duval and his comrades were stopping, and that their object had been to take them by surprise; for the moment the three highwaymen started off on such a gallop, the whole party renewed its speed, and speedily got into the main road, through a gate that a countryman officiously opened for them.

"There they go!" cried the man. "There they go—right away down the road. I was a hiding, and seed 'em rob the coach—but I didn't say nothing, in course."

"And why not?" shouted the foremost of the horsemen.

"He! he!" laughed the countryman. "Why not? Ho! ho! That be a good joke. I beant a fool quite."

"Come on, my friends," cried the foremost horseman, now, paying no further heed to the countryman's protestations regarding his own wisdom. "Come on! We must have them now. It may be a long chase, but they must give in at last. On—on!"

With a cheer, for their numbers gave them courage, the whole party now put their steeds to speed, and dashed on after Claude Duval and his friends on the high road.

The principal disadvantage that the highwaymen now were under, consisted in the fact, that the whole of that part of the country in which they were had got gradually alarmed, and was cognisant of their presence somewhere or another about that spot. In every individual they saw an enemy, and, unfortunately, their course was towards London, and they were such a short distance from the metropolis, that there was, in truth, every likelihood of meeting foes in front, as well as by being hotly pursued by those behind.

This was a state of things that, no doubt, would have appalled men more accustomed to face extraordinary dangers than were our friends; but of all persons, they were the least likely to allow themselves to be beaten down by the difficulties of their present situation.

After the hair-breadth escapes they had had from time to time, and the adventurous kind of life they had led, we must not suppose that a trifle would subdue their spirits.

Confident in the speed of their horses—confident in their own courage, they rode on, until an unexpected circumstance began to show Claude, that since speed would be much longer out of the question, and since force would not avail against so many foes, they must have recourse to finesse to save themselves.

The circumstance that altered the whole aspect of affairs was, that Claude found his horse beginning to fail him, and upon glancing to the ground, he saw that the wound the animal had received from the dung-fork, and which had looked to be so superficial, was bleeding profusely.

"Hold!" he cried, and he drew up within as small a pace as he conveniently could. His two comrades shot past him for some distance before they could

stop their steeds, but they did so as soon as possible, and turned and came back to him.

"For mercy's sake let us get on," cried Jack. "Every moment now is most precious to us."

"It is," said Dick. "What is the matter, Claude?"

"Everything. Look at my horse."

"Good gracious!" cried Jack.

Poor Jack was not exactly the man he was once, when he was upon the moment equal to any emergency; but still he had some of the old spirit left in him, and he saw in a moment what was necessary to be done for the horse that was wounded.

With a marvellous celerity, he tore open the valise that was at his saddle-back and got out a bottle, from which he smeared a kind of white ointment on to his handkerchief. Then plucking from the road-side a handful of fine grass he made it as flat as he could and placed it over the wound of the horse. The handkerchief then he placed over it, and the white composition that he had taken from the bottle caused the handkerchief to adhere so fast to the coat of the horse, that the poultice of grass was well kept on, and the bleeding stopped.

"What was it?" said Claude.

"A blood vessel," said Jack, "that, no doubt, was grazed by the pitch-fork, and which would have given no trouble if the horse had had a night and a day to rest, but which has given way with the hard gallop he has had."

"Ah! no doubt."

"Mount and be off again," said Dick.

Claude put his foot in the stirrup, but the horse shook and hung its head, and he withdrew it again.

"It's of no use," said Jack mournfully. "The creature would go down with you the first step, Claude."

"Then we are in for it," said Dick, "and no mistake. Hark! how those fellows are coming on. It's like thunder."

"Fly!" cried Claude. "You two can save yourselves. I implore you do so. Leave me here. Good-by both of you. Be off."

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## CHAPTER CCLIV.

### THE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE TO ABANDON THEIR HORSES.

"Just say that again, Claude," said Dick, "that I may be sure of what you mean, my old friend, for I don't exactly think it was you who advised me to leave a friend in distress."

"Nor I either," said Jack.

"Nay, but self-preservation is the first law of nature. I cannot go with you, so you must go without me."

"Not I."

"Nor I; and as far as that goes, Claude, what is to hinder you from mounting my horse? I don't mean to say that the creature will carry double for many miles, or that it will make such good speed as when it has only one on its back; but it will go for a time."

"I should only impede you, Dick."

"Claude, you impede us both now," said Jack. "Is this fair to keep us here parleying with you, while our enemies are gaining on us at every step?"

Claude saw that if he were to persevere in his opposition he should run the risk of sacrificing his two friends. He no longer hesitated, but managed to scramble up behind Dick.

"That's right," said Jack; "now let us be off."

"And abandon my gallant steed?" said Claude. "Oh, that is, indeed, a pang to me. Stop, Dick. I will shoot it first. It shall not fall into the hands of my enemies."

"Hold!" said Jack. "You don't know what you are saying, Claude. Do you think your enemies have any animosity against your horse? Quite the contrary. They will take capital care of it, and who knows but you may recover it again?"

"There is hope in that. Off and away, then!"

By this time their pursuers had made great progress, and the position of Duval and his friends became one of the most doubtful character. Nevertheless, they did gallop off, and Dick, seeing a turning to the right that appeared to lead somewhere among trees and fields, took to it, for he felt by the manner in which his horse plunged forward, that it could not long sustain both his weight and that of Claude's.

"On—on!" cried Jack. "They see us, I do think."

Dick urged his horse forward until they came to a little kind of brook, and then the creature made an attempt to leap it, and fell, throwing off both its riders. Claude was not hurt, but Dick was a little stunned.

"Oh, this will be fatal!" said Jack.

"Not so," said Claude; "we have a few minutes yet that we can call our own. Yonder is a cottage. We must get in there for safety. I advise that we strip the horses of all their garniture, and turn them both into yon meadow. Who shall say that they are ours? The officers will see them quietly grazing, and probably take no notice of them."

"A good idea," said Jack.

On the moment, he began to carry the thought into operation. Dick was too much confused by his fall to know very well what they were about, and he allowed Claude to lead him to the cottage, while Jack took the saddles and bridles from the horses, and hid them under the hedge, and then he turned both the animals into the field.

"You are not much hurt, Dick?" said Claude.

"Oh, no—no! only a little tap on the head. The trees are not spinning round and round with me half so fast as they were a moment or two ago. I shall be all right soon."

"I am rejoiced to hear it."

Jack soon came on at a quick pace behind them, and the sound of his feet had the effect of rather alarming Dick a little. He faced about hastily, saying—

"Your pistols, Claude—your pistols! Where are they? I hear some one coming."

"It's only Jack. All's right, Dick."

"Oh, Jack, is it? How confused I am still, to be sure. And where are our horses, old fellow?"

"All safe."

"Oh, well, if you say they are all safe, I know they are, and no mistake."

"On—on with you!" cried Jack, "or we shall be seen."

"This will do," said Claude, as he pushed open the door of the cottage, although at the time he did so he did not by any means feel sure that it would do, and had a strong suspicion that they might have to fight for their lives yet.

The cottage belonged to a labourer and his family. Fortunately, the only portion of the family that was at home was a girl of about twelve years of age; but the labourer and his wife were there, and they both started to their feet at the moment of the entrance of Claude and his friends.

The man was smoking a pipe, and he called out—

"Hilloa! Who are you, I wonder? You don't make much ceremony in coming into a man's house, I take it."

"Hush, Robert," said the wife, "they are gentlemen."

"Gentlemen be hanghed! I don't care. I pays my way, and since I have got the fifty pounds my brother Bill left me, I don't care for nobody, not I."

"There is no safety here," said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude. "Let me manage the affair."

Advancing, then, to the man, Claude looked him steadily in the face, saying—  
"Hark you, my friend. I am Claude Duval, the highwayman, and these are two friends of mine. The officers are after us, and if you give us up, you will get a good reward—as much as five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds! Oh, won't I!"

"No, you won't."

"What?"

"I say you won't, because if you do, your throat will be cut by some friends of mine as soon as they can conveniently spare time to do it; but if you hide us from the officers, I will give you this bag of money. It contains the splendid booty for which we have got into this scrape—a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds!" cried the labourer, staggering back.

"Yes, a thousand pounds. Our lives are worth, to us, more than that sum; but it is all we have with us—Hide us somewhere, and the money is yours."

"Oh, won't I!"

"That is right. There is not a moment to lose."

"Oh, Robert," said the wife, "where can you hide three men?"

"In the dry well," said the girl.

"Ah, yes, that's the very place," said the labourer. "Come this way, and I'll defy the devil himself to find you. Perhaps you won't like the place, though?"

"We will tell you that when we see it."

The man led the way to the back garden of his cottage, and showed Claude and his friends a dry well of about twelve feet only in depth, down which they could jump with ease, and which would just about hold them standing together.

"Now, I tell you what," said the labourer, "you three get in there, and I'll let down an old piece of tarpaulin on to your heads, and above that again I'll throw some straw and garden litter; and if that don't hide you, the deuce is in it."

"Don't smother us," said Dick.

"Oh, never fear, you'll get air enough."

"Hark!" said Jack. "Do you hear the horses' feet in the laue?"

They all listened, and they heard a loud voice say—

"Let a couple of men, with their fire-arms ready, stand by that stile, and another two of them keep guard at the beginning of the lane."

"Quick—quick! In with you," said the labourer.

The friends no longer hesitated, but got into the old dry well. The piece of tarpaulin was let down upon their heads, and the litter was thrown upon it. The weight was nothing, but the concealment was perfect.

"Claude," whispered Dick.

"Yes—yes. Are you all right, now, Dick?"

"Oh, yes, yes; but, I say, the parson's bag of dummies will do good service yet, won't it?"

"Capital!"

"Oh, don't talk," said Jack; "and don't you be laughing, Dick. How can you?"

"Oh, but it is such a capital thing."

"Hush! Oh, hush!"

The attention of the whole three of them was now directed to a scene of great confusion that took place in the cottage. It was quite evident that the pursuers were impressed with the idea that the three highwaymen had sought shelter there, and that they were in some hiding place about the little building. The labourer was expostulating, the officers were screaming, and occasionally the shrill voice of the woman protesting were heard above the other sounds.

"Do you want to knock my place down?" said the labourer. "What is the use of banging the walls of my little bit of a crib at that rate, I should like to know?"

"Oh, you ruffians!" shouted the woman, "what do you mean by it? Do you think that Heaven knows how many highwaymen can get under a chair, or up the chimney? Perhaps you had better look in the flower-tub, or the tea-caddy for them."

"There's my silver tumbler up stairs," said the daughter; "would you like to look inside that for them?"

"They are here—they must be here!" cried a voice. "They can't disappear underground!"

"I don't know that," whispered Dick.

"Hush!—oh, hush!"

At this moment, a party of the officers sallied out into the garden, and began to look about them with rage and disappointment, for there was positively no perceptible hiding-place in it.

"Confound you, where are they?" cried one.

"How should I know?"

"Do you mean, now, to tell us that a party of rascals did not a little while ago rush into your cottage, without even so much as asking your leave to do so?"

"Why, if you came to that, they did."

"Ah, now it is coming out, is it? Upon my word, you are a pretty fellow! And so, you admit that a set of vagabonds did make a rush into your cottage?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah—good! Hilloa, friends, come round and listen to this fellow's confession: He is getting a little alarmed now, I take it, and is about to tell the truth at last. Let me interrogate him."

The officers collected around the labourer; and he who thought he was very successfully getting the truth out of him, continued—

"Do you admit that, a little while ago, a party of men broke into your cottage in a violent manner?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah, well, that is something. Oh, I knew we should get it from him by a little perseverance—I have experience in such cases. Now, my friend, you are adopting a very prudent course. What did those men say to you when they came into your cottage a little while ago?"

"I was smoking my pipe."

"Yes, yes; well, go on."

"And they pushed open the door, and in they came."

"And what did they say? that is the point."

"Oh, you ought to know, for you spoke first. You know very well what you said. It was,—'Hilloa! is there any highwaymen here?' or something of that sort."

"You villain!"

"Lor, what for? You asked me if any rascals had broken into my cottage, and I couldn't gainsay you, for only five minutes ago that was just what you all did. It's the honest truth; and I'm only quite astonished that you should think I meant to say no to it."

The officer was in such a rage at being thus tricked, that he could not find words in which to convey his indignation. He stamped and swore, to the great amusement of his comrades, who were quite willing to have a laugh at his expense, and then one of them said, in a loud voice,—

"It's clear enough, if those we have been after have been here, that they are now gone again. There isn't a hiding-place for a cat in the whole premises, that I can see."

"What's this?" said another, approaching the well.

"Why, we make that into a kind of litter-bin," said the labourer; "but if you like, I'll fork it all out."

"Oh, no—no."

The officers now collected in a knot, and whispered to each other. The con-



sultation was anything but satisfactory, and was rather a lamentation over their non-success in finding the highwaymen, whom they had actually traced to that spot, and who then had disappeared as completely as though they had vanished into thin air like ghosts. The whole affair was quite inexplicable, for, although, in consequence of that cottage being the only one upon the spot, the officers thought it more than probable Claude and his friends had taken refuge there, yet they felt quite satisfied that now there they were not.

Yet the principal officer made one last appeal to the labourer.

"Listen to me, my good friend," he said. "You have had your joke, and there's an end of that, and now let us proceed to business. If you can take us to where we shall find those whom we seek, here is a twenty pound note at your service."

"Don't I wish I could!"

"I'll make it fifty pounds. Come, now, that will do, won't it?"

"How can you go on aggravating a poor man with your twenty and your fifty pound notes, in such a way? It's enough to unsettle a fellow for life, that it is. I don't know, I tell you, anything about the men."

"Now, my fine fellow, listen to me. The principal person that we seek is no other than Claude Duval."

"What, the great highwayman?"

"You may call him great if you like, but we consider him only a notorious criminal, for whom the gallows is waiting, and if you can tell us where to lay hands upon him, here is a hundred pound note you shall have."

"Oh, gracious! do you want to drive a fellow mad? Why, I'd give up my own father for half the money."

"Very well: good day."

With an astonishing abruptness, the officers left the cottage. They now felt pretty well satisfied that the labourer really knew nothing, and that they must have made a mistake in supposing that Claude and his two friends had entered the cottage; and yet that they were still somewhere close about the spot, they could not doubt, for that they had entered the lane, and were not come out of it, was a fact that it would have required a deal of evidence to induce them to doubt.

The officers collected together in the lane, and took serious counsel with each other, as to what should, or what could be next done. He who was the principal among them, spoke,—

"There is some trick in it," he said, "that's quite clear, and the only way in which we shall find it out will be by watching. There's some hiding-place hereabouts, that we might be months seeking for, and then never discover; but they must come out of it some day."

"The horses, too," said one, "that's one of the most singular parts of the whole affair to me, for, beyond the one horse that we have got hold of, and which they abandoned because it was hurt, we have seen nothing of the others."

Even as this was spoken, Dick's and Jack's horses were quietly nibbling at the young grass within his sight; but so natural did it seem for horses to be in a meadow, that he never suspected they belonged to the highwaymen. Had the cattle not been divested of their harness, of course there would have been immediate suspicion; but as it was, they created none.

"Now, listen to me," said the principal officer. "I have a proposition to make to you all."

The others listened attentively.

"I propose that one of you get gently up into a tree, and there wait while all the rest of us trot off as though we had given the affair up as a bad job altogether. We must go above a mile, when we will turn round, and come very quietly back, and keep under the hedge at the top of the lane. The one who will be in the tree can then, if he sees anything of the highwaymen, fire a pistol, which will be a signal to us to push on."

"That will do," said the others.

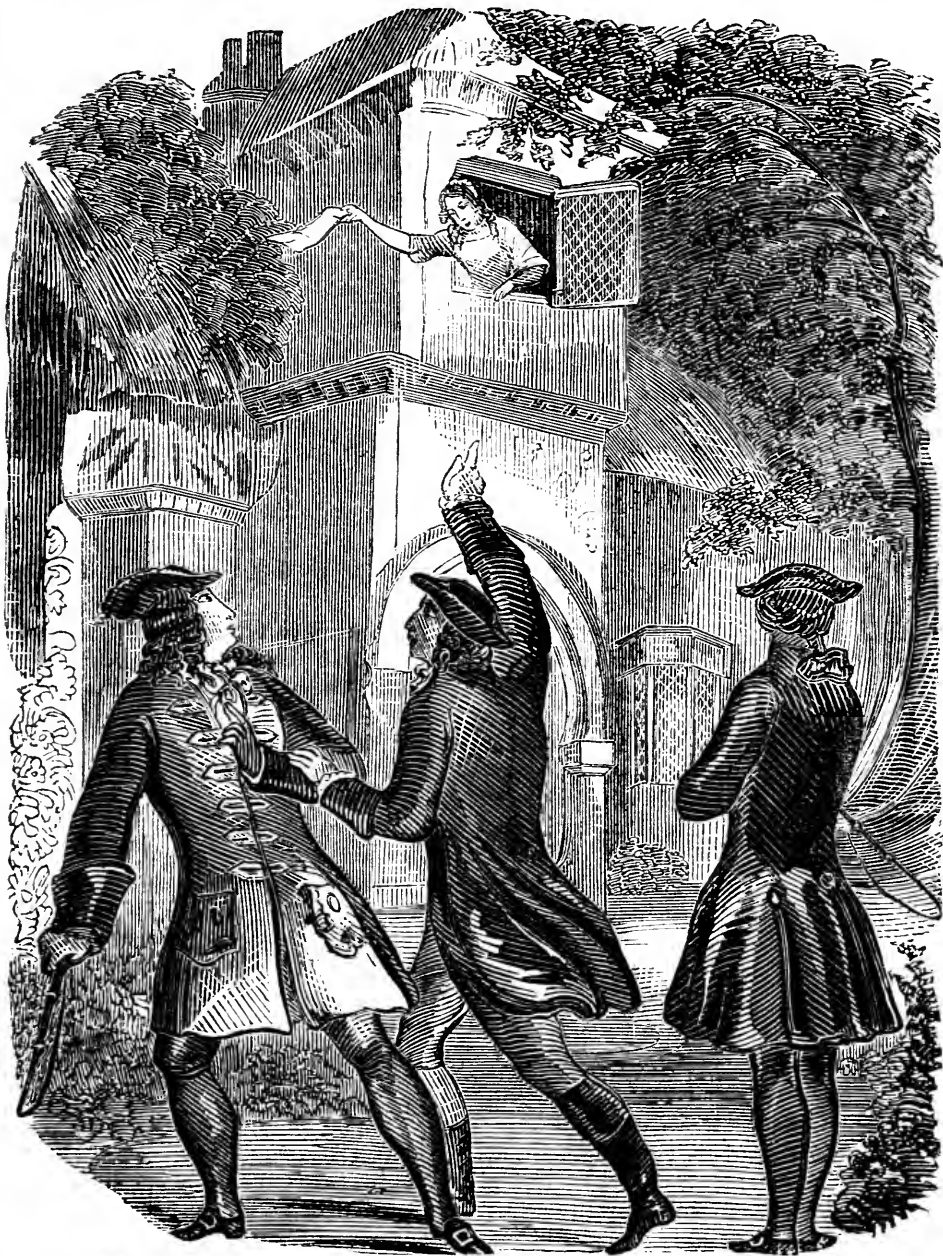
"Very good. Now, which of you will go into the tree?"

This was a question that seemed to be much easier asked than answered; and

after considerable contention among them, it was settled by drawing lots, and the one that it fell upon to go upon the troublesome and dangerous duty, looked as grim as possible about it.

"Well, if I must I must," he said: "so here goes."

With these words he commenced climbing a tall chestnut tree in the lane.



THE LABOURER'S DAUGHTER APPRISKS THE THREE FRIENDS OF DANGER.

### CHAPTER CCLV.

SHOWS HOW CLAUDE ESCAPED AND MET WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

It was quite evident that the officer upon whom the lot had fallen to keep watch in the tree, was anything but pleased with his position, perched up in its branches.

"I say," he cried. "Hilloa!"

"What now?" said he who was in command of the party.

"Why, I only wish to call your attention to the fact, that I am a nice mark for a pistol bullet here, if Duval should take it into his head to fire at me."

"Oh, you keep quiet and you will be all right,"

"Shall I?"

"Of course you will. If you don't fire at him, he won't fire at you; and if he should take it into his head to do so, you know you have all the chance of escaping the bullet, by its hitting against some of the branches of the tree."

"Yes, that's a comfort."

The other officers who had escaped the duty, and who, until the lots were being drawn, had looked rather serious over the affair, for fear it should come to their chance to have the onerous post, now seemed quite amused at the dolorous light in which their comrade viewed the affair, and they were all on the laugh.

"Now, let us be off," said the principal officer, "and, no doubt, Martin will be able to give us some information soon. Good-by, Martin."

"Oh, good-by! Are you going?"

"Yes—yes."

"Very well. Perhaps you will remember me in your prayers."

They all laughed at this; but Martin did not seem to see the remotest joke in it at all. When they galloped off, which they did purposely with as much clatter as they could, poor Martin looked down from his perch in the tree as disconsolately as might be.

"Umph!" he said; "it's all very well for a fellow to be perched up here to give notice when there's anything going on below; but I rather think if I do, that Claude Duval and his friends will not be very particular how they will have a pop at me with their pistols."

Full of this idea, Mr. Martin got up a little higher into the tree, and shielded himself as well as he could from the possibility of being seen from below; but still he considered that if he gave the alarm by firing a pistol, that that would be quite a sufficient indication of his whereabouts in the tree, to draw down upon him all the danger that he so much dreaded from the highwaymen.

With a shake of the head he said—

"I will take a thought of it before they get me to fire a pistol here. If I think it is a tolerably safe move to do so, why I will; but if I don't, why I won't, that's all."

With this highly prudent resolution, which was so very much against the probability of his giving the alarm his comrades anxiously expected, Mr. Martin, more for the sake of his own safety than from any ardent desire to come into collision with Claude Duval and his friends, kept what might be called a very particularly bright look-out.

"I don't see anything," he said, "and I'll be hanged if I hear anything either. Perhaps, after all, they are off. Well, I shan't wait above half an hour here, I'll be hanged if I do."

While the officers were making their disposition of affairs, in order yet to give themselves a chance of capturing Duval and his party, the labourer went into his cottage again, and sat down very calmly with his wife, while he smoked, and tried to look as if nothing were the matter.

The fact is, that he fully expected the officers would be upon the look-out after his proceedings, for that they still had a strong suspicion of his knowledge of the hiding place of Duval, he was quite acute enough to suppose.

"Wife," he said, "what shall we do?"

"What do you mean, Robert?"

"Shall we give them up even now, and get what we can, or shall we yet chance it for the thousand?"

"Oh, father," said the young girl, "it would be very cruel, besides very unfair, to give them up now."

"You hold your tongue, you young hussy, will you? I don't want you to say anything about it. Who asked your opinion, I should like to know?"

Thus rebuffed, the girl hung down her head, and shrunk to the farther end of the cottage. The labourer tapped the ashes out of his pipe upon the top bar of the little grate, and then he said—

"What do you think of it, wife? You don't speak."

"A thousand pounds is a very large sum, Robert."

"It is."

"It's almost enough to take one's breath away to hear speak of it, and it would make us for ever, I rather think, wouldn't it, Robert? Why, we should never know how to get through it."

"Ha!—ha! it would be easy enough got through. But that ain't the question, after all. The thing is, what are we to do?"

"Why, take the money."

"But the confounded police are on the look-out, I think."

"And what can they do, Robert?"

"Well, I don't know. Not much, I should say. Of course, they can take a fellow up for harbouring a felon; but, then, if one is put to a little inconvenience, a thousand pounds is capital pay for that. Where's the girl gone?"

"Out into the lane, I think."

"Call her back. I don't half like her interfering in the matter."

The woman went to the cottage door, and called the girl back, and she came with fright in her looks.

"Oh, mother, mother, there is a man in the old chestnut tree. I saw his foot just now!"

"Well, my dear, it's one of the officers, no doubt; but never you mind, it's no great matter to us. You go into your own little bed-room, and be quiet, that's the best thing you can do, while your father and I settle this affair."

"Yes, mother; but, you know, it wouldn't be fair to give them up to the officers, now, would it?"

"Be off with you, do. If your father hears you going on at this rate, and once gets angry, I don't know what he might not do to you; so go away at once, will you?"

A lively fear of her father seemed to come over the girl at once, and she hastened off and got out of his sight, while the woman went into the cottage front-room to inform her husband of what the girl had seen.

"That's just what I expected," he said. "They will hover about the place, and think to find out something yet."

"And what will you do, Robert?"

"I'm nonplussed, wife."

"Then, Robert, if you are nonplussed, it isn't at all likely that any one else will know what to do."

"Well, I reckon, I am rather a clever fellow, I must say; but yet there are circumstances, you know, wife, that bother even a clever fellow. You know that, though I now have to work, or at the least had to work till lately, when the fifty pounds was left us, I was a tradesman once; and if it hadn't been for my hard-hearted creditors, who would insist upon being paid, I should have done very well, indeed."

"Not a doubt of it, Robert."

"But it wasn't to be; and so, you see, with all my cleverness, I was forced to come and live here, the more's the pity. But touching these three men in the well, I—Oh, Lord, what's that?"

"Is all right?" said Claude, as he suddenly popped his head into the cottage from the back-door of it.

"Oh, dear, have you got out of the well?"

"To be sure. Why, you hardly supposed we were going to stay there one moment longer than was absolutely necessary? We would rather, I can assure you, let well alone."

"The officers are quite gone, then," said the labourer, giving a wink to his wife to say nothing about the man in the chestnut tree. "They are off at last, and you are safe."

"We heard the sound of their horses' feet, or we should not have left our secure retreat, I assure you. Come on, Jack and Dick. All's clear now, and safe."

"Oh, so safe," said the man of the cottage; "and I only hope, gentlemen, you won't forget your promise."

"It's a large sum," said Duval, as he took out the bag that he had got from the parson. "It is, I may say, a very large sum; but, yet, as I promised you it, you are entitled to it."

"There's one thing," said the labourer, rising, "that I think you ought to promise me, and that is, that if you happen to be taken, after leaving my place, you will say nothing about this money; for if you do, the law will come down upon us for it."

"Of course it will; but you may make your mind easy about that. If we are taken, it will go hard with us, and it would not do us one farthing's worth of good to deprive you of the money; so you may keep it so far as we are concerned."

"Then I'll hide it at once. Wife, get me a chisel."

The wife brought him a powerful chisel, with which he got up easily one of the flat red tiles with which the cottage was floored, and scooping a hole, he said—

"Now give me the bag."

"There it is," said Claude. "It is a large sum, but what is money without one's life?"

"What, indeed?" said the labourer, as quite complacently he conveyed the bag into the hole in the floor, and replaced the tile over it.

## CHAPTER CCLVI.

### THE REFUGE IN THE OLD MANOR-HOUSE, AND ITS RESULTS.

If the man at the cottage had been only half such a clever fellow as he thought himself to be, he would have looked into the bag first, before he conveyed it so snugly into the hole in the floor, and then he would have found out that it was anything but gold that he was so cleverly hiding; but he did not, and Duval could only congratulate himself, that, after all, the parson's mock bag of money had turned out to be so serviceable.

"Now then," he said, "my friend, we will leave you."

"I wish you luck," said the man.

Probably of the two he would much rather that Claude and his friends should not be taken; but still as he was paid he did not care much about it. If he had cared a straw, he would have told them of the man in the tree; but upon that subject he kept silent. His great object was to get the large sum they promised him, and then to get them out of the cottage.

When the door closed upon them he was quite delighted; he sat down to laugh. While he is so laughing, we will accompany our friends to the outside of the cottage.

"Done!" said Duval, as he looked smilingly at his two friends, "that fellow, with all his rascality and all his cupidity, is done."

"He is," said Jack, "but let us get our horses as quickly as we can now, and be off."

At this moment something hit Duval on the head. It was a little pebble, and upon looking up to see where it came from, he observed the labourer's daughter at the upper window of the cottage, for there was a room, or rather a kind of loft, above the sitting-room, in which she usually slept.



The girl placed her finger upon her lips to signify that he was not to speak, and then she threw out to him a little piece of paper, upon which was written—

“There his a man hin the highest chestnut tree.”

“Ah,” said Claude, “this is news worth having. Look at this, Jack, and you too, Dick. We have to thank the girl for this.”

He looked up to the window, but she was gone.

“A man in the chestnut-tree,” said Jack. “The biggest chestnut-tree. Where is that?”

“In the lane,” whispered Dick. “Hush! I see the branches of it now, and there cannot be a doubt but that this is a fair enough warning to us of danger. What is to be done now?”

Claude considered for a moment or two, and then he said—

“You two go and get the horses; I will settle with this gentleman in the tree. No doubt he is placed there to give an alarm to his friends, who are not far off. I see our position quite well now, and I shall look upon his conduct as that of a spy. It will be hard, indeed, if I can’t hit a man in a tree with one of my pistols. Get the horses quickly.”

“It is our only resource,” said Dick. “Come along, Jack.”

Dick and Jack made what haste they could to the meadow where the horses were grazing, and Claude went to the tree, about which there could be no mistake, as it was double the size of any other that grew around it.

As he neared it, he saw the branches at one spot shake a little, and that convinced him that the information he had had from the girl was perfectly well founded.

Whether or not the labourer had deceived him, he could not take upon himself to say, nor did he care much at that moment, as he had too much else to think of.

Taking a pistol from his pocket, he with great deliberation pointed it at the tree, and took a steady aim.

“Hold!” cried the officer from amid the branches. “Don’t fire, Claude Duval, whatever you do. I know you very well. If you fire, you will have all my comrades upon you, for a pistol discharged is to be the signal, and I don’t want to throw away my life that you may be hanged. You be quiet, and I will, so I hope you will listen to reason.”

Duval laughed.

“Certainly, my friend,” he said. “I never throw away a shot, and I always do listen to reason.”

“I thought you would, Duval; you can be off all right with your friends, now, for the others won’t gallop up till they hear a pistol shot, and I won’t fire one till they can’t do you much harm.”

“You will excuse me, my friend,” said Duval; “but I shall be much the better pleased if you drop your pistols to the foot of the tree now.”

“Oh, but they may go off in falling.”

“No, you can shake out the priming.”

“Well but—”

“Oh, I see you are full of excuses, so our treaty is at an end.”

Claude again levelled his pistol.

“Hold! You won’t hear what I have to say,” cried the officer. “I was only going to remark that if my brother-officers found that I was without my pistols, they would suspect what of all things I would wish to conceal from them, namely, that you and I had met.”

“If that is all, you may make yourself easy. I will leave your pistols at the foot of the tree, so that you can get them when you descend.”

“That’ll do. Here they are.”

Down came one pistol, and then the other, and Claude was satisfied that the officer’s fears were quite sufficient to induce him to keep faith with him. It took only a moment or two to take the charge from the pistols, and then Claude threw them to the foot of the tree, saying—

"There are your arms. You will find them all right. And if you keep your own secret, no one need ever know to your detriment that you and I have had this little bit of conversation."

"It's not likely I'll tell, Duval, if you don't; and, of course, though I don't deny that I am bound to arrest you if I can, yet I am not such a goose as to throw away my life for it."

"Far from being a goose," said Claude, with a laugh, "I look upon you as a very sensible man, indeed, I assure you. Ah! here are my friends with our cattle."

At this juncture, Dick and Jack made their appearance with the two horses, and Jack said to Claude—

"Dick's horse, I do believe, although it is a few inches higher than mine, is less able to bear your extra weight than mine is. You had better mount behind me."

"Why, no, Jack," said Claude, drily. "The fact is, that fastened by the bridle to a gate a little lower down the road, I can see a horse."

"Oh, that's mine," cried the officer in the tree.

"You mean it was yours," said Claude. "It is mine now."

"Don't take it. I'm a ruined man, if you take the horse. I only borrowed it, and it's worth forty pounds if it's worth a halfpenny. Oh, Claude, don't take that horse whatever you do. I'm a man with a family, and what are they to do for victuals if you take the horse?"

"Why, you don't mean to say," said Claude, "that you feed your children on horse-flesh, do you?"

"Oh, dear!—Oh, dear!—There it comes."

Jack had gone to the gate that Claude had indicated, and fetched the officer's horse, to the immense chagrin of that individual, who kept up, now, quite a lament of groans upon the subject.

"Hark you, my friend," said Claude Duval; "you or some of your party shot or injured my horse, and I was forced to leave him behind; so this is but a fair exchange and no robbery. I would rather have my own."

"Come—oh, come," said Jack. "Come, Claude. Every moment that we linger here is fraught with danger."

"But, I tell you, I borrowed the horse of Mr. Stanhope," cried the officer, "and I—Oh, they are gone!"

Claude and his friends went off at a sharp canter, and the officer was left in the tree lamenting.

The route that the highwaymen took was, naturally enough, the very reverse of that which they had heard the officers take, and they soon came to the end of the lane, which terminated in a gate leading into the meadows.

Such a petty obstacle as a gate was not very likely to stop the career of such personages as Claude Duval and his two friends. Jack jumped the gate at once, but Dick, after the fall that his horse had had, did not like to risk him in a leap just then.

Duval was about putting his horse at the gate, but Jack cried out to him—

"Don't try it, Claude, with a horse you know nothing about. He may not be able to do it."

"I think he can," said Duval. "Don't you baulk me again, Jack."

"Well—well, I warn you."

"Thank you. If I break my neck, you may depend that I won't blame you for it, Jack."

With these words, Duval rode his horse at the gate, and to his great gratification, the creature went over it in beautiful style.

"Forty pounds," cried Duval, "did he say this horse was worth? Why, it would be a good eighty pounds that would be required to buy him, I take it: he is a famous hunter."

"Capital—oh, capital," said Jack. "I never did see a creature take a leap in better style. I do believe he would go over anything."

These words were scarcely out of Jack's mouth, when from a little pathway that was close by the side of a hedge that formed a continuation of the fence of the field, there rushed a young lady, who, clinging at once to the bridle of Claude Duval's horse, cried in frantic accents—

"He has come—he has come at last! Oh, God! Yes, he has come! Here he is! I know the horse, and I know him! Oh, he has come at last, in answer to my prayers!"

Duval was perfectly thunderstricken at this sudden appeal to him, and at the appearance of the young lady, who had rushed forward so very unexpectedly, that she might have been an apparition for all he knew to the contrary. Jack and Dick, too, looked quite paralyzed with astonishment, and for the space of time in which you might have counted twelve, not one of the three of them could speak a word.

"Yes—yes," added the young lady. "At last—at last I shall die happy—very happy, now that he has come. Do I not know the horse? Oh, yes. It is—it is my Stanhope!"

"Stanhope!" said Claude.

"Yes—yes. You know that you promised to come long ago; and now that you are here, the circle of friends that have been walking out with me, and jeering and gibbering at me for so long, have all taken to flight. Ha, ha, ha! I am happy, now, for you have come!"

"I am all amazement," said Claude.

"Father—father!" shrieked the young lady, in a voice that echoed again through the meadow. "Father, he is come—oh, he is come!"

"She is mad," said Dick.

"Quite mad," said Jack.

The young lady paid no attention to these remarks, but kept calling "Father!" until an elderly gentleman, with a lady about his own age, made their appearance in great haste and agitation.

## CHAPTER CCLVII.

### CLAUDE OFFICIATES AT A MARRIAGE, AND TAKES LEAVE OF THE BRIDE.

THE elderly lady and gentleman were both evidently in very great grief, and the lady cried out—

"Oh, Emma—Emma, do come home. How is it that you are here with strangers? Come home, do, my dear child."

"No, mother—no," cried the girl. "This is Stanhope. He said he would come and marry me. He swore that he would, and you have nearly driven me mad among you by saying that he would not: and lo! here he is."

"Alas—alas!" said the old gentleman.

"This will kill me," said the old lady. "Oh, gentlemen, how came you to encounter this poor young creature? You can well see that her wits are gone. I pray you leave her to us at once."

"No—no," shrieked the girl, clinging to Claude's horse in such a way, that he was afraid to move for fear the animal should trample upon her feet. "No—no, I tell you this is Stanhope who said he would come and marry me."

"What a dreadful delusion!" said the father.

At that moment it flashed across the mind of Duval that the officer had said the horse was borrowed from a gentleman of the name of Stanhope, and he felt quite sure that it was the sight of the animal, which she no doubt well knew, that had induced the poor crazed girl to mistake Claude for the real owner of it.

The father tried to force her from her hold of the bridle of the horse, but she only uttered the most piercing shrieks, and called upon Duval, in the name of Stanhope, to protect her.

"Sir," said Claude to the father, "come round to the other side of the horse that I may speak to you. It is quite evident that this girl must be soothed, not cowed in any way."

"But alas! sir," said the father, as he stepped round to the other side of the horse, "what can I do?"

"She mistakes me for Mr. Stanhope."

"It seems so, sir; and yet you are not much like him; he is a much fairer man than you. It is his heart only that is black."

"Is he so bad?"

"He was the ruin of that young girl, and you see, from the remains of her beauty, what she might have been. Under the solemn promise of marriage he effected her ruin. Her intellect has given way with the full knowledge of his perfidy, and her mad idea now is that he will yet come to marry her. My son has met him in a duel, and wounded him so that he is laid up now, and richly he deserves the suffering that he no doubt endures. You see, sir, that we can do no more now but suffer."

"Understand me, now," said Duval, "that I do not know this Mr. Stanhope, and, to my knowledge, never set eyes upon him; but I can well understand how it is that your daughter, in her crazed intellect, has mistaken me for him, as this is his horse."

"This his horse?"

"Yes, sir; but don't run away with an idea that I am a friend to this Mr. Stanhope. I borrowed the horse of one who borrowed it of him, that is all, I give you my word of honour that it is so."

"I am satisfied, sir, and do not doubt you; but it is a most unfortunate thing that she should chance to meet you upon this horse."

"Be not too hasty, sir, in coming to that conclusion."

"How can I help it, sir? If you have any power over her imagination, by the fancy that she has of your being Mr. Stanhope, let me beg of you to exercise it at once by urging her to go home."

"I will try it. Emma!"

"Yes, Charles, yes. Oh, it is he!"

"I am coming up to the house. Pray go on with your mother."

"Oh, yes, anything you wish. We shall be married soon. Oh, God, what joy this is! They all said you would not come, but I knew you would, Charles; and you have come to prove your own truth and constancy."

"Yes, yes, Emma. Go on with your mother."

With a look of the most quiet obedience, she now placed her arm in that of her mother's, and allowed herself to be led off.

"Is she really so tractable?" said Duval.

"Quite the reverse," said the father, as he turned aside to dash the tears from his eyes. "Oh, Heaven, is there no thunderbolt to reach the head of the villain who destroyed my child?"

"Listen to me, sir," said Duval, who truly pitied both the girl and her parents.

"It is quite clear that this scoundrel, named Stanhope, will never come to redeem the promises he has made to your child."

"Never—Never!"

"And it is equally clear, that if he does not come, she will continue in this desperate state of mental disease."

"She will be worse, much worse now, after you are gone. I dread to meet her again."

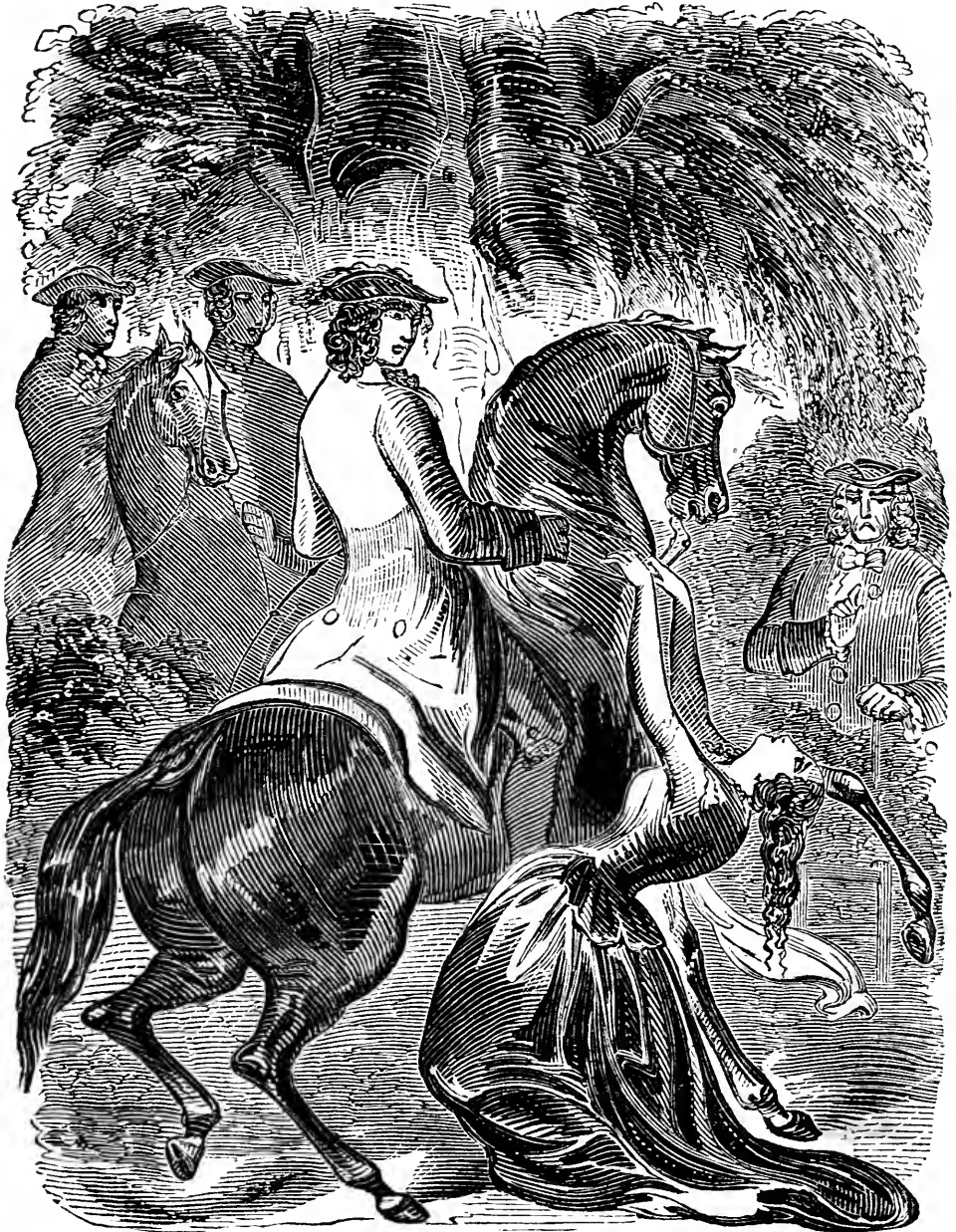
"Then let me advise. The only thing that I can see, is for you to make her believe that I still really am the Mr. Stanhope she takes me for. Let me marry her."

"Marry her?"

"Yes, in a sham way, you know; one of my friends will personate the parson and perform the ceremony, immediately after which, I will tell her that I have an appointment in London, so that I must leave her. You can then, when I am

gone, tell her that I am in the army, and unexpectedly ordered abroad. After that you can choose your own opportunity of telling her that I am dead, and, of course, she will feel grief, but how much better will that be than her present state."

The father looked thoughtful.



CLAUDE MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE WITH A POOR MANIAC.

"Come, sir," said Duval "I propose all this to you out of pity to the young girl, as I do, from my heart, think that it will have the effect of changing the whole current of her thoughts, and probably of entirely recovering her from the state she is now in."

"It is feasible."

"It is, indeed, to my thinking ; and anything is worth the trying, in a medicinal



point of view, that promises for her an amendment of her present sad state, do you not think?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then, try it, sir. Do not hesitate. It is true that I am a stranger to you, but if I can be of such service to that poor, afflicted girl, I shall feel that it was a happy chance that brought me upon Mr. Stanhope's horse to this spot."

"Sir," said the father, "I must own to you that I feel a kind of repugnance to this plan."

"I do not wonder at it; but the case is so singular, and so distressing, that I have been induced to make you the offer that I have, with a view to saving you from further evil; but if it should still continue, upon reflection, to be repugnant to you, I have but to take my leave."

"Oh, no—no, do not go. Allow me to speak to her mother upon the subject, before I give you my final answer."

"I think that is only what ought to be done."

"Then, sir, will you be so good as to accompany me to my house, now, and I can only say, that whether your proposal, which I feel is dictated in all kindness, be acceded to or not, I shall feel always grateful to you for having made it."

"Do not think of that," said Duval, "I make it from sheer and genuine sympathy with that poor afflicted young thing."

This was strictly true, and the tone in which Claude said it, was enough to convince any one of his real sincerity of purpose.

"Is it asking too much, sir," said the old gentleman, "for me to ask your name, and who you are?"

"I am a gentleman," said Duval, "and if you will permit me to preserve an incognito, I would rather do it than impose upon you by telling you that I am what I am not."

"Very well, sir; I have no right to pry into your name, or your condition in life. Will your two friends likewise accompany us?"

"If you please."

There was no need to explain to Jack or Dick the affair, for they had both been sufficiently near at hand to hear it all, so that they followed Claude and the old gentleman across the meadow to the house, the chimneys of which they could just see peeping up from among the trees of a garden that was close at hand.

Claude dismounted, and slung the bridle of his new horse over his arm, as he walked by the side of the old gentleman; and it was quite evident that the latter was getting each moment more and more charmed by the manner of his new acquaintance.

"Ah, sir," he said, "I suspect that in not telling me your name and station you are concealing from me rank, and, perhaps, nobility, instead of anything that can be discreditably to you."

"Pray permit me to be silent upon that head," said Claude. "It may happen that at some future time we may meet, and then you may know me in my proper character. Until that time shall come, allow me to be your unknown friend."

"Certainly, sir, at your pleasure; and I can only say, that he you whom you may, my feelings of gratitude towards you will suffer no diminution whatever."

By this time they reached a garden gate that led from the meadow into the well-kept grounds of the house, and it was quite evident to Claude, that the owner of the place must be a man of some worth, for it was extremely well and trimly kept.

## CHAPTER CCLVIII.

CLAUDE HAS TO LEAVE THE MANOR-HOUSE IN A HURRY.

WE have not yet had time to do more than hint at the personal appearance of the young lady who, in that sad eclipse of the intellect under which she laboured, mistook Duval for the greatest, and, we may say, the only enemy she had ever had upon earth.

She was not above nineteen years of age, of the most delicately fair complexion that Claude had ever seen. Her hair was of that sunny auburn, which is really auburn, and not the sandy apology for that colour which is usually so called. Her eyes were of the most beautiful and liquid blue that imagination could picture, and although her figure was a trifle small for a connoisseur in female beauty, it was yet so exquisitely graceful, that no wonder Claude, with his appreciation of female beauty, was at once charmed and distressed.

He was charmed at the sight of such a piece of feminine loveliness, and he was distressed to think how that once glorious gift of reason that had lighted up all those charms had fled.

Jack and Dick both felt the warmest sympathy for the young girl, and they were quite willing to run some personal risk, if it would but in any way conduce to her welfare.

The house was an old-fashioned one, with a great number of odd corners and quaint gable-ends to it, and the windows were in many places of the old-fashioned diamond-shape panes, that are now so completely obsolete, except when they are purposely used to imitate the architecture of a former age.

"You have a charming old place here," said Claude to the father.

"Alas—no! It was once charming, but now all their beauties have but the effect of adding to our distress, for we recollect what was their appreciation by our darling, who to us is as one of the dead."

"Do not despair; you should recollect that this madness of hers is not the result of a disease, but of a powerful sad impression that has been made upon the mind. Such is the kind of insanity that is curable."

"You really think so, sir?"

"I do, indeed."

"Those are words of comfort. I should not know how to make enough of you if by this plan that you propose you should succeed in restoring my child to something like serenity."

"Try it, sir. If it fail in doing so, it at the least has the negative gratification that it cannot make her worse."

"I do not think it can. But it is time, sir, that I should tell you who I am. I am a Mr. Moffat; and after practising as an attorney for a number of years, I have returned home."

"An attorney?"

"Yes, sir. I hope that you have none of the worldly prejudices against my profession, for I assure you there may be honest attorneys."

"I do not doubt it, sir. I pray you not to suppose for a moment that I have any prejudice against you."

"I thank you, sir. The fact is that this, Mr. Stanhope is the son of a nobleman, who was an old client of mine, and that was how he got such a footing in my house."

"I understand."

They had now reached an elegant room upon the ground floor, and Mr. Moffat, after apologising for being there alone for a little while, went to consult his wife upon the proposal Claude had made concerning Emma.

"Well," said Claude, when he was alone with Jack and Dick, "what do you think of this adventure?"

"I approve of it," said Dick. "Let us do all the good we can as we go along in the world."

"And I likewise approve of it," said Jack, "on the same principle. By adopting such a course, too, we make friends; and in our position of life, we never know when friends may be servicable. Several times it has happened to me, when I have been in great straits, and must have been sacrificed, that I have encountered people who felt bound to me by some old tie of grateful feeling, and they have saved me."

"I quite concur with you, Jack, in that," said Claude, feelingly. "Heaven knows that no one has greater cause than I to feel grateful to my friends; but yet, upon the higher principle of endeavouring to soothe the afflictions of this young girl, I would act, if I were to be assured that from the moment that I should cross the threshold of this house I should be forgotten."

"That I can well believe of you, Claude. But some one comes."

The door of the apartment was opened, and the father and mother both appeared. Tears were in the lady's eyes, and advancing to Claude, she said, in a voice of great feeling—

"Sir, not only do I accept the kind offer you make regarding Emma, but I do think, under Providence, that it may and will be the means of calming the mind of that afflicted one."

"I hope so from my heart, madam."

"We all hope so," said Dick.

"Then," said the father, "let it be soon done. Poor Emma is getting impatient to be once more in company with him whom she supposes in her madness to be Mr. Stanhope."

"Let me speak to her," said Claude, "and I will soon soothe her to calmness. At a time like this, anything should be done that possibly can to make her think that all is well. Pray let her come into the room."

The mother moved to the door; but before she could reach it, it was rapidly opened, and the young girl came into the room.

"Where is he?" she said. "Where is my Charles? Why do you keep me from him? I told you all that he would come, and you would not believe me, and so I do think that at times you nearly drove me mad. But he is here. Ah, he is here now!"

She advanced towards Claude again, and grasped him by the arm. He had his hat off now, and she looked in his face rather composedly as she said, in a low plaintive voice—

"Are you not my Charles?"

"Yes," said Claude. "Can you doubt it?"

Her countenance cleared in the moment, and the little doubt that had obtruded itself by the aid of the small glimmering of reason that still remained to her, vanished at once.

"Oh, yes—yes," she said. "I know you are my Charles, and all is well now. Who could speak to me in such a tone, but he who loved me? And now, father and mother, I would have you take notice, that he has come, although you said he would not."

"We acknowledge that, Emma," said the father.

"Yes, my child," sobbed the mother, "it is as you say."

"Now, my dear Emma," said Claude, "will you listen to me quietly, and pay great attention to what I am about to say?"

"Yes—oh, yes. How I shall listen to you! I do not wish to listen to any one else in all the world, Charles."

"Then, Emma, you must know that I have come down here, at some inconvenience to marry you, for since I knew you and saw you last, I have gone into the army. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, quite. And you have come to marry me, Charles? You are an officer in the army, now, you say?"

"Exactly; that is quite right. I have come to marry you; but the moment

the ceremony is performed, my military duties will call me to London, and perhaps a little way out of England; but you will recollect that you are my wife, and you will be patient. Only think how many soldiers wives have to wait the return of their husbands."

"Alas! I shall mourn."

"Yes; but you will feel much happier than you have felt."

"Happier, Charles! Oh, yes, I shall be myself again. My state will be one of Heaven, in comparison to what I have suffered. I shall be your wife. That will be to me everything, and those about me will know that such is the case, and I will try to be happy, even although you are away from me."

Claude glanced at the father and mother. The latter was weeping, but the father said in a low tone—

"It is more than I expected. She looks already more happy."

"And she will be," said Claude. "Now, Emma, you see here two friends of mine, one of them is a brother officer, and the other is the chaplain of our regiment. He will perform the marriage ceremony for us, and when you hear that you are my wife, I hope and trust that you will throw off all gloom and discomfort, and try all you can to make your fond parents happy and contented with you."

"I will, Charles. Yes, I will,"

"That is enough. By so doing, you will always preserve your place in my best affections, and let me be where I may, I shall think of you with the fondest regard."

"Ah, Charles, when you say that, you know that I would promise you anything in the world. But I ought to have a bridal dress of white, with roses upon it, and my hair should be bound with a silver wreath."

"You will do very well as you are," said Claude. "Recollect that I have no time to stay. My horse—the horse that you know quite well—waits without to take me to London again."

"Oh, yes—yes! I had really quite forgotten that. How foolish I am, to be sure. But I shall soon get better—much better. Did I not always say that you would come, Charles? Ah, I knew you better than they did, for when you told me that you would have me and no other, then I saw the moon look down upon you, and death would have come to you from its silvery beams if you had broken the vow."

"I should have deserved death," said Claude. "But, come, we will have the marriage performed in this very room, if your parents are agreeable."

"We are," said the old couple.

Claude beckoned to Jack to come and play the part of the chaplain; and then Jack, in a low, solemn voice, said,—

"I presume there is a book of prayers in the house?"

"Yes, sir," said the father. "I will fetch you one in a moment or two, if you will please to be seated for that space of time."

"That will do," said Jack. "I trust that when this ceremony is over that the young lady will know a peace of mind to which, I fear, she has been for some time a stranger."

"I shall—oh, yes, I shall!" cried the poor bewildered creature. "I know well that I shall. Where is the book of prayers? We are all quite ready, and my Charles has come all the way from London to marry me. You see, mother, that he has come?"

"I do, my dear," said the mother, who was hardly able to speak for emotion; "I do, my dear; and I sincerely hope that his coming will contribute greatly to your happiness, my child."

"I shall be as happy as the day is long. Nay, I fear that I shall be so merry and so full of spirits, now, that you will hardly know me; and I shall feel much better, here." She pressed her hands on her head as she spoke. "And then at night the fearful dreams will not come to me as they used to; and I shall not

see fingers pointed at me in my own chamber, nor hear the hideous laughter of creatures that do not belong to this world."

"Hush—hush!" said Claude. He saw that she was getting excited, and that the colour on her cheek was deepening, and he heard that her voice was rising to a high and unwonted pitch. "Hush! It is quite impossible that we should be married now, if you are not much more still than you are, dear one."

She shuddered a little, and then in a low tone, as she crept closer to Claude, she said,—

"Oh, yes, I will be as still as the grave!"

## CHAPTER CCLIX.

THE SINGULAR MARRIAGE TAKES PLACE, AND A STRANGE VISITOR ARRIVES.

THESE last words of the unhappy girl were spoken evidently under great terror that Claude would leave her again; and after a moment or two she looked up into his face with a glance of great sadness, and said,—

"I am not mad!"

The words seemed to be spoken as much in the light of a question as an assertion of sincerity; but Claude Duval thought proper to say all he could to reassure her.

"Mad!" he replied. "Oh, no—no! I am sure that no one can possibly call you mad. It is too absurd, that. You are quite as sane as any of us; and here comes a servant with the prayer-book, no doubt; and the chaplain here will at once unite us."

"Oh, yes—yes! That is joy, indeed!"

An old servant who had been dispatched to the library for a book of common-prayer, now made his appearance, and it was placed in the hands of Jack, who, partly from a feeling of superstition which would cling to him, and partly from pity for the unhappy young creature whom it became necessary to deceive for her own peace, looked as serious every bit as though he had been a real clergyman called in upon the spur of the moment to perform the ceremony.

"Now, Reverend Sir," said Claude, "we are perfectly ready if you please. Pray proceed with the ceremony."

Claude meant this as a hint to Jack to get it over as quickly as he could, and Jack replied—

"Take your places. I, too, am quite ready."

They all half-surrounded him in a kind of half circle, and Jack, in an impressive tone, read the marriage service. The formalities were all gone through with great gravity, and, finally, Jack closed the book, and with a slight inclination of his head, said—

"May the marriage be a blessed one, and produce all the good which every one here present hopes and expects from it."

"Amen!" said the father.

The young girl now turned to Claude, and with a shriek of joy she fell into his arms.

"Joy, joy!" she said. "I am indeed a wife. No more can the finger of scorn be pointed at me to drive me mad. I am a wife—I am your wife, Charles!"

"You are, my dear one; and now remember what I was compelled to tell you before this marriage took place. My horse is at the gate!"

She burst into tears and sobbed bitterly.

"And must you go? And must you really leave me? My own, my husband!"

"I must, indeed."

"It is imperative," said Jack.

"There cannot possibly be any delay," said Dick.



The young creature could not speak for her tears ; and as a tray, with wine and other refreshments, was brought in, the father spoke to her.

"Now, my dear, let me hope that although the military duties of your husband call him away from you, that you will feel a calmness and a peace of mind to which you have long been a stranger, and that we shall all feel happier——"

"Oh, yes, yes, father," she said, interrupting him, "and I will write a long letter every day to Charles."

"Nay," said Claude, "you must not attempt to do that, for I shall be so short a time probably at one place, that it is doubtful if any of such letters would at all reach me."

"But you will write to me?"

"Do not expect it. You know the life of a soldier is one that scarcely may be said to belong to himself. Rest content that you are my wife, and that I will come to you as soon as my military duties will permit me."

"Yes, madam," said Jack, "that is just the fact; and I can only assure you that even in coming here now to render you that tardy justice which he felt conscientiously compelled to render to you, my gallant young friend here is committing a breach of duty."

"And, therefore, must go at once," said the father.

"I am ready," said Claude, who took it now into his head that the father seemed rather anxious to get rid of him. "I am ready; my horse is at the gate."

He moved towards the door, but with a shriek, the girl followed him.

"No—no, not yet!—Oh, not yet!"

"Nay, but——"

"Oh, do not say me nay! You will take one cup of wine with us before you go.—Father, where is the cup of gold, that we consider the cup of honour? Where is it, father? Fill it for him who is entitled to it."

"It is here," said the father, as he handed a handsomely chased gold cup to Claude. "Drink sir, and then, as you must leave us, a short leave-taking is the best."

A loud ringing of the bell at this moment struck on the ears of the whole party.

"What is that?" said Dick.

"The great bell at the gate," said the father. "It is only some visitor for me; but the servants will show him into one of the other rooms. We shall not be intruded upon."

"I don't know that," said Claude. "Some one comes, that is quite clear."

The sound of a footstep approaching the room now came clearly upon all their ears.

"This is vexatious," said Jack. "Who can it be?"

"Let it be whom it may," said the poor blighted girl, "let it be whom it may, they shall congratulate me upon my marriage, and they will be the first to know of it."

The door was flung open, and a gentleman walked into the room, crying out as he did so—

"Well, old friend, how are you? You see that I have at last fulfilled my promise of coming down here for a little while, from the cares of my affairs in town, to—Oh, I beg your pardon; you have company!"

"Yes," said the girl, stepping forward, and holding Claude firmly by the cuff of the coat. "This, Sir John, is my husband?"

"Your husband?"

"Yes," said the father. "This is the husband of our dear girl, Sir John, and as you are a magistrate of London, I only wish you had been here to sanction with your presence the ceremony."

"The devil you do!"

"Yes—yes. Hush! All's right. Hem! Oh, yes."

"Why, what on earth is the meaning of all this? What is all this nodding

and winking about, eh? What does it mean? What do you want me to do or say?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

"Oh, nothing!" cried everybody.

"Nothing at all," said Dick, "Now, I think, we will go."

As Dick spoke, he sidled to the door of the room, but the magistrate, with sudden vehemence, cried out—

"Why, old friend, are these gentlemen acquaintances of yours?"

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Well, if ever I saw Richard Turpin, the highwayman, in all my life, and I have had him twice before me, and he robbed me once upon the Fulham Road, here he is!"

Everybody was profoundly still for a few moments, and then the father, as he clasped his hands together, said—

"A highwayman? Oh, no—no!"

"But I say yes. I don't know the others, but this is the famous Dick Turpin, the highwayman, I will be upon my oath."

"Oh, my dear, sir," said Dick, "you make a very great mistake, indeed. I may be like Turpin, the highwayman; but there are in the world the most extraordinary likenesses."

"There are, indeed, my friend, and I can only say, that yours is so extraordinary a one to Turpin, that if you ride into London, the authorities will hang you on the strength of it."

"This is insulting!" said Claude. "I will now leave this house at once with my friends. Farewell dear wife—farewell, until we have the happiness of meeting you."

"Charles, Charles, must you indeed go?"

"Indeed I must. Jack, where has that Sir John gone?"

The magistrate had hastily left the room.

"Danger!" said Dick, as he took a small double-barrelled pistol from his pocket, and shook the powder in the pan. "Danger, most certainly, by all that's interesting!"

"This comes," said Jack, "of going out of one's way to do a kind thing by any one."

"Do not say that," said Claude. "I will not regret that I went out of my way for such a purpose. Good-by, dear."

Claude kissed the girl, and then darted to the door of the room. Jack and Dick had already left it, and stood in the passage beyond it with a pistol in each of their hands.

"All's right," said Claude. "Don't make any noise."

The father followed them hastily.

"Oh, tell me," he said, "tell me truly who and what you really are?"

"A highwayman," said Claude, "and my name is Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"The same. But do not you join all the world in abusing me, or I have tried to do you some good, as I think you will admit, and I leave your house, taking nothing with me but my danger. If you wish to do me a good turn in requital of the trouble I have taken to restore your child to peace of mind, have our horses taken care of, and let us at once mount and be off."

"You shall—you shall. Oh, if I could only see my friend, Sir John, and tell him that I would have no sort of interference with you in my house, all might yet be well."

At this moment the magistrate made his appearance, followed by a man with a remarkably large face, who had such a cunning expression that it was quite fearful to look at him.

"Now, Stevens," said the magistrate, "I have often heard you say you knew every highwayman and cracksmen in and about London. Look at these three gentlemen, and just tell me who they are."

“Oh dear, yes, sir, I will; hum! ha! Oh, dear me. Oh! oh!”  
 “Why, what’s the matter with you?”  
 “Nothing, Sir John; oh dear, nothing at all!”  
 “Then who are they?”  
 “Must I speak, Sir John?”



CLAUDE BARGAINS WITH THE GIPSY FOR CONCEALMENT IN THE CAMP.

“To be sure; I order you.”  
 “Then, Sir John, that ere one that’s rather big is Claude Duval, and that other one is Dick Turpin, and that other one there in the shade is either Sixteen-string Jack’s ghost, or Sixteen-string Jack himself.”  
 “The devil they are!” said Sir John.

Upon this, Claude Duval stepped forward, and holding his pistol, that he had taken from his bosom, carelessly in his hand, he said,—

“Now, sir, I think I know you ; you are Sir John Richards the magistrate, and I think I likewise know your very cunning friend here, Mr. Stevens. He and I have encountered once before, when I made his rather long face an inch or two longer. Now, gentlemen, you both know who we are, and it is difficult to conceive that you should know so much without likewise knowing a little more.”

“And pray what is that ?” said the magistrate.

“Simply, that we are not the sort of men to give up easily, and that when we are three and you only two, it don't look a very likely proposition that you should apprehend us.”

“But it's my duty to do so.”

“Oh, dear me, Sir John,” said Stevens, “that's all very fine. The duty of everybody, Sir John, is to take care of his own skin, and to see that his own bones are safe. If I might humbly advise, Sir John, I should say—let 'em go.”

“That I cannot do, Stevens. I order you to take these men into custody immediately, and if you are resisted, you are authorised, you know well, to call upon every one in the king's name to assist you in the capture. If you should come by a violent end in the affair, I will take care that honourable mention is made of you afterwards, and your death will be a shining example to other officers in all time to come.”

“Oh, dear,” said Stevens, “don't mention it, Sir John. I'd a great deal rather shine in life than in death.”

“Do you refuse, then ?”

“I decline, Sir John, I decline.”

Claude laughed.

“Upon my word, Stevens,” he said “you have much more discretion than your master here, and I admire you very much for it, and will do you a good turn if I have ever the opportunity. I am particularly anxious that there should not be a disturbance in the house. Good-day, Sir John, good-day. Keep your temper, Sir John.”

## CHAPTER CCLX.:

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE BETRAYED BY THE GIPSIES.

THE advice to keep his temper with which Claude favoured the magistrate, seemed, by the appearance of that personage, to be very much needed, for he was beginning to get red in the face. No doubt, the idea of being so near the effecting of three such important captures, and yet missing them, was very galling to the magistrate.

The father of the poor maddened girl plucked Claude by the sleeve, saying,—

“This way—this way. Come away, for the love of Heaven !”

“Yes,” said Claude. “My horse ?”

“It is here ; follow me. My poor girl is rapidly getting ready to ride after you, and the only thing to stop her, is to convince her that you are gone. Come, oh, come !”

“I am as willing as possible,” said Claude. “It was your friend, Sir John, here, who detained me. Good-day, Stevens.”

“Good-day to you, Claude Duval,” said Stevens. “I dare say you and I will meet again at some time or another, and then, let who will get the better of it, there need be no malice.”

“None in the least, Stevens. Farewell !”

Duval hastily followed the father, and Jack and Dick, who by no means had expected that the affair would have gone off so quietly, kept close to him. The

magistrate sat down in one of the hall chairs, and fanned himself with his hat, while Stevens rubbed his great, rough hands together, and looked at him.

"A nice article you are, Mr. Stevens."

"Thank you, Sir John—Hem! Ha! Wait a bit, Sir John."

"What for?"

"Just to keep our brains in their proper places. Lord bless you, Sir John, that Duval, who is a civil enough fellow till he is put very much out of his way, would no more have scrupled to blow your brains out than he would to tread on a fly."

"You don't mean that, Stevens? I don't think I ever heard of a magistrate's brains being blown out."

"Yours, then, Sir John, would have made a beginning."

"The deuce they would!"

"Yes, Sir John, and no mistake at all, Sir John; but—but——"

Mr. Stevens crept closer to the magistrate, and in a mysterious whisper he said—

"I'll nab 'em."

"You will?"

"Safe, Sir John. I'll nab 'em. Lord bless you, Sir John, it's all right; only, if we can nab 'em without any danger, it will be just as well, you know. I'll do it; but—but——"

"What the deuce are you making those abominable faces for? What do you mean by grinning at me like an old pole-cat, and saying nothing but—'But—but?'"

"Oh, Sir John! Oh, dear! Oh—Hem! If I do nab 'em, what am I to get Sir John—how much? That is the question, Sir John."

"Oh, it is, is it? Then you don't feel inclined to do it in a politic sort of way, and for the benefit of society?"

"Society may be robbed, and murdered, and d——"

"Hush! Don't let me hear such language, Stevens. I undertake, that if you take those three desperadoes into custody, you shall have the whole of the reward offered, as well as being highly recommended to the Secretary of State."

"Oh, well—hem! it's as good as done now, Sir John; and so I will be off at once, and if anything should happen to me that I don't expect at all, why it will be nothing at all to nobody, for I'm a single man, and nobody cares for me, and I never cared for any one, that's a comfort. Hem—ha! Oh, dear!"

Mr. Stevens rubbed his hands again together, and then glided out of the hall.

"He'll have 'em," said the magistrate, "I feel that he will have 'em as sure as fate; he is quite a wonderful man is that Stevens, and have 'em he will, and the world will be rid of three fellows that make the roads perfectly unsafe. I am afraid to go five miles out of London myself with a penny-piece more than is just sufficient to pay the tolls."

While this little interesting conversation was going on between Sir John Richards and his man Stevens, Claude and his friends had been conducted by the father of the insane young lady to the garden, where sure enough their horses were, apparently ready for the road again.

"We are safe," said Jack, as he at once mounted, "I feel that we are safe now."

"Yes," said Dick, as he too sprung into the saddle. "I feel now all right, and can laugh at the danger we have passed."

"Not so can I," said Claude.

"Indeed, and why not?"

"You do not know that man, Stevens, as I know him. He is one of the most consummately cunning fellows that ever stepped, and I feel as confident as though he had himself told me of it, that he has some scheme on hand to take us. That it may fail, no doubt, and that by courage and resolution we may defeat it. I will not for a moment doubt; but that he has such a scheme, take up your minds. And now, sir, allow me to bid you good day, and I



sincerely hope you will not think the less of what little good we may have done your child, because we happen to be what we are—Knights of the Road."

"No," said the father, "and I can only say, that if either of you get into any trouble or difficulty, I hope and trust you will write to me, and all that is in my power will be done for you, in spite of my friend Sir John Richards."

"Thank you, sir. Farewell!"

Jack and Dick likewise made their farewells, and then they all three trotted across the meadow at the back of the garden, and soon reached the lane with the gate at the end of it, by the spot where Claude had been at first so much surprised by the kind of salutation he had got from the young lady.

"Hurrah!" cried Dick. "I, for one, defy Mr. Stevens, and all his meshes. I am mounted, and my bonny Black Bess will carry me through the flimsy cobwebs of his devices."

"Don't make too sure," said Claude.

"You alarm me, Claude," said Jack. "It is so seldom that you indulge in any forebodings, that you thoroughly alarm me when you do. Tell us what you think this cunning Stevens will attempt."

"I only wish I could, Jack. If I could tell that, I should not feel the slightest shadow of uneasiness about it, for when once you know so much, all the cunning of the scheme is lost, and open violence only remains, of which we are not afraid."

"But," interposed Dick, "you don't mean, Claude, to say now, in sober conscience, that you think this fellow, Stevens, can do anything that we need care about?"

"We shall see," said Claude. "He is the only man in the police who has what one may call a diabolically inventive genius, and one never can calculate upon what he is about."

"Then, in the name of all that's abominable, let us leave him as far behind us as possible. Put your horses to speed, and let us have a five mile canter."

"Agreed—agreed. Be it so."

They all three upon this set off at good speed, and the five mile canter that they promised themselves would very soon have been accomplished, but for rather an untoward accident occurring to prevent it.

They thought that it would be decidedly their best plan to take a route across the country by the lanes, so as to get into quite another line of high road as early as possible, and they had got about a mile and a half of the distance, when Dick suddenly pulled up, crying out in an alarmed voice—

"Hilloa! what is this?"

"What's what?" said Claude Duval, as he on the instant stopped his horse. "What do you mean, Dick?"

"The worst meaning ever I had in all my life. My Bess is dead lame."

"Lame?"

"Yes, to be sure. I have been suspecting it for the last half-mile, only I was so loth to believe it, that I did not like to pull-up; but I can no longer disguise the fact from myself, now that lame she is to all intents and purposes."

"Perhaps it's only a stone in the foot."

"I hope so."

Dick hastily dismounted and lifted, one by one, the feet of his mare.

"No," he said, "there is no stone, and I can't see anything amiss. It is, after all, just possible that she was doing it for fun. It may have been nothing, after all."

"Or, perhaps," said Jack, "a stone, which fell out the moment you changed her pace. Mount again, Dick, and let us be off."

"I will—I will."

Dick was in the saddle again in a minute, and then it became but too painfully evident, that the horse could not or would not move faster than a painful kind of walk. Before any comment could be made upon such a remarkable occurrence, Jack called out,—

"Why, my horse is taken in just the same sort of way. It is as lame as it well can be in all four feet."

"And mine," said Claude Duval, with all the coolness in the world; "so here we are at a dead fix."

"But what is the meaning of it, Claude? Are the horses bewitched? Are we to believe in necromancy, and evil eyes, and all that sort of thing? How else do you account for it, Duval?"

"Stevens!"

"What?"

"Stevens," repeated Claude, in the coolest way in the world, as if the affair really did not much matter to him. "Stevens."

"The devil!" said Dick.

Jack pulled a very long face.

"And so, Claude, you really think that we owe the lameness of our cattle to that cunning fellow, Stevens the officer?"

"There's no sort of doubt of it, Jack. It is a piece of his most infernal management to keep us about the neighbourhood until he can get together a sufficient force to attack us. I did not entertain a doubt for a moment but that he would try something or another."

Dick seemed to be thoroughly bewildered at this catastrophe, for the lameness of his horse, to him, quite amounted to own that he was entirely unable to suggest any mode of escape from the many perils that surrounded them. Jack almost shook, as he thought that this was only the commencement of the scheme by which that prince of wily officers, Stevens, was going to circumvent them.

"Claude—Claude," he cried. "Are you thinking of what to do? Shall we yet look to you for our means of escaping from this most dreadful dilemma?"

"I hope so," said Claude, rousing himself. "We are not going to give in if we were all struck lame ourselves, as well as our horses. Let us lead them on at once—it is the only thing we can do, and trust to reaching some place of shelter as soon as possible. We are well armed, and it shall cost Mr. Stevens and his friends dear, if they make an attack upon us. They may prevent us from escaping, if they like."

"Yes," said Dick, "they have done that, but it is questionable if that is not about the worst thing they could have done us, as far as regards their own safety."

"We will fight to the last."

"Hush," said Jack. "Don't talk about fighting, just now; of course, if it comes to the worst, we will fight; but cunning is best met by cunning. Wait a bit while I look thoroughly at the horses' feet. It will be a great thing to find how and why they are lamed."

"It will—it will. Look your best, Jack, and you don't find it out, nobody will, that's one comfort."

Jack took one of his horse's feet in his lap, and with his handkerchief he carefully brushed from the hoof all the dust that it had collected from the road; after which, he felt it carefully, and then he said—

"Oh, here it is!"

"What?—where?" cried Dick and Claude in a breath.

"Here," added Jack. "A small piece of some adhesive kind of substance, no doubt impregnated with something very irritable to a horse's foot. Here it is, not, as you see, larger than a sixpence; but I had the greatest difficulty to get it off, it stuck so hard."

While Claude and Dick could hardly find words to vent their indignation in, Jack took from the off-foreleg hoof of each of their horses, a similar little plaster to what he had found upon his own, and the mystery of the lameness was discovered.

"What it is I don't know," said Jack, "but it has so much inflamed the feet of the horses, that they are only fit for rest and a poultice a-piece on the foot, now."

I don't think the mischief will last, as we have luckily found it out rather promptly."

"Oh, if I catch that fellow," said Dick, between his clenched teeth, "I should only like to know what was on the little plasters, and make him swallow a painful of it."

"Hush!" said Claude, "some one comes. Take the horses to the side of the road, Jack. I will meet whoever it is."

"And I with you," said Dick.

"No, Dick, one is best. It is but a single footstep that I hear. Be assured that if I want assistance I will call to you. In fact, you will hear what passes."

"So I shall."

The person who was approaching turned out to be a gipsy boy driving a miserable-looking ass. At sight of Claude Duval, he stopped and seemed rather hesitating about whether it would be safe to advance or not. Once, too, he glanced over his shoulder, as though there was danger behind him, which made it a most important point with him whether it were better to advance or retreat.

"Come on, my lad," said Claude, who saw his hesitation. "Come on. There's nothing to fear. All's right with us."

Upon being thus encouraged, the gipsy boy came on, but in proportion as his fears of the persons towards whom he was advancing diminished, he showed more alarm at some undefined danger in the rear, for he kept glancing behind him with looks of terror mingled with anger and rage.

"What's the matter, boy?" said Claude; "you don't seem to be very well pleased at something?"

"How should I be pleased?" said the boy. "Are blows with the thong of a whip pleasing, because you can't tell what you don't know?"

"Certainly not; but you don't mean to say that any one has been serving you in that fashion, do you?"

"I do mean to say it, and I say more, which is, that I will have my revenge!"

The boy was passing on, but Claude stopped him, and placing a small coin in his hand, he said—

"Tell me who it is that has served you in such a way, and if you are so anxious for revenge, who knows but I may help you?"

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## CHAPTER CCLXI.

CLAUDE FINDS THAT THE APPEARANCE OF SAFETY IS NOT THE REALITY.

THESE words of Claude's seemed to have some effect upon the boy, for he at once stopped, and throwing the rope of hay, which formed the only halter he had for the ass, over his arm, he said—

"You will help me to revenge?"

"I think so. But there's no harm done if I cannot. You must tell me how it was, and who it was that cut you with the whip."

The boy turned his flashing eyes in the direction that he had come, and raising his arm, he said—

"At the other end of the lane, are twelve men on horseback, well armed. They are waiting for some one to lead them on in search of some highwaymen, so they said, and when I got up to them and would have passed on in peace, they asked me if I had seen three men on lame horses, and of course I had not, and told them so; but they would have it that the words of my mouth were lies, and they lashed me with their whips."

"An," cried Jack, "this is worth knowing."

Claude made a sign to Jack to be silent, and then he addressed the boy, saying—

“Tell me who and what you are, for upon that knowledge will depend whether I can help you to your revenge or not.”

“I am a gip.”

“That I see; but how comes it that you are alone? It is seldom that one of your people is met in this way. Where is your tribe, boy?—or have you none?”

“None? Where is the true gip without his fellows? I am not alone. Will you trust yourself upon this old bank with me?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Come on, then.”

With wonderful agility, the gipsy boy made a kind of a rush at the bank by the side of the lane, and gained the top of it, where there grew a thick hedge of blackthorn, alders, and many other indigenous shrubs, through which it was impossible to catch a glimpse beyond; but the young gipsy, with practised skill, dashed aside the branches until he made a clear space, and then he cried—

“Behold! In yonder valley by the sparkling water-course that at times borrows light and beauty from the sun of other climes, is my tribe—my people!”

Claude looked in the direction indicated by the young gipsy, and at some distance off, in a picturesque hollow, he saw the brown and ragged tents of the wanderers, and a thin wreath of blue smoke rising above the surrounding vegetation, as though to mark the spot.

“The boy watched his eyes, and then said—

“You see them?”

“I do.”

Claude at once sprang down again from the hedge, and approaching Jack and Dick, he said in a low tone—

“What say you to asking of the hospitality of the gipsies for a while? I am sure that this boy knows some hidden and secure path to their encampment, and they will do anything for money. We will pay them well; and it is so essential that our horses should be in some place for safety, that I can get over all the risks of the application on the score of the chances of its success.”

“It is a risk,” said Dick.

“Yes,” said Jack, “as regards the gipsies, it just comes to this, that you are either when with them as safe as they can possibly make you, or they will betray you to a certainty.”

“What motive can they have to betray us?” said Claude Duval. “If they think at all, and have any feeling upon the subject of our position in society, that feeling ought to be in our favour.”

“True.”

“Then, shall I speak to the boy about it?”

“Use your own judgment, Claude,” said Jack, “and I will follow you. If you think that it is the best chance for us, I’ll believe it really is, and will brave all the risks of it.”

“So will I,” said Dick. “The falling lame of my horse, has placed me in such a predicament, that I am willing for anything that promises her a night’s rest, poor thing.”

“There is one thing,” said Jack, “that looks well in this affair. We have found out so soon the mischief that Claude’s friend, Stevens, did, that it cannot be very great, and a poultice to the horses’ feet during the night will, in all probability, make them right by the morning.”

“Then risk the gips,” said Dick.

“What poultice would you use for the horses’ feet, Jack?” said Claude.

“Ah, it’s as well I should tell you what to do, in case anything should happen to me, Claude.”

“Nay, Jack, nothing was further from my thoughts than the attempt to provide against such a contingency.”

"I know that; I did but jest. But yet I will tell you both. You must pluck a handful of the flowering mallow, or marsh-mallow, as it is called, and pound it down as well as you can, with a small quantity of warm water. The juice will be quite green, and you must soak a rag doubled three times in it and apply it to the hurt in the horse's foot."

"Thank you, Jack; and that will cure it?" said Dick.

"It will. If it don't, it's a kind of hurt that horse never had before in all my experience."

"Then I will speak to the boy at once," said Claude, "since we are so far agreed about it."

He then stepped back to the hedge, from which the boy had now jumped, and was carelessly holding the halter that was around the ass's neck.

"Listen to me," said Claude Duval. "Your people have no objection to money. You have found out its value in all lands, and when the hand of sickness is upon any of you, you know well that money is your best friend."

"It is."

"When you want to cross the sea, too, you must have money; for although upon land you can take up the staff, and pack up your tents, and walk through the wilderness, the sea stops you, and you must pay money to those that have ships to transport you to the south."

"That is true."

"Very well, then; I and my two friends want to be concealed until to-morrow morning. Will your tribe, do you think, enable us to do so, by hiding us among them?"

The boy considered for a moment or two, and then he said—

"Yes. The tribe will do it. There is the consent of but one to ask; it is our queen. She is with us now."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Her name is Zahara, and her home is the plains of Lower Egypt, but she is here now, and she will consent."

"Quick—quick!" cried Dick. "I am certain that I hear the sound of horses' feet in the lane, Claude."

"And so do I," said Jack.

The gipsy boy flung himself down upon the ground, and laid his ear close to it for a moment. Then, springing to his feet again, he said—

"They come. Follow me at once."

"And our horses?" said Dick. "We cannot leave them."

"The horse will be safe with its rider. Come on."

The lad immediately led the way along the lane until they came to a portion of it where there was a gate leading into a field. It appeared to be fastened, but the gipsy boy had found out a means of lifting it from its hinges, so that the party could pass through it with the greatest ease. Immediately upon the other side of the gate was one of those mysterious, double hedgerows, which are common enough in some parts of the country of England, and which look as though they had at one time been well-kept paths, but by the establishment of some other and better road, had been suffered to go to vegetation, and to become completely wild with weeds and trees and bushes again.

It was down this double hedge-row that the gipsy boy led the three friends and their horses.

In some places their route was so overgrown with weeds, and so interlaced by the long prickly arms of the blackberry, that it was no easy thing to get along, and more than once Claude Duval had to take out his knife and cut away some obstructing branch of a bush before they could get past.

"Will this lead us to the encampment of your people?" said Claude to the boy:

"It will," he replied. "It is the way we come and go; but a man can easily make his way through this tangled brake when a horse cannot. It is awkward for the cattle; but we shall soon be through it now."



This lane—for such it might really be called, although it had evidently been completely abandoned for many years—was about a quarter of a mile in extent, and finally ended in a spot where the grass and the tall rushes sufficiently evidenced there was abundance of water. In fact, as the adventurers trod upon the ground it yielded to them, and the impression of each footstep rapidly filled up with water.



CLAUDE LIBERATING HIS FRIENDS FROM THE LOCK UP.

"Why, this is a regular swamp," said Dick.

"We shall soon be out of it," said the boy. "Follow me."

The ground now rose a little, and the boy led the way around the slope of a little eminence, when suddenly upon rounding a clump of three tall trees, the party came right upon the gip y encampment.

The sight that now presented itself was singular in the extreme. The encampment consisted of about a dozen tents, and occupied a space of ground of considerable extent. A group of naked children were playing before the entrance of the nearest tent, and upon the sudden arrival of the strangers, some very singular kind of horn was blown, which made a harsh screaming sort of noise.

Immediately upon this, there emerged from some of the other tents several men, who, with looks of anger, seemed to demand what the intruders wanted there.

"Wait here," said the boy. "I must go and explain what you have said to the people. Do not move from this spot, I pray you."

"We will not."

The boy left them, and to every man he met, he muttered something in the singular patois of the people, and each one to whom he spoke followed him, and they all made their way to a rather larger tent than the others, and which stood somewhat apart.

"Well," said Dick to Claude, "it is just possible we may be safe here. How much do you intend to offer them?"

"Oh, I shall ask them to name their price."

"It will be cheap at anything," said Jack, "if we can but get a night's rest and safety for the horses in this place."

The consultation in the larger tent did not appear to last very long, for the boy was seen coming back to the strangers rapidly. Upon reaching them, he spoke quickly.

"All is well," he said. "The gips do want money, and they will get it from those who are not of their people. Come on."

"Then our proposal is accepted?" said Claude.

"It is. Follow me."

The boy led the way, and the three adventurers followed him at once, each leading his horse, and it was a mortifying thing to them all to see that at each step it was quite evident the horses got worse and worse on their feet, so that it was really no easy matter to get them along at all. The boy paused at the entrance to the larger tent, and shouted out something in a language that neither of the friends had the least conception of.

Through a slit in the canvas, then, a hand was projected, grasping a bottle, which in a moment was cast to the ground and broken.

"That will do," said the boy. "Come away. You will be well and properly provided for."

"But what was the meaning of breaking a bottle at the sight of us?" said Claude.

"Merely to signify that until the pieces united again of themselves, we would not give you up to your enemies."

"Very well, that is all right."

A couple of men, now, without speaking a word, began to erect a rough tent. When it was finished, one of them said—

"It is for the beasts. Perhaps you will not disdain to join the fireside of the poor gip?"

"Certainly not," said Claude. "We would rather be with you than away from you. But, I tell you candidly, that we expect the officers of the police are in pursuit of us, and we must, in case they come here, be hidden in some way."

"Our people," said another of the men, "are over the wold now, and we shall have due notice of the approach of any one. It will be time enough then to look for hiding places."

"But you have come to no understanding as to what we must give you," said Claude.

"That we must leave to you," said the man. "We can see many things; but not into the fugitive's pocket."

"Very well; we will be as liberal to you as we can, and I do not think you will lose anything by leaving to us your reward."

The three horses were now led into the tent that had been prepared for them, and Jack at once set about his preparations for curing their feet. As he had come along the lane between the tall hedges, he had been able to gather as much of the marsh mallow as he wanted, so that he was quite prepared to commence operations at once, and in the course of a quarter of an hour, he had, by the assistance of Claude and Dick, made the horses comfortable enough.

The gipsies looked on in silence; but it was evident that they were interested greatly in what was going on. When everything was done for the cattle that could be, Claude said—

“Now we are ready to sit down in your tents, and to partake of such hospitality as you may be able to afford us.”

“Strangers,” said one of the gipsies, whom they had not seen before, but who seemed to be in some sort of authority in the tribe. “Strangers, it so happens that the present period with us is one of ceremony connected with our ancient faith, and we must not eat nor drink with the children of another people.”

“Very well,” said Claude, “as you please; but I was not aware that there were any particular periods in your faith, if you have any which make such a rule imperative.”

“We have a faith.”

“Pardon me. I had no intention of offending you by making the remark at all. I merely spoke of my own ignorance. That was all.”

“It matters not. Come on.”

The gipsy went before, and halting at the door of a tent, he said something in his own language, and then holding aside the torn and dirty canvas of which the tent was composed, he added in English—

“Enter.”

The three friends stooped and entered the tent, in which there was a miscellaneous assemblage of the tribe, to the number of sixteen or seventeen, only three or four women being of the party.

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## CHAPTER CCLXII.

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS LIGHT UPON EVIL TIMES.

THE gipsies seemed to be all talking together as Claude and his companions entered the tent, and it was astonishing to note the little attention which the arrival of the new comers created.

The man who had played the part of their conductor to that tent, showed them some rough seats made from boughs of wood, and there was likewise a kind of table similarly constructed.

“Sit here,” he said, “for although the gipsy may not eat nor drink with the Nazarene at this time, he will make him welcome in his house.”

Claude glanced at Dick rather uneasily, and Dick inclining towards him, said in a whisper—

“Is there anything amiss?”

“I don’t know that there is; but I don’t like the idea of their refusing to eat or drink with us.”

“Nor I,” said Jack.

They all three spoke in such low tones that it was quite impossible the gipsies could overhear what they said. But yet they found that many an inquiring glance was bent upon them, and in the flashing of the dark eyes that succeeded them, Claude found there was more of cunning and mystery than of cordial welcome.

Whatever, however, might be his opinion of the character of the gipsy tribe he had got among, he, Claude, felt that it would be a most dangerous thing now

to manifest anything in the shape of mistrust, so he only made up his mind to keep as wide awake as possible.

"We have nothing to offer you but water from the spring, and some cold victuals," said one of the men to Claude.

"That will do."

Upon this, a jug of water was placed before them, and a wooden bowl containing a not very dainty collection of the leavings of some dinner-table.

Dick shook his head. "The water for me," he said, "and as for the eatables, I think we can leave them for our friends the gips."

"With all my heart," said Claude, "they don't look very tempting."

At this moment a loaf of bread was flung into the tent on to the floor, and one of the gipsies, pointing to it, said to Jack—

"If you want bread, take it."

"You don't call that," said Dick, "the politest way in the world of handing a bit of a loaf to a gentleman?"

"Never mind," said Jack. "Never mind."

"Oh, but I do though," said Dick, as he lifted the loaf from the ground, and with almost the force of a cannon-shot, threw it back again out of the tent.

"We don't want any, thank you," he cried.

A howl outside showed that the loaf had hit some one, and the gipsies looked scowlingly at their guests.

"You have but yourselves to thank," said Dick, "for this. The only civil thing we could do was to follow your example; and as you threw the loaf at us to know if we wanted it, we had no resource but to throw it back again, if we did not."

"Quite right," said the gipsy who appeared to have authority over his companions. "It is quite right. Nothing can be possibly better, and we take no sort of offence at anything so very natural as your conduct."

Both Jack and Claude regretted that Dick had been so hasty upon the occasion; but since it was done, it could not be undone, and they neither of them liked to say a word to him about it.

They all three drank the water in the jug, and then one of the gipsies came up to the table and said—

"Are you done with that?" pointing to the jug.

"Quite," said Claude. "It is at your service."

Without another word, the man took up the jug, and opening the canvas at the entrance of the tent, he flung it as far as he could, and when it fell, of course it was smashed to atoms.

"Well," said Dick, "upon my word we have got among very delightful company, indeed, I rather think."

"Hush," said Claude. "Let them have their own way. It is just possible enough that they have some religious ceremonies of their own which compel them in the fanaticism of the moment to behave in this way to us. But our stay will be short among them."

"The shorter the better," said Jack. "But see, we are nearly alone."

The gipsies one by one had left the tent, until there were but a man and a woman remaining, and they, too, were going towards the entrance of it, when Claude spoke—

"We will walk out of the tent," he said, "into the air, if you require it for any purpose. We have no wish to dispossess you."

Without a word in reply to this speech, which certainly required one, from its courtesy, the man and woman left the tent, and the three friends were alone completely.

"Well," said Dick, "I don't like this sort of thing at all. What do you think of it, Claude?"

"Be careful, Dick. We are surrounded but by walls of thin and tattered canvas, recollect; and every word we say is, no doubt, listened to. If we accom-

plish the end we have in view, of procuring safety till the morning, all will be well enough. We will pay them for that, and then we will depart in peace."

"Yes, but I must confess I should have liked a more cordial kind of reception from them. I wonder, too, what has become of the boy who brought us here? He seems to have completely disappeared."

"Claude," said Jack, suddenly, and he rose to his feet, "I know you are struggling against the conviction, in your own mind, that things are not as they ought to be here. Speak to us candidly, and say if it be not so."

"It is," said Claude, as he rose. "I will not remain with these people longer. They will not break bread with us, nor eat salt. They are not friends of ours."

"Let us to the horses, then, at once, and get away," said Dick.

"Yes—yes."

At this moment a wild kind of yell came upon their ears from without, and before they could take a step towards the opening of the tent, down it came in one mass of confusion upon them, and they were most completely entangled in the quantity of loose canvas and old rags of which it was composed.

"Betrayed!" cried Claude.

"Lost—oh, lost!" cried Jack.

Dick managed to get one of his pistols out and fired it at random. There was a loud cry, and then all was still for a moment; after which there was a bewildering shout, and a rush of men towards the fallen tent.

In the course of three minutes, Claude, Dick, and Jack were dragged out from the wreck of canvas, and found themselves in the grasp of a couple of officers, who, by the assistance of others who had nothing to do but help them, soon succeeded in handcuffing the whole three of them, and in tying ropes round their legs, so that any attempt to escape was out of the question.

The gypsies raised a wild kind of shout, more like the howling of a band of savages than anything else; and then Mr. Stevens the officer came up to Claude.

"Well, Duval," he said. "Hem! Ah! I rather thought I should do it, somehow or another; but I didn't think to do it quite so easy."

"Oh, so this is a trick of yours, is it?"

"Yes, Claude Duval. Hem! I don't bear any malice, you know, and it's all in the way of business, you know, or else I shouldn't have thought of it."

"Oh, don't make any excuses."

"I must just search you, if you please, gentlemen, for your ease, that's all. You see, I was bound to take you, if I could, and so I have, you see. Hem! ha!"

"You are a genius, Stevens."

"Oh, dear, no; I did think you would have suspected that boy with the donkey, that I did."

Claude looked chagrined.

"And so, that was a take-in, was it?" he said.

"Oh, dear, yes. He did it pretty well; but yet I hardly, do you know, expected that it would have answered—A clever youth."

"So clever," said Dick, "that if ever I get hold of him I will put a final stop to his cleverness for the rest of his days."

"Hem! Ha! Oh yes. No doubt."

Poor Jack looked dreadfully cut up at this unexpected capture; but Claude laughed only, and said—

"Why, Jack, this is, after all, only a little resting. They can't keep us, you know that well enough."

"Oh dear! can't we?" said Stevens. "Hem!"

"Claude—Claude," said Jack, "the end has come."

"Not a bit of it," cried Claude. "All's right enough; I don't mean to give in, I assure you. There's plenty of time."

"I fired a pistol," said Dick. "Did I hit any one?"



"Yes," said Stevens. "One of the gips. A man with a pair of ear-rings on, I believe,"

"Why, that's the very fellow who took us in hand when we came here, and seemed to be a sort of leader among them."

"Oh dear, very likely. Hem! Ha! He is quite dead. The bullet went into his right eye and came out at the back of his head, so it was rather a finisher."

"Well," said Dick, "for a chance shot, it was about the best I ever fired."

Stevens soon possessed himself of all the pistols that had belonged to the highwaymen, with the exception of one that Claude had so well hidden that it escapes even his scrutiny.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "I beg to inform you that we will take you to London at once in a cart, and if you make any attempt to escape or to be mischievous on the way, I can only say that I shall blow your brains out, as soon as look at you."

"Bravo, Stevens!" said Claude.

"I am not joking."

"No," added Claude, "nor am I; and I tell you what it is, Stevens, you are a very clever fellow, but I still think that you will find yourself in the wrong box, after all."

"In the witness-box at the Old Bailey you mean, and you in the dock."

"Very good—very good! It's all right. Where's your cart?"

"Hem! Ha! You are a nice young man, Claude Duval, and you are a nice man, Dick Turpin, and you are an engaging person, Sixteen-string Jack; but there will be a terrible crowd when you are all three hanged on next Monday come a week. Hem!"

"Look here," said Claude, as he pointed as well as he could with his manacled hands to his head. "I will bet you this against yours, that we are not hung on Monday come a week."

"Bet me what? your hend?"

"Yes."

"Done, then, Claude Duval. Hem! Ha! I shall ask the sheriff to let me take my stake, and I dare say there are people who would pay a good price for it."

A wailing cry now arose from a throng of the gipsies that had congregated around the dead body of the one of their tribe who had fallen, and Dick raised his voice, and spoke—

"The reward of treachery!" he said. "The reward of treachery. It has done you a deal of good to sell our blood. There will from this day forth be a curse upon your tribe. I curse it!"

"No—no!" shrieked a female voice.

"Yes," said Dick, "and the curse will stick to you, too, as long as your tribe is a tribe."

Upon this the gipsies made a rush towards Dick, but the officers with the pistols in their hands interposed.

"Dear me," said Stevens, "my good friends, what do you want?"

"His blood!" cried a gipsy. "We must have his blood and place it when the moon is at its full to the east, and then the curse will go from us. It is the curse of blood, and only may be so removed."

"Really, gentlemen," said Stevens, "I am sorry to disoblige you; but this is my prisoner and you must kill and eat me first before you get him; and the first man who attempts to lay a finger upon him, I will send to the other world to keep him company who lies yonder in his gore. Hem! Ha!"

The gipsies shrunk back.

At this moment one of the officers appeared with a cart, and Claude and his friends were placed in it. The gipsies were consulting among each other, and then just as the officers were all mounted and ready to go, there rushed out of the

large hut an old hag of a woman, with a piece of scarlet cloth wound round her head, and in a screaming voice she addressed them in their own patois.

Whatever she said had the effect of rousing them to a state of fury and desperation, for catching up what weapons they could upon the spur of the moment, they began to advance threateningly towards the officers who surrounded the cart.

## CHAPTER CCLXIII.

### THE FIGHT WITH THE GIPSIES.—TREACHERY HAS ITS REWARD.

No doubt after what had happened, the gipsy tribe would have been but too glad, if such a thing had been possible, to have retraced its steps, and instead of bartering with the officers the fugitives for gold, would have felt greater satisfaction in defending the highwaymen, and trusting to their generosity for a recompense.

They had chosen the course, though, and the past was not to be recalled. Vengeance for the death of their comrade seemed to be the principal feeling that actuated them.

The officer, Stevens, now, by his cool and courageous conduct, excited the admiration even of his captives. In a clear loud voice he spoke to the gipsies—

“Now listen to me, gipsies. These three men are my prisoners. I have taken some pains to get them, and I mean to keep them. When once I take a prisoner, I never part with him till I get a receipt for him from the proper authorities, and I warn you all that I will defend them to the last drop of my blood; and as I happen to know that my comrades here are of the same way of thinking, the most prudent thing you can do is to be as quiet as possible.”

“Revenge!” cried the gipsies. “Blood for blood! It is the law of our old religion, and we will carry it out. Blood for blood!—A life for a life!”

“Hem! Very good, gentlemen. Come on, then.”

With a frantic yell, which had the effect of rather frightening the officers' horses, the gipsies made a rush towards the cart in which the prisoners were, for the purpose of getting possession of Dick; and there can be very little doubt but that if they had succeeded, his life would not have been worth a moment's purchase.

The gipsies, however, had to do with men of cool nerves and steady valour—men who, with arms in their hands, knew they could hold their way, and who were not to be intimidated.

“Steady,” said Stevens. “Steady.”

The officers stood firm.

“Fire!” said Stevens.

In a volley, the pistols of the officers were discharged, and the rabble rout of the gipsies reeled back.

Again, then, there rose the shriek for vengeance, and those who had escaped from injury from the first volley, again rushed forward.

“Fire!” said Stevens; and again the officers sent a fearful volley among their assailants.

The smoke cleared away, and the gipsies were in full flight, with the exception of some dozen dead and dying, who lay upon the ground, deserted by the others.

“That will do,” said Stevens. “They would have it, and now they have got it. We are for London.”

The gipsies were evidently too much sickened of the affairs to attempt to rally again; and so, without any further molestation, the officers turned round and began to make their way towards the nearest high road.

“Well,” said Claude, “this is a pretty affair, Mr. Stevens.”

“Yes—Hem! Rather.”

"It is not for us to regret it, for those rascals deserved amply all they have got, that is quite clear enough. They are a bad lot."

"Oh, very bad, indeed," said Stevens.

"And pray, what did you give them for betraying us, if it's a fair question, Mr. Stevens?"

"I don't mind telling you in confidence, Claude Duval, but, of course, you musn't let it go any further—that they agreed to do the job for five pounds."

"Five pounds?"

"Yes; that was all they got, and I paid them beforehand. It has cost some ten or twelve of them their lives, and you your liberty, and will hang you three shortly, and will put a good round sum in my pocket."

"And all for five pounds?" said Claude.

"Yes, it's cheap. Hem! Ha! Very cheap, indeed," said Stevens, as though he were speaking to somebody who really had no more concern in the affair than just to come to a passing opinion upon it.

"The price of blood should be rather high," said Claude. "To sell three lives for five pounds is too little."

"I said it was cheap."

"Too cheap to be good. Mr. Stevens, you may depend it will not answer. I shall win my wager of your head."

"Oh, dear no, you musn't do any such thing. You can easily imagine that I could not do without it in my business."

"Oh, that don't matter to me in the least."

"Certainly not; and I don't at all expect you to take that into consideration for a moment. But there is Sir John Richards. I told him if he waited just at that corner that I would bring you to him."

It was galling to Claude Duval to hear Stevens talk in such a style; but he made no remark upon it at the moment, only he resolved that he would strive more than mortal man had ever yet striven, that the day should come when he would pay him off with interest some, if not the whole, of that cool superiority with which he now showed off over him and his two friends.

"Cheer up, Jack," said Claude. "All are not lost that are in danger."

"It's all owing to that confounded mad girl's affair," said Jack.

Claude smiled, as he replied—

"No, Jack, don't say that. Who knows but that if we had never gone into that house, we might not have encountered a greater danger still out of it?"

"How could we encounter a greater danger than this, Claude?" said Jack, holding up his manacled hands.

It was a pang to the heart of Claude Duval to see that sight, and to feel how helpless he was at that moment to be of any use to alter their condition. Claude, however, would not allow any one to see that he was so deeply affected, but he turned it off with a sad smile, saying—

"Never mind, Jack. Live in hope."

"And die in despair," said Jack.

It was quite clear that poor Jack was in no mood to be reasoned with just then. As for Dick, he was looking rather moody and savage; and suddenly looking up, he said—

"Mr. Stevens?"

"Well, sir; what now?" said Stevens.

"My horse—all our horses. What has become of them?"

"They had not been ten minutes in the tent, where you thought you had them so secure, when we had possession of them."

"And it was you who stuck those infernal little plasters on their feet?"

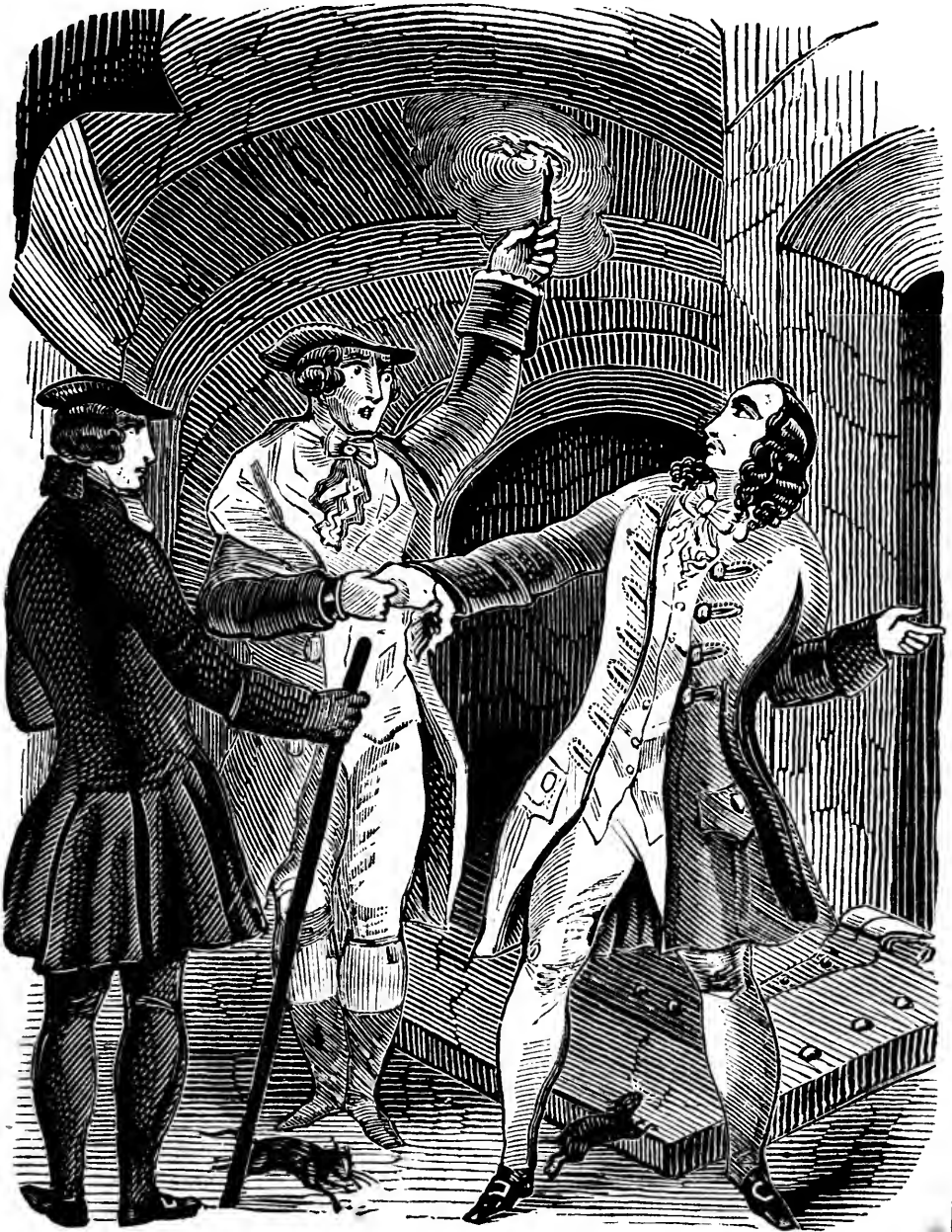
"It was, Dick Turpin. Before I went into the house with Sir John Richards, I saw your three horses. The other two I did not know, but I did know your Black Bess, Turpin."

"Go to the devil!"

"It was not a pleasant trick," said Jack, "to lame a good steed."

"They will be all right," said Stevens. "I never use a thing of that sort that I have not an antidote for; and if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, the horses are as good as ever they were."

"Take care of my horse, Stevens," said Claude, "for when I get him on to the road again, it will provoke me not a little to find him out of condition."



CLAUDE AND DICK RESCUE JACK FROM THE BOW-STREET LOCK-UP.

Don't grudge the oats, whatever you do, and mind you bruize them well, for he is used to it."

Stevens made no answer to this cool speech of Claude Duval's, which was so anticipatory of freedom again; but, riding up to Sir John Richards, he said in his odd kind of way—

"Here they are, Sir John. I've brought 'em."

"Why, you don't mean it, Stevens?"

"Yes, I do, Sir John. Here they are, all three in the cart. You can go and look at them, if you please, sir."

"Well, upon my life, so they are! What a trouble now and a bother it would spare if they could be hung at once, wouldn't it, Stevens?"

"Indeed it would, sir. If you think proper, it can be done at once."

"Why no—I rather think that would exceed my commission as a magistrate, Stevens. But I heard a deal of firing. What was it all about?"

"A row with the gipsies, sir. They tried to get the prisoners away from us, and we were forced to fire, or they would not only have done that, but murdered us besides."

"Then if you have killed any of the rogues and vagabonds, it is justifiable homicide, Stevens; so let us get off to London, as quickly as we can. Oh, you vagabonds, your time has come at last, has it? The gallows groans for you, it does. Only see, now, what a disgraceful end you have come to. This is the result of all your finery, and your gallivanting on the road, and your galloping here and your galloping ther, and your scarlet coats and your lace ruffles."

"Have you learnt that by heart," Claude, "or did you think of it only just now?"

"Come, come, sir; no impudence."

"That's just what I say myself—and I warn you that if you go on with any more of your speeches, I will recollect them when we meet in some lonely place on the road."

"I'll take my chance of that, you thorough bad one," said Sir John; "and if you are not hung this time, I shall recommend that the gallows be burnt for old fire-wood."

"It will make a good bon-fire," said Claude.

The magistrate disdained to hold any further parley with his prisoners, but turning his horse's head towards London, he directed Stevens to bring them on with all speed.

The distance was not so great as to make it necessary to have a halt upon the road, so that none of the chances of a long journey presented themselves to our three adventurers for escape, and, to all appearance, their situation was something even more than a critical one, since they were evidently being conveyed to London without any of those chances that, if they had been taken anywhere else, might have come in their way.

When they were quite near to the metropolis, Stevens turned to the magistrate, and spoke respectfully, saying,—

"Newgate, I suppose, Sir John?"

"Well, I don't know. They will have to be brought before me in the morning: Suppose you put them in the Bow-street lock-up for the night?"

"As you please, sir; but Newgate is the safest."

"Oh, pho! Don't let them think that we are afraid of them, and so are forced to carry them to Newgate at once. The fact is, there is too much fuss made about these fellows, that's the truth, and they think they are quite wonderful people on that account. Take them to the lock-up—you will find that strong enough; and, besides, in your hands, which they will still remain in, they haven't much chance."

"Very good, Sir John—hem!—it shall be as you please, and if they escape me, why, they have but another to get the better of, and that's Old Nick."

This little dialogue was overheard by Claude, who, giving Dick a slight nudge with his elbow, said,—

"Dick, we are to go to the lock-up in Bow Street."

"Are we really?"

"Yes; do you know anything of it?"

"A little."

There was a peculiar look about Dick's face that gave Claude a hope that



he knew a great deal about the Bow-street lock-up, and for fear they should be separated when they got there into different cells, he was very anxious to know what Dick did know of the place.

"Speak low, Dick," he said, "and tell us all."

"I will. There's a tavern in the neighbourhood that supplies the place with anything the prisoners choose to buy, and there is a girl at the tavern who will do what she can for us."

"That is all?"

"Not quite, Claude."

"Go on, then, and tell me all, will you? But don't look as though you were speaking of anything interesting, for that d——d Stevens has his eye upon us now."

"I see him. Then I can tell you, Claude, that I know a secret passage from the lock-up in Bow Street to——"

At this moment Stevens rode up to the side of the cart, and in a voice of mock friendship, he said—

"Hem! Really now, you seem to be having such a pleasant little discourse together, that it is quite a shame to keep it all to yourselves, that it is. What is it all about?"

"An ass in a fox's skin."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, and his name was Stevens."

"Very good—very good, and very witty, I daresay; but people should keep their wit between their teeth, like their tongues, at times, or it won't do them any good; and it strikes me, Claude Duval, that it ain't the wisest thing in the world of you to make an enemy of me."

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## CHAPTER CCLXIV.

### THE PRISONERS PASS A STRANGE NIGHT AT THE LOCK-UP:

"Pshaw!" said Claude, in answer to this last remark from Stevens. "You have done your worst, and you know it."

"Never mind. Here we are at the lock-up in Bow Street."

Those few words—"Here we are at the lock-up in Bow Street"—had a very chilling kind of sound to the faculties of the three prisoners, and it was not in human nature for them to be otherwise than just a little affected at such an announcement.

They were all unusually silent.

"Ha!" laughed Stevens; "so you are beginning not to like it, and to think about it, eh? I thought your high spirits would soon come down a bit."

They neither of them thought proper to make any reply to this rather ungenerous remark from Mr. Stevens, and he was quite delighted with the idea that he had subdued them at last. But such was far—very far from being the fact in reality. The real truth was, that Claude Duval and his friends felt how very important it was now that their whole attention should be directed to the means of escape, and they could no longer spare a ment to engage in any frivolity with Mr. Stevens. They did not know but that the chances of liberating themselves might entirely depend upon some little matter that they might now notice; so, like prudent men, they sacrificed the present to the future, and let Mr. Stevens enjoy his fancied triumph while they looked warily about them.

The lock-up in old Bow Street at the time of Claude Duval was, as the reader may very well suppose, a very different affair to what it is now. Not the smallest vestige of the ancient building that was devoted to that purpose now remains.

As at present, though, the lock-up was opposite to the police-office, and it was a low-roofed building of only one story in height, and principally built of massive

wood-work. The cells were underground, and fitted up, as regards strength, principally upon that account.

The place was altogether one of the most gloomy that could be well imagined, and was highly calculated very much to affect the imagination of ordinary offenders.

We need hardly say that it had very little effect of that character upon the three prisoners now brought to it.

If there had been any idea upon the part of the idlers of the vicinity that the coach which stopped at the old lock-up contained such men as Claude Duval, Sixteen-string Jack, and Dick Turpin, it is very likely that in the course of a few minutes Bow Street would have been quite impassable; but such was not the case, and they were taken beneath the low-roofed and gloomy portal of the place without exciting any extraordinary sensations.

Immediately within the outer door was another one of iron—that is to say, it was called an iron door, in consequence of being coated with that metal to a considerable thickness on both sides, and it was likewise studded with those large nut-headed nails, which give so great an appearance of strength with so very little of the reality of it.

Immediately through that door was a kind of hall or vestibule, in which a couple of constables sat by a fire, that would throw out as much smoke into the air of the place as went up the chimney. Above the mantel-shelf were several cutlasses, and a blunderbuss, with a brass barrel, that was bell-shaped, and which was presumed to be loaded in some very deadly manner.

A door to the right and another to the left led to rooms appropriated to the officials of the place, and from one of these rooms opened a door to a narrow staircase, that led down to the cells.

Such was the general arrangement of the ground-floor of the old lock-up. Above, there were five rooms, in two of which the clerk to the magistrate at the office resided, and the others were unoccupied, except now and then, when some prisoner of importance, as regarded wealth or position, was placed there for a short time, pending his examination before the magistrate in the public office.

The mode by which these upper rooms were reached was by a staircase opening from the hall, and which was connected by a door that was always shut by a cord and weight. The hall itself was not above twelve feet square, and all the rooms were of the most paltry and confined dimensions.

"Now, gentlemen," said Stevens, "here we are."

"And this you call a lock-up?" said Dick.

"Rather."

"Is that blunderbuss loaded?"

"Just a few."

"Well, Heaven have mercy upon the man who shall attempt to fire it, for it will burst and blow his head off to a certainty if he does. That I can swear to."

"Oh," said Stevens, with a grin, "we are not so mighty particular about our heads as all that comes to; and if we feel inclined to fire it, off it will go, even if our heads follow it."

"That," said Claude, "is a matter of taste."

"You couldn't say a truer thing than that," replied Stevens. "And now, gentlemen, if you will give me leave, I will show you to the parlours below stairs; and if it's any satisfaction to you to know that I am to be found any hour of the night here in the hall, I beg to inform you that such will be the fact—without a doubt."

"Thank you," said Claude, as he looked up at a clock that was upon the wall. "I think we shall be with you about half-past two."

A savage expression crossed the face of Stevens, for he saw that one of the constables in the hall was upon the broad grin at the idea that he was getting the worst of the chaffing that was going on in the place.

"Very good," he said, as he slowly rubbed his hands together, "I quite

understand you, Claude Duval. It is mere chaff. And yet I will shew you that I have a good feeling towards you, and, upon one condition, you shall sit up with me by the fireside here all night, which will be a thousand times more comfortable than being in one of the little parlours below."

"The condition?" said Claude. "What is it?"

"That you will all three give me your words of honour as men, that you will make no attempt to escape."

"It is tempting," said Claude, "but I beg leave to decline."

"And I," said Dick.

"And I," said Jack.

"Very good. I am not at all surprised nor disappointed. It is only what I fully expected. But still, to shew you that I had a good feeling towards you, I gave you the chance. Where is the lock-up keeper?"

"Here you are, Mr. Stevens," said a short, stout man with a very red face, and peculiar little grey eyes, making his appearance from the upper floor. "Here you are. Who have you got here?"

"Claude Duval—Sixteen-string Jack, and Dick Turpin."

The lock-up keeper screwed his lips up to the position of whistling, but no whistle came from them. Then shaking his head, he said—

"No—no, that's too much of a good thing all at once."

"There is your order."

The lock-up keeper looked at the magistrate's order, and saw that it did indeed name the persons mentioned by the officer. A look of intense interest came across his face in a moment, and he cried—

"Well, this is something! I didn't think to have had three such in the old lock-up while its timbers held together, that, I didn't! That is to say, all at once. Gentlemen, you are as welcome as flowers in May."

"We are very much obliged," said Claude.

"Now, Mr. Bolt," said Stevens, speaking in a sharp jerking tone, and addressing the lock-up keeper by his name. "Now, Mr. Bolt, you will quite understand that I don't intend these prisoners to get away, and that I will remain here, in the hall, until they leave this place again; and so help me everything that is good, bad or indifferent, I'll shoot the first man who tries to leave this place who ought not, or who in any way aids the prisoners to go——"

"Mr. Stevens," said Bolt, and his little eyes twinkled again, and his face got redder than usual, "if you mean to accuse me of letting prisoners go, say so at once, like a man, and I can meet you on the charge."

"That will do," said Stevens, drily. "I don't want to say another word about it."

"Oh, you are a humbug," said Bolt.

"I know it," said Stevens, with all the composure in the world. "I am quite aware of the fact."

This little quarrel between Stevens and Bolt was amusing enough to the three captives, and it gave them some hopes, too, that Bolt might, just to get the better of Stevens, and aggravate him a little, be of what service he could to them; so Claude Duval said—

"I am sure that it is a very ungracious thing of Stevens to say one word against Mr. Bolt, who is a gentleman, as all the world knows, although he keeps the lock-up."

Bolt looked gratified.

"My opinion is," said Dick, "that Stevens gets in an ill-humour when he sees Bolt, because he is not a quarter so good-looking, and can never hope to be so. Bolt is a handsome man, and the sight of such is aggravating to some selfish people."

Bolt rubbed his hands together, and smiled.

"Hold your row, all of you, will you?" cried Stevens; "and you, Bolt, how can you be such an ass as to stand smirking and smiling there in such a way, objects ause you are flattered in the most barefaced manner to your face, when all

the world knows you are as ugly as the parish pump, and about as much of a gentleman as my old hat is a nosegay?"

"You envious humbug!" cried Bolt.

"You stupid idiot!" shouted Stevens.

"Go it," said Claude. "Go it. That's the thing—go it! All's right. Stick to him, Bolt; you know you are right, and that gives you strength."

"Stop!" said Stevens, suddenly, with almost preternatural calmness. "Stop, this is folly. Mr. Bolt, I beg your pardon."

"Oh, well, if you say that, Mr. Stevens, I have done."

"Yes, Bolt, I beg your pardon. It is I who am the ass to allow myself to be so played upon by these fellows, who are only desirous that you and I should quarrel, that out of that circumstance they may gather some hope of escaping from the lock-up. Give me your hand, Bolt. I did not mean what I said. The words were spoken in a moment of wrath, merely, and I will stand a bottle of the best wine that can be got to-night for you and I, as we sit up."

Bolt and Stevens now shook hands to the great disappointment of Claude Duval, and the former said—

"Mr. Stevens, you know, I always respected you as a man of extraordinary talents, and I hope we shall always be good friends."

Stevens looked at the prisoners with a twinkle of the eye, as he then said—

"Come, then, we will show them to their cells, and then we will have the bottle of wine, Mr. Bolt."

Claude Duval now turned his whole attention to studying their route to the cells. He glanced at the room that led to the staircase. He took notice of the doors, and upon which side the fastenings were. He counted the stone steps, and found they were fourteen that led to the cells, and he felt that the floor at the bottom was earth merely.

He had not a hope that they would all be confined in one cell—that was not to be expected; therefore, it was no disappointment to him to find that they were placed in different cells.

"Good-night, Dick," he said. "Good-night, Jack."

"Good-night," said Turpin, gaily.

"God bless you, Claude," said Jack.

It was evident that Jack's spirits were very much depressed by the tone in which he spoke; but Claude did not think it prudent to say anything to him of a consolatory character, as there were others to listen to it; so he made no remark.

In another minute he was in a cell alone, and the door double-locked and barred and bolted upon him.

"This is pleasant," he said, as he leant against the damp wall, and tried to pierce the obscurity of the place with his eyes in vain.

The most galling thing to Claude was, now, that he was handcuffed; and, although he possessed the art of compressing his hand sufficiently to escape from ordinary fetters, he very much feared that the handcuffs that were now upon him, were too tight for him to get out of so easily.

"Confound them," he said; "if they had only left my hands at liberty, I might do something; but what a piece of desperate cruelty it is to shut up a man all night with his hands locked together by iron manacles. What, now, if this were only a case of suspicion against me, and I was really innocent!"

It is needless to tell the reader that such positive cruelty is never practised now. Prison discipline is better understood than it was in those days, and the age is much more humane.

As Claude Duval was the most energetic in his movements after he had remained for while in the cell, we will, with the reader's permission, neglect Jack and Dick for a short time, while we attend to what our more immediate hero is about.

The idea of remaining in the lock-up at Bow Street, if he could by any possibility leave, was not one that was likely at all to take possession of such a mind as Claude Duval's; and from the moment of his arrest, although he could not be

said to be concocting some scheme of escape, yet he was on the look out for some opportunity of laying the ground-work of such a proceeding.

It was quite evident, that during the time that had intervened from the arrest, and the moment when the key of the cell in the lock-up was turned upon him, there was no chance of doing anything that could in any way tend to give him or his companions a chance of liberty, so he had wisely forborne to make his situation worse by any weak and unavailing effort, the consequences of which would be sure to rest upon their own heads.

When he was now, however, alone in the lock-up, the affair assumed quite a different aspect, and escape for himself and his friends was the sole idea that filled up his imagination.

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## CHAPTER CCLXV.

### THE FRIENDS DESPERATELY ESCAPE FROM THE LOCK-UP IN BOW STREET.

"Now for the handcuffs," said Claude, after he had felt quite certain that the officer had left him to himself, and that there was no intention of again visiting his cell.

It will be remembered, that Claude had had his fears that he might not be able to rid himself of the encumbrance of the handcuffs quite so easily as he would wish; but as yet he had not made the effort.

Now he set about the attempt.

Claude Duval was a small-boned man, although above the middle height; and although there was not a particle of fat about him, he yet had a roundness of contour, and an appearance of plumpness that looked like fat; but the out-of-doors life he led, and the exercise he took, had made him muscular, so that he had a chance of getting out of the handcuffs, which a more angular and bony man would not have had for a moment.

His first effort was to hold up his manacled hands above his head, so as to get the blood as much out of them as was possible, and then he fixed the handcuffs tightly between his knees, and tried to get his right hand out.

What an awful effort it was, and how impossible it felt! So he could not. But he soon found, from the slippery and damp condition of his hands, that he had broken the skin, and that they were bleeding from cuts inflicted by the edge of the manacles.

"Where there is a will," said Claude, quite calmly, "there is a way, and I will get out of the darbies if they carry half my hand along with them in the process."

Determination such as that was not to be defeated. By one frightful squeeze he slipped his right hand out of the fetter.

"That will do," he said, as he shook it to try and recover sensation in it. "That will do, though it was a bit of a twinge."

It was some time before he could get his right hand sufficiently recovered to enable him to make any effort to liberate his left; but when he made that effort he soon found it was in vain.

Possibly the bones of his left hand, as is the case with many persons, were a little larger than those of the right, or his having wounded and lacerated the right in the way he had done, had made it impossible for him to make such another effort; but certain it is, that he was obliged, after a trial, to give it up in despair.

"Never mind," he said, "a bracelet will do me no particular harm now, and I dare say I can twist off the loose darby that hangs dangling by the wrist rather troublesomely."

By placing his foot upon the loose handcuff, and giving it a sudden jerk with the left hand, he snapped it off, so that, in reality, he was as free from the handcuffs



for all practical purposes, as though he had got his left hand out as well as his right.

"That will do," he said; "and now, Mr. Stevens, with all his cunning, has left me a knife in a part of my clothing; and if I don't cut my way to freedom with it, why I can't, and there's an end of it; but, I will try, for all that."

Former experience had taught Claude Duval the value of such a weapon—it was a knife upon one side and a saw upon the other, and was exquisitely got up—so that while he had had time and opportunity to do so, he had procured it and hidden it about him in such a way, that it was next to impossible that he should be deprived of it.

The result had shown that he was right in his calculation, for even Mr. Stevens with all his tact and cunning, had managed in some way to overlook it.

It seemed but a small weapon, that knife, the blade of which was not above eight inches long, with which he was to work his way to freedom; but yet smaller tools than that in the hands of skilful cracksmen have worked a passage out of Newgate.

By feeling all along the edge of the knife with his finger, Claude found that it was in good condition, and then he placed himself close to the door to listen if any of the sounds from the upper part of the lock-up reached that place.

All he heard was a rumbling noise, that seemed to come from directly overhead and that confirmed him in the idea that the cells went under the street, for the rumbling sound he did not doubt was a carriage going along over the stones.

The idea did slightly occur to him of trying to work his way out through the roof of the cell, but he gave it up, as he considered that it would be next to impossible to do so without attracting the observation of some one passing, and so leading to an immediate discovery of his intentions.

"No," he said, "I must go the regular way out as I came the regular way in, I suppose; but the first thing will be to get out of the cell, and to liberate, if possible, Jack and Dick."

The cell was paved with a sort of red tiles, very thick, indeed, but in consequence of lying there a long while, the earth, from the dampness of the spot, had oozed up between them, and formed a sort of coating over them, so that, at first, Claude had thought that he trod upon merely hardened earth.

A very slight examination was sufficient to prove to him that such was not the case, and he thought that very possibly the passage on the outside of the cells might be paved in the same way, although he had had the impression that it was nothing but earth.

Such a state of things did not make much difference to his plans.

Throwing himself on the ground, he carefully felt the door at its lower part and found that it was about half an inch from the ground, and that a current of cold, damp air crept in under it.

"Now I shall set to work," he said, "and we will see what the next hour will do."

Claude was very careful in the way in which he used his knife, for fear of breaking it, for well he knew that however well-tempered a piece of steel might be, it was impossible to say that there might not be some flaw in it that would make it give way when least expected to do so; and that knife was to him too great a treasure for him to use it very recklessly.

He got up, without much difficulty, one of the tiles with which the floor was paved. It proved to be about the thickness of an ordinary brick, and, indeed, but that it was shaped squarer than a brick, might with propriety have been called one.

After this, his progress was easy enough, and he placed the knife in its hiding place in his apparel and only used his hands to the work. The tiles gave way without any trouble at all, and he soon got up a sufficient number of them to leave the spot of earth by the door of the cell quite free from any such encumbrance.

The object of Claude was to get under the door

He well knew that a small excavation would be sufficient for him to force himself through, and he did not for a moment doubt but that he should be able to accomplish it.

According, now, to his expectation, he found that the passage without the cell was paved with the same description of tiling that the cell itself was ; but the difficulty of getting rid of any of that which was outside was very great.



THE THREE ADVENTURERS FOLLOWING THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT, LEADING TO THE KING.

After incredible efforts, he did at last succeed in loosening one of the tiles, and in dragging it into his cell. After that, his progress was easier, and he pulled them away right and left, and in advance as far as he could reach.

The rapidity with which Claude Duval worked, was now amazing, for he felt that he was in a very dangerous position, as no one could come into the passage.

now, without at once seeing what was going on, in which case an instant defeat of all his plans was to be at once looked for.

That such a discovery and such a defeat would be made the excuse for loading him with fetters, from which there would be no escape, he well knew ; so that now he worked, indeed, for his life. Never did a human being, with inefficient means to do so, dig into the earth with the speed that Claude Duval now used in the process, and this process and the result was that he soon had thrown out sufficient of the soil to enable him to feel that there was a large cavity under the door.

“ Will it do ? ” was the question.

After some little consideration, he thought the best way to creep through, was with his face downwards, and, accordingly, he made the attempt. He got his head under the door easily enough, but his shoulders stuck fast, and after a violent effort to get through, he was compelled to desist and set to work again deepening the excavation. He had it wide enough, for, in truth, it was just about as wide as the door itself.

It took him another ten minutes now to complete the job, and he found the broken handcuff of great assistance in helping him to scoop out the mould from the excavation. When he tried it again, he, to his great delight, slipped through easily, and although it gave him a rather awkward twist to do it, he did manage to scramble right under the door, and to get into the passage.

“ Trouble the second over, ” said Claude. “ The first was the handcuffs—the second, the cell ; and now I have got plenty to do before me. ”

The first thing he now did was to run up the stone staircase, and listen intently at the door at the top of it. When there, he heard the murmur of voices, which he felt convinced came from the hall, and no doubt were the individual property of Mr. Stevens and Mr. Bolt, as they sat by the fire in that part of the lock-up.

What they were saying, he could not catch sufficiently distinct to understand, as the sound had to come right through the side room ; but he was so far satisfied that they were quiet.

“ They are discussing that bottle of wine, no doubt, ” thought Claude, “ that Stevens was so liberal in procuring to treat Bolt with. I would give them fifty bottles of the very choicest, if they would only be quiet for another hour or so. ”

Claude now trod lightly down the stone steps again, and finding his way to the first of the cell doors on the opposite side to that upon which was his own from which he had recently escaped, he tapped at it with his knuckles pretty sharply twice.

There was no answer to the summons.

“ They are neither of them in that one, I suppose, ” said Claude ; so he felt his way to the next door, and tapped at it.

“ Who’s that ? ” said Dick’s voice.

“ Hush ! ” said Claude, placing his lips to the key-hole. “ Hush ! It is I—Claude Duval. Don’t you know my voice, Dick ? ”

“ God bless me, yes ; I do, now. But how, in the name of all that is odd, have you got out of your cell ? I have been working away at the hinges of my door all this time, and have only got one of them off now. ”

“ Which one, Dick ? ”

“ The lower one. ”

“ Wait a minute, then, and I can give you a helping hand. There are iron bars across the doors, and if I can only get one of them loose, it will make a first rate jemmy, I rather think. ”

“ But how, in the name of all that’s wonderful, are you out and about, Claude ? That puzzles me. ”

“ Never mind about that just now. We shall have lots of time to talk at

that when we are all three in some quiet spot in the far-off country, and enjoying a laugh over our night in the lock-up."

"Do you really think so?"

"Think what?"

"That we shall soon be in the country again, and enjoying a laugh?"

"To be sure. But be quiet. I'm trying for the bar."


To his great satisfaction, Claude found that the bars were only screwed in the floor by an iron pin hung by a bit of chain about six inches long to the wall, so that by taking the pin out, the bar could be at once lifted from its place with the greatest possible ease.

With that iron bar, which was about five feet in length, in his hand, Claude felt that he was rather a match for Mr. Stevens, and Mr. Bolt likewise, and all their myrmidons; but the first object was to release Dick. He did not choose Dick as the first to release; but as he had come to his cell, by accident, first, he felt bound to make Jack wait his time.

Claude found that he could just insinuate the end of the iron bar under the door of Dick's cell, and when he did so, he heard something, either about the lock or the hinges, given such a crack, that it was quite evidently broken.

Another moment and the door gave way by the hinge that was left, and Dick was as free as an escape from his cell went, at all events.

## CHAPTER CCLXVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN EFFECTUALLY ESCAPE FROM THE LOCK-UP. 

DICK had still his handcuffs on him; but Claude now had his knife with the saw at the back of it, by which he could help him.

Claude shook hands with his friend as well as he could in the dark, and then he said—

"Let us make an effort to get you free from the darbies, Dick, for while they are upon your wrists, you are still a prisoner."

"No, Claude—no."

"No?—What do you mean by that?"

"Just that I would prefer you should go and rescue poor Jack before anything else is thought of. He must suffer more than either you or I, for we both know that, poor fellow, after what he has gone through, he is not the man he was."

"True—most true—I will not delay a moment."

"Why did you not leave me alone, Claude, for a little while, and go to his cell at once?"

"Just because I did not know at all which was yours and which was his, and that yours was the first that by mere chance I came to."

Claude now felt his way to another of the doors, and tapped at it as he had done at that of Dick's cell, but no answer was returned; and so he went to another and to another, and it was the fourth before, in a weak voice, Jack replied from within, saying—

"Who knocks?—who knocks?"

"I, Jack," said Claude. "Dick and I have come to rescue you."

"Oh, no—no! Do not mock me. It is cruel to do so. We are all lost! We shall all die! The time has come. Do not mock me, Claude Duval, by any delusive hopes."

Claude did not want to argue the matter with Jack, for he knew that it would be quite useless—indeed, useless as it was dangerous, for time was of the greatest object to them that could possibly be. Turning to Dick, he said—

"We must try what we can do with the door of Jack's cell by the aid of the iron bar. Take this one, Dick. Have you got it?"

"Yes—yes. But you——"

"I know how to get another. But you can't work with your handcuffs on, I am certain."

"Yes, but I can, though. That's quite a mistake of yours, Master Claude. I can place both hands on a crow-bar and give a lift with it quite as well with a pair of handcuffs on as without them."

"Push it under this door, then, as well as you can. You will feel that there is a sort of crevice there, if you take the trouble so to do, and let us try what iron will do against wood and iron by a heave upwards, both at the same moment of time."

"You give the word then, Claude."

"I will. Are you ready?"

"In a moment. Not quite yet. Wait a bit—Now for it—I am all right. The end of the bar is a couple of inches under the door."

"Heave!" said Claude.

In a moment, crash! went the lock of the door.

"Heave again!"

Crackle, went some of the wood-work.

"Oh, what is all that?" said Jack. "What is taking place, now?—Speak to me, somebody, do. What is it all about? Am I dreaming?"

"Jack, be calm," said Claude. "All is right, old friend. Don't you know my voice? It is I, Claude D'aval. Why, you have been to sleep and don't know where you are."

Claude had thrown down his iron bar, and with all his strength was trying to drive the door inwards. In another moment it went with a sudden crash, and Claude was very nearly precipitated into the cell along with it.

Dick was much afraid that the noise that had been made would have the effect of warning the officers above of something unusual going on in the cells, and he mentioned his dread to Claude.

"Speak to Jack," said Claude, "and I will go up the steps and listen."

Claude thereupon bounded up the stone steps, and stood for some few moments with his ears placed against the door at the top of them; but all was still, and he felt quite satisfied that their efforts to escape in that underground place had not made noise enough to reach the ears of the officers above. He went back, and heard Dick remonstrating with Jack.

"What's the matter with him, now?" said Claude. "Oh, Jack, I am quite astonished at you. What do you mean by all this?"

"I don't know what he means," said Dick; "but he won't know me at all."

"Light!" said Claude. "Oh! would that we had a light. It is the utter darkness that confounds him in this place."

"That is Claude's voice," said Jack.

"To be sure it is," said Claude, kindly. "I was quite sure you would know that, Jack. Recollect yourself. We are trying to escape from the lock-up in Bow-street. Don't you remember, old friend?"

"Oh, yes—yes. Pardon me, both of you. I know now. But the truth is, I had fallen into a sort of slumber that had thoroughly confused me, and a noise that I heard completed the matter."

"That noise was made by our breaking open the door of your cell, Jack; so it ought to have been a welcome enough one to you. All we want now is a light."

"Then I can accommodate you," said Jack; "for I have the means of getting a light hidden about me so well, that they did not find them out when they searched me. Wait a moment."

Both Claude and Dick were very glad to hear Jack now speaking so rationally as he did, for they had been really apprehensive, from his strange mode of



talking only a few moments before, that the peril he was in had had the effect of depriving him of his reason. Now, however, they no longer entertained such an idea, for the tone of voice in which he had last spoken had been quite sufficient to dissipate it.

In the course of about half a minute a faint light illumined the cell; and then Jack, as he held up an ignited phosphorus match, said—

“Here it is; but I have no candle or wax taper, so we can only see while the match lasts.”

A couple of large rats made a bolt out of the cell at this moment, and passing Claude and Dick, went scampering down the passage, and were out of sight in a moment.

“A lively place this,” said Dick.

“Very,” said Claude; and then, as he spoke, out went the match, and all was profound darkness again.

“Confound it!” said Dick; “what a treat the commonest penny-dip candle that ever was made would be to us now!”

“It would, indeed, Dick,” said Claude; “and I would gladly promise a guinea for it, or a couple, for the matter of that. But light up another match, Jack, if you can.”

“Oh, yes. But I have only got six.”

“Well, never mind; let us have another, so that I may see where to begin with a file I have here at Dick’s handcuffs. I will soon have his off, and then I will begin upon yours, Jack.”

“Never mind about getting them off, Claude. Separate them, and that will be quite sufficient, I assure you. The rings on my wrists are no harm so long as I have the use of my hands.”

“I understand.”

Jack ignited another of the little matches and held it until it burnt right down to his fingers; but by that time Dick had twisted up the lining of his hat closely, and lit it by the match, so that it made a temporary torch, although it did not burn over well.

Claude, by the light of it, however, was able to work away at the handcuffs much better than as if he had been in the dark, and the fine saw, with its exquisitely sharp teeth, soon bit through the iron, and so far as having his wrists separated, and his hands at liberty, Dick was comparatively free.

“Now, Jack, for you,” said Claude.

Three minutes more sufficed to release Jack from his fetters, and then they felt as if they were something more than half way to freedom, indeed. All Jack’s matches, however, but two, he had exhausted, and those Claude advised him to keep for the present in case of any emergency. They then each armed himself with one of the bars that went at the backs of the cell doors, and, Claude going first, they slowly ascended to the strong door at the head of the flight of little stone steps.

If they could but get that door open, it was but a fight with the officers, even if they encountered them, and then liberty might be theirs; but that door was likely enough to present many obstacles, for not only was it of very great strength, but it was so close at hand to the hall, that they dared not set to work with the expedition they would have liked, for fear of being overheard by the officers.

“Careful we must be, now,” whispered Claude, “and I think we must have one of the two of Jack’s matches to make a survey of the door with.”

“Here it is,” said Jack.

Whiz! went the match, and Jack handed it to Claude, who passed it steadily up and down the door, until it went fairly out; but it had kept alight long enough for him to see that the only way for him to work at the door was to cut out either the lock or the hinges, and either would be a work of some time and difficulty with the little saw that he only had to do it with.

“You had better both of you sit down on the steps,” he said, “and make up

your minds for a waiting job, now ; for there is no resource but to cut away round the lock, and to have patience about it."

"Stop," said Jack.

"What is it, Jack ?"

"You can do better than cut away at the lock."

"Can I ?"

"Yes ; I can just get my hand under the door, and surely your saw will go edgeways under, if that is the case. Can you not cut out a square large enough for us to creep through ?"

"That will do, Jack. I can."

Claude saw at once the facilities of escape that this mode of operation suggested by Jack presented. The door was likewise to be attacked at a part of it that was not fortified by any extraordinary means, so that, in all likelihood, it would not offer any very great obstruction to the saw. He at once knelt upon the stairs and began operations.

In the first place, Claude found that the space between the bottom of the door and the top stair would just admit the saw edgeways, so that he could commence to work at once ; and although it was rather an awkward thing sawing upwards, it was to be done, by a little perseverance, and that was a quality not wanting in Duval.

With a noiseless, but amazingly rapid motion, the fine-tempered saw cut through the wood-work and the sheets of iron which were used upon the door, and by feeling his way, Claude easily avoided any of the large nails by which it was clamped.

"How are you getting on ?" said Dick.

"Capitally ! If we go on at this rate, the opening in the door will be made in ten minutes ; but speak low, whatever you do."

"I will—I will."

"Better not speak at all," said Jack.

They seemed to think this the wisest advice, for none of them exchanged a syllable now, while Claude worked away with the saw, which only made a dull, grating sort of sound, which could not extend very far, and which, if it did, would most likely be mistaken for something in the street. If the officers went on gossiping, however, which it was very likely they would, it was not at all probable that they would hear it at all.

Claude Duval was well aware through how small an apparent space the body of a man will pass, so he did not give himself more labour than he thought sufficient in the matter, but soon turned the saw to the horizontal, which was much easier in working.

"Do you want a light ?" said Jack, in a low whisper.

"No—no. When I get the piece quite out will do. Then it will be as well for us to see our way in the matter ; but not yet, Jack."

Another five minutes, and Claude had turned the corner, and was sawing the door downwards rapidly. A flash of light suddenly shot under the door, and he stopped sawing.

Some one was in the room to which the door communicated.

"Lost !" thought Claude, but he did not say a word.

His idea was, that the officers were going to see if all was right in the cells, and if that was the case, there was nothing for it but a hand to hand fight for liberty and life.

"Have you found it ?" said a voice from the hall.

"No," said the man who was in the room with a light, and who had evidently come there upon some message for Mr. Bolt, as his was the voice that propounded the question from the hall.

"Look in the corner cupboard, then."

"Oh, here it is. All right, sir."

They heard something rattle like glass, and then Bolt cried out again in angry tones—

"What are you about there—are you drinking it?"

"Oh, no, sir; I'm coming."

"Just try the door leading to the stairs," said Stevens, "before you come away. It's as well to be quite sure everything is all right; and give it a good shake, Smith."

"I will, sir."

Smith, the officer, who had been sent to fetch a bottle containing some rather ardent compound from the room, now approached the door at which Claude Duval had been so industriously at work, and laying hold of the lock of it, he gave it a good shake, which satisfied him that it was all right and secure. He never thought of casting his eyes downwards. If he had, he must have seen the effect that the saw had produced.

"All right, sir," he said.

"Then come on, at once," said Bolt.

The man left the room, and slammed the door of it shut behind him.

"A narrow escape, that," said Claude. "Quite a squeak I call it."

"It was, indeed," said Dick. "I thought it would have been a case of 'war to the iron bars,' at the very least. I was resolved to sell my life dearly, if it was to go at all."

"No—no, Dick," said Jack; "don't talk of selling your life at all. Let us hope that that is a contingency not at all likely to come to pass; and as the danger has gone by now, we will not speculate upon what might have been its results."

"Very good, Jack—I say no more. Are you hard at work, Claude?"

"Indeed I am."

"But I do not hear the saw."

"No, I am working with such long sweeps that it makes no noise. Now do you hear it?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good, then you will hear it no more, for, if I do not very much mistake, I have got so near to the end of my job, that the slightest force will break out the piece of wood."

"That's capital. Do it, Claude, do it."

"There it goes."

Claude just tapped with the toe of his boot at the piece of the door that he had cut all round, and out it went into the room beyond, leaving a clear opening of about fifteen inches square, through which, without a doubt, they could each of them creep."

"It is done," he said.

"Then we will follow you," said Dick.

"Very good. This is not a time to squabble about precedence, so here goes. What a treat it will be if it should turn out too small, after all, for us."

"It would be such a treat," said Dick, "as I would not have for the best hundred pounds that ever I saw in all my life."

"Nor I for double the amount," said Jack. "Put us out of our suspense, Claude, by trying it at once."

"Here goes," said Claude, and in a moment he popped through the orifice in the door with the agility of a Harlequin.

"Ah," said Jack, "he was but joking with us, for it is quite evident that he knew he could get through with ease. Follow him, Dick."

"As you please, Jack."

Dick was a trifle stouter than Claude, but he did get through the hole in the door, although it cost him a slight squeeze to do so, and he had his doubts about it before he tried it.

Jack followed immediately, and they were all three in the outer room. The utmost caution was now requisite in their proceedings lest they should be overheard by the officers in the vestibule or hall, for although the door of the room

that opened into that portion of the lock-up was closed, yet sounds had not far to travel.

They could hear the officers conversing, and by the same rule, the officers might hear them, if they raised their voices above the merest whisper in addressing any remarks to each other.

Their success, so far, was sufficiently wonderful to induce them to entertain the most sanguine hopes of its being followed up by still greater success. They were intensely silent, however, for a few minutes, for they were exceedingly anxious to ascertain, if possible, who was in the hall.

## CHAPTER CCLXVII.

### THE ADVENTURERS MEET WITH A FRIEND THAT THEY DID NOT EXPECT.

It could not be said that either Claude Duval or his friends had formed any distinct plan of proceeding after they should reach the room they were now in. The fact was, there had been so many doubts about the reaching of it at all, that they had neither of them liked to ask each other what they should do if they did so far succeed.

Now, however, the question became one of the most serious importance, and Dick, in a low voice, said—

“Now that, thanks to Jack’s suggestion about cutting a piece out of the bottom of the door, we have got so far, what are we to do? I would fain leave it all to you, now, Claude, to decide upon what course of action you may think the best.”

“The obvious one,” said Claude, “is to sally out, and fight our way; but that would certainly lead to murder, and that is what I, and what I suppose both of you likewise wish to avoid.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said both Jack and Dick.

“Very good; then, it is quite clear that we must not sally out in the way I mention, if such is our feeling upon the subject, but we must try to get into the street in another way.”

“By the front windows?” said Dick.

“I hope so.”

“Impossible,” said Jack; “they are all bound with iron. I noticed as much as I came in the coach to this place.”

“And so did I,” said Claude, “but the bars must be terribly old by this time, and their hold upon the wood-work must be slight indeed. I should say they cannot resist us.”

“Maybe so; but how are we to get into the room above?”

“There is no way but one, and that is through the roof. Confound the man who built this place, who did not put a staircase in the wall of this apartment leading to the one above.”

“That would have been almost too handy,” said Dick; “but if we are to commence operations on the roof, the sooner we do so the better; and here goes for a beginning of it.”

There was a large and very heavy table in the middle of the room, and as he spoke, Dick got upon it, but so lightly and with such agility, that he did not shake it in the least.

“Shall I begin the work?” he said, as he found that he could easily touch the ceiling with both his hands.

“Do so,” whispered Claude, “but be cautious, Dick, whatever you do, and recollect the proximity of the officers. The only plan will be to take down the plaster of the ceiling bit by bit with your hands, after once making a beginning, and letting Jack and me take the pieces of you. If any should fall, we are found out, and there is then no chance but in a fight for it.”

"I know ; but spread your coats upon the table, so that if any should get loose and fall, it may make less noise."

All this was, it will be remembered, in the dark, with the exception of a little glimmering flash of light that came under the door, so that the situation of the three highwaymen was to the greatest degree full of danger, and no men but such



THE ARREST OF THE THREE FRIENDS IN THE GIPSIES' CAMP.

as they could possibly have preserved their calmness and self-possession under such trying circumstances.

Both Jack and Claude spread their coats close to where Dick was standing upon the table, and then he set to work, and the plaster of the roof began to rattle down rather quickly.

"Cautious!—cautious, Dick!" said Claude.



"Yes. Here's a great piece. Take it. Have you got it?"

"I have—I have."

"That will do. Here's another."

By dint of feeling about carefully, Claude continued to take the pieces of the ceiling from Dick, who got them off with great rapidity, and Jack, finding that he was not wanted there, went to the door and kept his ear close to it, to listen if the officers should make any suspicious movement in the hall. From his voice it would appear that Bolt was telling some long story to Stevens, and that he had taken quite enough of the wine to make his utterance rather thick; and by the tone in which Stevens replied to him, it was quite evident that he was dying with sleep, and with the greatest difficulty struggling against the disposition to drop off into a sound slumber.

The fact was, that Stevens had been up two nights before that one, and it was hardly in human nature that he should be able to keep up much longer. Yet Stevens was so particularly anxious that the three prisoners should not escape him, that he made the most strenuous efforts to preserve himself from dropping off to sleep.

"Speak louder, Bolt," he said; "you go on in such a drawling kind of way, that it is enough to set any one off to sleep. Speak louder, and give me a nudge with your elbow if you see me going."

"I will."

"That's a good fellow; now go on with that story of yours. What's that?—oh, what's that?"

"Only me giving you a nudge," said Bolt. "You was closing up your eyes, and going to sleep like a blessed baby."

"Oh, was I? Well, I shan't do so any more. I am quite wide awake now, Mr. Bolt, as you see. Go on."

"Very good. Then, as I was saying to you, Mr. Stevens, before I got this situation of keeper to the lock-up, you see, I was, of course, like yourself, a runner, and many an odd adventure happened to me in the course of my professional experience, I can tell you. Sometimes things went all right, as they ought to do, and I nabbed my man; and sometimes things went all wrong, and I didn't nab my man; and sometimes I caught a tartar."

"Murder!" cried Stevens.

"Lor, Mr. Stevens, what is the matter?"

"Something gave me such a pinch on the calf of the leg, I'm sure. What could it have been?"

"Why, me with the fire-tongs, to be sure; and I daresay, now, they are a little hot. But if you want to be kept awake, you must really put up with these little things, you know, Mr. Stevens."

"What, was I going off again?"

"Indeed, you were; and my private opinion is, that if I were not here, you would tumble right into the fire, that you would; and then there would be an end of you. Come—come, Mr. Stevens, rouse yourself up a little, and don't give way to—what do you call it?—Murphy, is it?"

"No—no. Morpheus."

"Oh, ah, I knew it was something very like Murphy, but I didn't feel quite sure about it, that's all."

Jack, from his position close to the door of the room, had heard all this quite plainly, and he was highly delighted to find that Stevens was so sleepy, and that Bolt was, in reality, half drunk, which was a fact that could very easily be deduced from the tone in which he spoke. Of course, the confederates had not been at all idle during that time; but Dick had managed to get a great quantity of the plaster of the roof down, and had reached the floor boards above, after cutting away the laths that impeded his progress.

The removal of a floor board or two would be the worst job of all; for however easy such a process would have been if they had happened to be above the floor to do it, yet it was by no means to be done with facility below.

If they had not had the little cutting saw that Claude possessed, it would have been now quite impossible for them to have proceeded any further that way towards escape. By its aid, however, Dick, who was a pretty good workman, contrived to get a part of the floor-boarding cut away, and then he made a grand effort to push one of the planks upwards. With a grating sound the nails gave way, and the plank was loosened, if not removed.

"Hush—hush!" said Claude.

"I can't help a little noise, now," said Dick. "It's the rusty rails in the wood. It will soon be done, now."

By a vigorous wrench, now, Dick got the plank quite out of its place, and brought down upon his head a great quantity of dust at the same time; but that was a minor event, and he immediately commenced operations upon the next board, which, when he should succeed in getting it up, would, no doubt, leave space enough for him and his companions to creep through.

The space between the joists was just about sufficient for them to pass through, but the width of a floor-board would not do exactly.

"We shall be all right in a few minutes, now," whispered Dick. "The other one is coming quickly."

At this moment Jack felt the greatest alarm for the safety of them all, for after repeated efforts to keep Stevens awake, Bolt had begun to give it up in despair; and after giving him a right good shake, he said—

"Mr. Stevens, do you think that a drop of anything else will keep you awake, if I get it for you?"

"Yes. Oh, dear, yes—I—I think it would."

"What will you have, then?"

"Vinegar."

"Vinegar? You don't mean that. You don't mean sour vinegar, do you?"

"I never heard of any other. Get it, and I shall recover at once. I don't often give way in this sort of fashion, but there's nothing like a wine-glass of vinegar to keep a man awake."

"Well, I suppose that is upon the principle of giving him such a stomach-ache that he can't go to sleep for the pain of it. Hilloa! there you go again. Keep up, Mr. Stevens, or you will certainly fall into the fire."

"Get me the vinegar, then."

"Well, if you will have it, you shall. Let me see—oh, of course, there is some in the next room, and no mistake. I recollect now. It's in the corner cupboard. I'll go and get it in a moment for you, my dear friend. I—dear me, how the lock-up moves about—Why, I declare, it is quite, in a way of speaking, rotatory. Woa! woa!"

Mr. Bolt could manage to go on talking in his prose way very well, as long as he kept his seat, but when he rose to his feet, it was quite a different affair, and the effect to him of his potations was just like being in a ship at sea with a cross gale. Of course, nobody ever heard of a drunken man yet who blamed himself for such apparent effects, and so, to be quite consistent, Mr. Bolt would have it that it was the lock-up that was going about in such a ludicrous manner with him.

"Well, this is odd," he said. "I can't make it out. The lock-up is drunk; it must be drunk, for sometimes the wall is here, and sometimes the door is here, and sometimes they are both there, and sometimes they are neither here nor there. It is very odd."

Mr. Bolt was so astonished at these phenomena connected with the hall of the lock-up, that he felt himself compelled to hold by the back of a chair while he considered them.

Mr. Stevens took that opportunity of letting his head droop upon his breast, and of falling fast asleep. It is just possible that if Bolt had been in a situation to get the vinegar with certainty, it might have had the effect of keeping Stevens awake; but as it was, nature yielded, and his sleep became profound.

Those who have had occasion to struggle against sleep will well understand

what an uphill fight it is, and how the oftener you fancy you have defeated it the oftener it will renew the combat with you, until you give up the contest in despair. Such must have been Mr. Stevens' feeling; not but what if he had imagined for a moment that it was within the range of possibility that Duval and his companions should escape from the cells of the lock-up, it is likely enough that that would have had a sufficient effect to keep him wide awake.

But all his ideas went the other way, and it was only as a matter of principle, and not of necessity, that he had determined upon sitting up, for he believed the prisoners to be as safe as it was possible for any prisoners in the world to be. Mr. Stevens, however, like many other very clever men, made a mistake now and then.

"I'll try it again," said Bolt. "Who knows but that a drop of the vinegar would do me some good? I'll try it again. It's in the lower cupboard in the next room. Here goes!"

When Jack heard these words from Mr. Bolt, he thought that the danger was sufficiently imminent to say something to his friends about it, so leaving the door, he touched Claude upon the arm, and whispered—

"Bolt is coming."

"The devil he is!"

"Yes. He is coming to this room to get something out of the lower cupboard. He is drunk, but he is coming. It is for vinegar."

"Is it? Then, Jack, we must give him some pepper with it. How do you get on, Dick, with the floor-boards?"

"Capitally! the second one is just up. Holloa! what's that?"

There was a noise in the room above as of a chair thrown over, and the impression upon the mind of Dick was directly, that some one was there who, possibly enough, was cognisant of all his proceedings. A feeling of the most blank and bitter disappointment came over his mind at such a notion as this, and he paused in his work.

"Did you hear that?" he said.

"Yes," said Claude. "My opinion is, that a chair had one or two of its legs resting upon the floor-board that you were pushing up, and that you consequently upset it, as you could not avoid doing."

"Oh, yes, that is it. I did not think of that. What a relief it is to feel certain, as I do now, that that was it."

"I think you may be certain, Dick."

"I am sure I may. It is too probable. But what is that that Jack is saying about Bolt? I thought I heard his name?"

"Simply that he is coming here, that's all."

"Confound the fellow, is he?"

Dick jumped off the table as he spoke, and pointing to the hole in the ceiling, he said—

"Now, Claude, escape! There is the road to freedom; I don't think you will have any difficulty in getting through the ceiling."

"After you," said Claude.

Dick sprang upon the table again, and was through the hole in the roof in a moment. It was no time, that, to stand upon ceremony, or to delay the precious moments by useless altercation as to who was to take precedence.

## CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

[THE CONFEDERATES ARE] DISTRESSED FOR THEIR HORSES, AND HEAR NEWS OF THEM.

"Now, Jack," said Claude Duval.

It did not take half a minute, now, to place them all three in the room above; but their danger soon became of the most imminent description, as it was quite evident that their foes from the outer room were approaching.

With a sudden burst the door was opened, and the voice of Bolt cried out—  
 “Hilloa! Hilloa!”

“All right!” said Claude Duval.

“The devil it is,” said Bolt. “Help!—help! Murder—escape! Help—murder! Hoi! They are off!”

“To be sure we are,” said Claude, as he made a spring towards the window and flung it open. “Come on, Jack and Dick. Speed does it now.”

Claude felt quite convinced, now, that anything in the shape of further caution with regard to the doings of himself and his friends was completely out of the question, and that it made not the slightest matter now with regard to the amount of noise they made in their escape.

The window was by no means so high from the open street as to present any serious difficulty in the way of leaping or dropping from it to men who had been accustomed to the sort of life that Duval and his associates led. They did not, however, at the moment notice that Mr. Bolt had a floricultural taste, and that the balcony of the window had a row of garden pots upon it, which went crashing into the street.

They were, however, but a trivial hinderance, and just as a gun or blunderbuss was fired through the opening in the roof from the room below, Claude had sprung through the open window and alighted safely in the street.

“Run Claude—run!” cried Jack.

“Not yet. Is anybody hurt?”

“No—no.”

Dick now followed Claude’s example and bounded through the window, but Jack was slow to follow.

“Save yourselves,” he said, “and leave me. Oh, save yourselves!”

“Not for a thousand pounds,” cried Claude. “If you do not wish to sacrifice us, you will come at once. Good Heavens, Jack, what has come over you?”

A kind of blight or stagnation seemed for the moment to have come over Jack, but from these words from Claude, he shook it off and sprang from the window. Claude partially broke his fall, and so they were all three in the street.

It was at this moment that Bolt and the officer who had taken such pains to secure Claude and his friends, and who had, to a certain extent, been so successful, made a rush into the street. The occurrence of the escape of the prisoners seemed to have had the effect of sobering them both on the instant.

Now, Claude had fully expected that such a result would ensue as these two men rushing out upon him and his friends; and as nothing was so disagreeable to him or so seriously dangerous as being chased through the streets by the officers, he had made up his mind that the contest with them should be there and then upon that spot.

“Dick,” he said, “tackle one of them.”

“All right,” said Dick.

Claude, upon this, sprang upon the officer, as though he meant to devour him, and before he could possibly defend himself from the impetuosity of such an attack, which was more like that of a tiger upon his prey than one human being upon another, Claude had fairly lifted him off the ground and thrown him headlong into the lower room of the lock-up, where his head came into such violent contact with the little stove at which they had been so snugly enjoying themselves, that he lay as one dead.

While Claude was thus disposing of the officer, Mr. Bolt had ran right into the arms of Dick, who immediately grappled him, saying as he did so—

“Do you wrestle, old fellow?”

“A little,” said Bolt, as he made one of the most determined efforts to throw Dick that was in his power.

“Good,” said Dick, and then exerting all his strength and skill in an art that he almost stood alone in, Mr. Bolt’s heels were soon up in the air, and his head came in rather disagreeable contact with the rough road paving of Bow

Street, and there he lay, with a full conviction in his own mind that every bone in his body was broken.

"All right!" cried Dick.

"Come on, then," said Claude, "follow me."

Duval turned the corner of Bow Street, and made towards Covent Garden Market, which at that hour of the morning was as still as the grave. After tumbling over some twenty or thirty of the poor, harmless wretches who nightly congregated there to sleep, he got right through the market and emerged opposite the church.

They were unperceived by any one.

"Our horses," said Dick, "oh, that we could find our horses."

"What's that?" said Jack, as a strange sound came upon his ears.

"Watchmen's rattles," said Claude, "that's all. I wonder how many watchmen it would take, now, at a moderate computation, to arrest us?"

"It's hardly possible to say," smiled Dick; "but, oh, for our horses!"

"Do not despair, Dick; we may yet find a way to get possession of them; and, for the present, I don't think we can do better than go to one of the kens, where we shall be safe enough till we can turn over in our minds what to do."

"We will follow you, Claude."

"Jack, where do you advise that we should go?"

"To Lipstone's," said Jack, "down by the river side. You can get to it by a dive down the dark arches by the Savoy."

"True. Come on, I had forgotten that. It will be the best place we can go to, for there is escape both by land and water, if it should be necessary. We have no time to lose. Come on."

Claude went first, and taking a slight turn to the left, he made his way down Southampton Street into the Strand, and in the course of two or three minutes they reached the mouth of one of those yawning arches opposite the Adelphi, which look as if they led to the infernal regions.

A watchman stood there, holding up his lantern and looking as well as he could down the archway, as he cried—

"Hilloa! hilloa! Come out of that, will you, or I shall be after coming and fetching you, and giving you a night's lodging in the lock-up, my hearty. Come out of that, will you?"

"What's the row?" said Claude, as with one blow he sent the watchman's hat right down over his eyes, and forced him to a sitting posture upon the stones at the entrance of the cavernous-looking place.

"Murder! murder! My rattle!"

"There it is," said Dick, as he seized it and swung it an amazing distance along the street. The confederates did not pause for the watchman to get his hat off his eyes and see them, but they at once, now, dived down the archway, and were lost to all sight in a moment.

How very dark it was in that place. Even Claude paused and instinctively held his hand out before him, for fear of suddenly encountering some obstacle to his progress.

"Jack! Jack!" he said. "Where are you?"

"I am here, Claude."

"Well, I think you know the way to where we want to go better than I do, or than Dick does, so will you take the lead? It is so precious dark here I cannot see in the smallest degree where I am going."

"I don't wonder at it. But it's not likely there is anything to obstruct you. However, we will not go any further till I have made the signal to some of old Lipstone's servants, if there are any about, to let them know that it is all right, and that we are friends."

"Do so, Jack."

"I don't know that signal," said Dick, "for my experience has, after all, lain more in the country than in town."



A very strange whistle, like that of some bird in the dark, who had an idea of singing, and yet was half afraid to trust his voice, now came upon the ears of Claude and Dick. The latter said in a low tone—

“Is that Jack?”

“Yes,” said Claude; “listen to him. He does it beautifully. Don’t speak a word until he has finished.”

Dick and Claude now were profoundly still, while Jack went on with the odd whistling, which at moments sounded in tone as though the bird were thoroughly waking up, and asking himself if it were daylight yet; and at last he finished with a long clear note, and then all was still.

“It’s a failure,” said Dick. “There is no reply!”

“Hush!” said Jack.

At that moment, there came three clear notes, that any one would have sworn were those of a blackbird, and then a faint star-like light appeared, as if far away in the intense darkness of the place.

“All’s right,” said Jack. “That is our way. Keep that light in view, and you will go right, and we shall soon see less darkness.”

They all three now kept the little star-like light steadily in view, and it seemed to move before them as they advanced in the cavern, for such it really looked like, did that gloomy arch leading right down to the banks of the Thames from the Strand.

Claude had the most absolute faith in the security of the position they would occupy, when once they should reach the place they were going to, and which among the “family” was called “Lipstone’s Ken.” It was well enough known to the police of London, that there was such a place, but none had been able even to reach it, although the most persevering efforts had been made to do so, and every kind of treachery that could be practised was put into requisition for the purpose of getting a full knowledge of the place.

It is, after all, though, very doubtful if the officers at that time had any intention of breaking up this establishment of theirs. The policy of the police at the period when the numerous incidents of our tale occurred, was not to prevent crime, but to find it out.

The whole affair was looked upon as a lucrative branch of business, and the officers reasoned with themselves, that if there were no thieves, why, then there would be no officers, and so they should be out of trade. What they wanted was that there would be plenty of robberies, and plenty of officers to find them out, so that they had no desire in the world to break up these nurseries of crime, the kens, as they were called, of London.

In point of fact, at that period the morality of officers and of thieves was pretty much upon a par the one with the other, and it was by no means an unfrequent thing for a well-know cracksman or highwayman who might not happen to be “wanted” just then, as the slang term was, to meet an officer and take him into the nearest public-house, and treat him handsomely to the best the place afforded.

But to return to our friends, if we may call them such upon the strength of so long an acquaintance with them.

The little star-like light continued to retreat before them, until one would have thought that it must be going right into the Thames, and then suddenly it disappeared:

“What now?” said Dick.

“Oh, it’s all right,” said Jack.

“Yes, I recollect now,” remarked Claude. “I suppose we shall have a visitor soon.”

“We shall,” replied Jack; “and here he is.”

“Well,” said a mild voice suddenly. “Who am I to have the pleasure of saying have arrived at this house?”

“It is all right,” said Jack. “I am a blackbird, and so is one of my companions, and we two can introduce another according to rule.”

"That is all right," said a voice; "but who are you?"

"I am called Sixteen-string Jack."

"Ah, I thought I knew the voice. Why, Jack, we have not seen you for an age. I don't know any that can whistle the blackbird's pass as you do!"

"Are you young Will Lipstone?"

"I am. Did you know my voice?"

"I thought I did; but I am very glad to find it is you, and I now tell you without further ceremony, that I am accompanied by Claude Duval and Dick Turpin."

"Is that possible!"

"It is true, Will, whether it is possible or not. Can they be in safety in the ken till we can think of what to do next, for we have just come out of the lock-up at Bow Street, without asking leave of any one but ourselves?"

"You don't know how glad I am to see you—no, not see you, for it would require better eyes than I have to do that here; but to know that you are coming to the old ken. There is not many there now. We must make Turpin a genuine blackbird before he leaves us."

"I shall be much gratified," said Dick.

"It shall be done. I can tell you, Turpin, that it is not every one who comes with two such sponsors as Jack and Claude Duval, who I am as glad to hear speak as possible."

"We are much beholden to your kindness, Will," said Claude. "Should you know me by my voice?"

"Ah, yes, I should, though it is four years since I heard it."

"Our horses," said Dick, "is what we are distressed for, or we should not have troubled you on this occasion."

"Don't speak of that. We will find out where the cattle are, by some means, and get possession of them, I dare say. Lay hold of me, Jack, if you please, and then if your two friends lay hold of you by the coat, we can all go right, for I can, so to speak, see my way in the dark here as well as in the light."

This arrangement was adopted, and they proceeded for about twenty paces in the most profound darkness, until a dull grating sound, as of a door moving upon very rusty hinges—then there came a flash of light, and the three friends could see each other and their guide, and likewise perceive that they were in a narrow passage with a vaulted roof and an earthen floor.

Dick was the only one of the three who was rather surprised at the appearance of young Will Lipstone. This young giant—for he really might be called such—was no less than six feet four inches, and he looked as he stooped in the narrow passage—which was only six feet in height—taller even than that, and that was nearly enough, Heaven knows.

Both Jack and Claude, who knew how tall Will was, were rather amused to see Dick moving his head up and down very gravely to get a good look at him, and Jack said—

"He is one of the littles ones, you see, Dick."

"He is, indeed."

"It ain't thought that I shall grow much more," said Will, in a rather apologetic tone of voice.

"It's to be sincerely hoped you won't," said Jack, "unless it's downwards a little; for you could very well spare half a dozen inches, Will."

"Well, they do say I'm rather long."

"And they are right," said Dick. "But where are we now?"

"Oh, we shall soon be in the ken, now. It's all right enough. We have got to pass one of our servants."

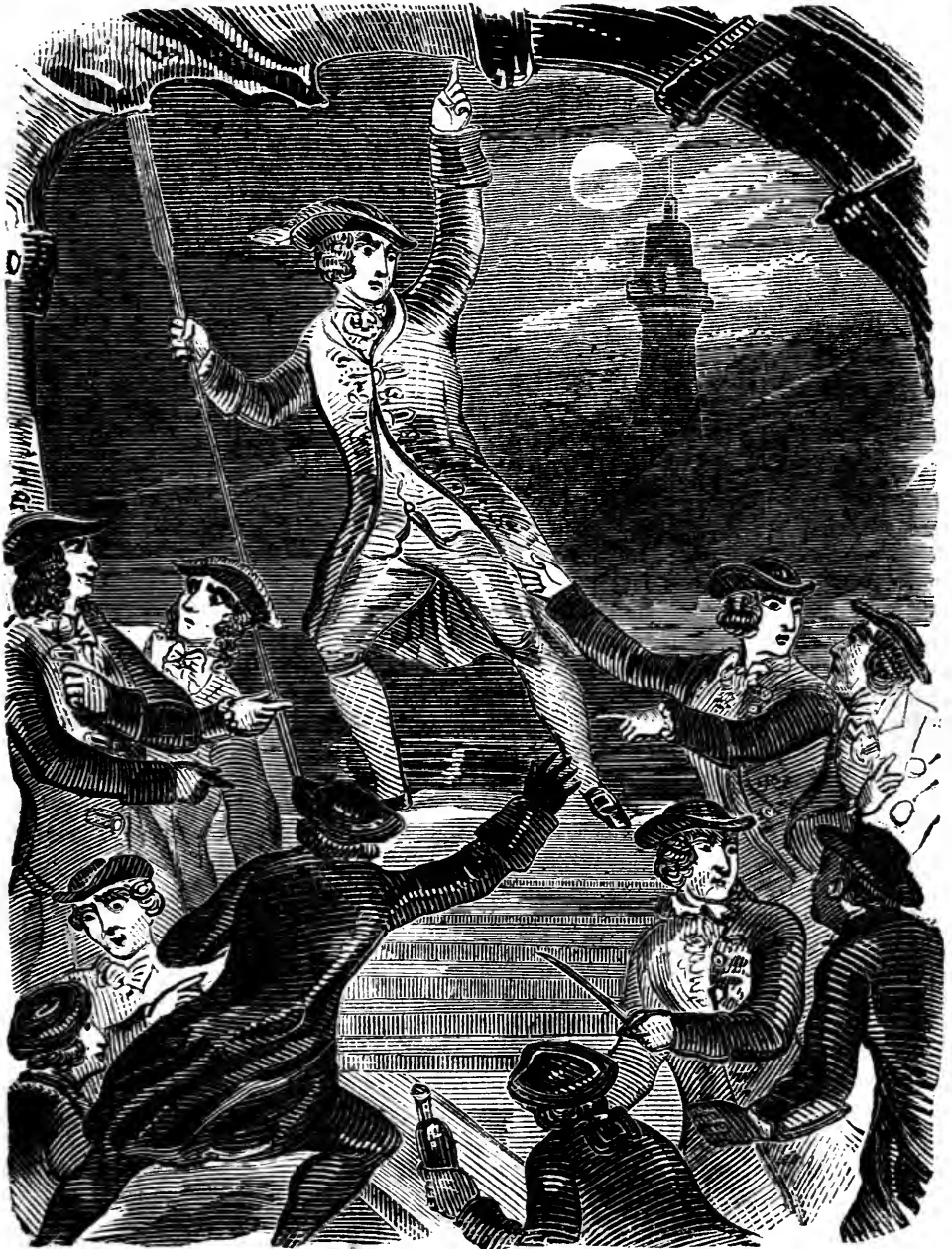
"In case, I suppose," said Jack, "anything should occur to you in the outer passage, Will?"

"Why, yes, there is no knowing. They do say that the officers have made a dead set upon the old ken, lately; but we have kept them out as yet,

and I don't think, after all, anything but a good rousing fire would oust us now."

"Nor I, either."

Will still went on as he spoke, and at the end of the passage in which they were, they came to a little room, not much bigger than twice the size of a watch-box, but here there was a man with a lamp, who called out—



THE BLACKBIRDS MAKING THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE KEN.

"Who is it?"

"All's right," said Will.

"Oh, it's you, Will, is it?"

"Yes, friends all. Open the door of the crib, Tom, and let us pass through."

It ain't worth while anybody being quite outside now, but you can keep a kind of look-out from No. 1 door."

"I will. It can't be far off morning now, I take it."

## CHAPTER CCLXIX.

### A TRAGEDY IS PLAYED AT THE OLD KEN.

THE room in which the man named Tom kept guard—and which we have noticed as being so small—had what appeared to be panelled walls; but the fact was, that each of the seeming panelled walls was a door, being just about the ordinary shape and size of one.

Tom touched a spring bolt at the top of one of them, and it swung open at once; but all beyond it seemed to be very dark and drear, indeed; and yet the confused hum of voices came upon the ears of the friends.

"Here we are," said Will.

At the moment that he spoke, he drew aside a very large blanket that hung from the floor to the ceiling, and in an instant Jack and his companions found themselves in the old ken.

The place that they were in now, was nothing more nor less in appearance than a very large cellar. The roof was low, being not above eight feet at the highest from the floor, and the place was capable, probably, of accommodating about a hundred people altogether. Tables and chairs of all sorts and sizes were round the walls, but running down the centre there was one long table, evidently enough formed of three long planks of wood put together, and supported upon trestles. The table, if it might be so called as a matter of courtesy, was covered with a green baize cover, and at intervals there were lights upon it, so that the place was fairly enough illuminated.

The odour of tobacco made the air very offensive for a short time, until the lungs got a little used to it.

"Here we are," said Will. "I think Joe the Cracksman is king of the ken to-night. You can't very well see him from here, though."

Will was right enough when he spoke of the difficulty of seeing to the farther end of the ken, for about twenty or thirty of the persons present were smoking, and there was a thick gray cloud enveloping almost every object.

A bell hung close to the entrance, and now Will struck it in a peculiar manner, and in an instant all the confusion of sounds were hushed as if by magic, and all eyes were turned to Will and those who were with him.

"Who comes?" said a voice from the farther end of the room.

"Two blackbirds," said Will, "and one linnet."

"Oh, very good. The two blackbirds answer for the linnet?"

"Yes, and so do I."

"That's better. One guinea, linnet, if you please."

"Am I to pay a guinea?" said Dick.

"Yes," said Will. "It's all right: I will pay it."

"Thank you. The fact is, my exchequer is rather low just now. I will make it all right with you."

"Oh, stuff—don't mention it."

"Who are the blackbirds?" said the voice from the farther end of the room, and which may be concluded to come from Joe the Cracksman, although it sounded quite mystic from the midst of the vapours of tobacco smoke.

"One is our old friend, Sixteen-string Jack!"

"Hurrah!" shouted everybody in the old ken. "Hurrah!—hurrah!" and the lights danced again with the concussion of the air.

"The other?" shouted Joe the Cracksman, who now, as the majority had left off smoking to take a good look at the new comers, was just beginning to be dimly seen.

"The other is Claude Duval!"

At the sound of this name, which by that time had acquired almost an European celebrity, everybody rose, and there was a grand rush to get to the end of the ken where Claude was, for although they all knew that he had been there before, yet few had had an opportunity of thus seeing him, and all his most renowned exploits had been done during the few years that he had been away.

"Stand back, blockheads," said Joe, "stand back. We are well pleased to see Claude Duval here, and Sixteen-string Jack, and if it is danger that brings them to the old den, we will stand by them like men."

"We will—we will!" shouted everybody.

"I don't know how to thank you all for this kind reception," said Claude. "It is danger that has brought us among you. The fact is, the Philistines thought proper to place us in the lock-up at Bow Street, but we thought we would rather be here by a great deal, so here we are."

"Hurrah! That's it—all right. Did you burn down the blessed crib?"

"No, but I am afraid we have damaged it a little, as well as some of those who were so delighted with our company that they wanted us to stay all night, and then be introduced to their friends in the morning."

A roar of laughter greeted this speech.

"But you haven't told us who the second is," said Joe the Cracksman.

"I will, though," said Will. "They call him Dick Turpin."

The sensation at the announcement of this other name, so well known to fame and the road, was tremendous. Never before had three such luminaries, in the highwayman world, been in the old place all at once, and the enthusiasm of those who hoped that the time would come when they should be able to emulate the exploits of the three friends was unbounded.

About a dozen glasses were held to the lips of each of the visitors, and it was only by Claude crying out that they had had plenty to drink already, and had work to do before the morning, that they escaped being deluged by all sorts of liquors.

Some half dozen voices declared that they had heard of the arrival of the confederates, and then, in a momentary calm, Claude said—

"If there should be any one here who can get us information of where our cattle are stowed, we shall be much obliged. Without our horses we hardly know what to do, but if we can only discover where they are, we have no sort of doubt of recovering them."

A variety of conjectures were immediately hazarded, and, finally, two of those present were despatched to make all the inquiry possible upon that subject. Joe the Cracksman put it to the meeting that Dick be forthwith declared a blackbird by acclamation, which was done, and then he was initiated into those particularities which would at any time procure him admittance to the ken, and all the assistance and support that the fraternity could offer him. The rules were read over to him; and the punishment for any treachery, or the introduction of an officer to the ken, was hanging.

"I shall not incur that," said Dick, with a smile. "The officers and I don't usually hit it very well, and I rather think now that I shall be like my two friends here, that is to say—"Wanted" for the rest of my life."

Tingle went the bell at the door at the moment, and the voice of the man who had been named Tom, by long Will, called out—

"A blackbird and a linnet!"

There was a deathlike stillness now, as two persons made their appearance in the ken.

One of the persons was a small, wiry-looking man, who was a member of the ken; but the person with him was a much stouter personage, and a stranger to all appearance to all present.

"Who is the blackbird?" said Joe the Cracksman.

"I am, as is tolerably well known to all the highly honourable fraternity," said the smaller of the two men, "John Stokes, and a cracksman."



"Who is the linnet?"

"The linnet is a friend of mine, who has taken to the road, gentlemen, and who wishes to be enrolled in the brotherhood. He took two watches upon Hounslow Heath, only last week, and yesterday he stopped a coach upon Ealing Common, and with a good booty."

"I did," said the linnet.

"Very well; does he know our rules?"

"Yes, Joe, he does. Here's his guinea, and he puts another five to it for good fellowship, and is willing, at all times and in all seasons, to abide by the old ken."

"That is right. Has any member of the ken anything to say in the matter, for now is the time, before it is all settled, and the name of the new member put down in the roll?"

"Yes," said one rising, "I have something to say—Is the door closed, and are we all right?"

"All," said long Will.

"Very good; then I propose that the new member be searched. It ain't a thing that we often do, but there's one of our rules that lets us do it if we like—I propose that he be searched, and if nothing suspicious is found upon him, I will be the first to drink his health."

No one made the slightest remark upon this but Joe the Cracksman, who occupied the position of authority in the chair, and he said—

"Very well. One of our rules says, that any blackbird can ask that a linnet should be searched upon his applying to be a member, so I can't say nay to it."

Those who were the nearest to the linnet saw, or fancied they saw, that he shook a little, and that he changed colour; but whether such was the fact or not was a very difficult thing to say in the uncertain light that was in the place: He spoke calmly enough.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I had no sort of idea that I should be looked upon with any degree of suspicion. If I had known that, I would have foregone even the great advantage of belonging to this honourable fraternity; but I really thought my friend here was in great esteem among you."

"No, he isn't!" said several voices.

"A sneak!" cried one.

"Order! order!" said Joe the Cracksman, "this must not be. It is true, enough that we have heard some things of John Stokes that we don't like; but so long as he kept good faith with us we were not bound to notice them."

"What things?" said the man named John Stokes.

"Oh, we will tell you. We heard that you were seen visiting the house of an officer named Hunt, and that, without doing a bit of work, you had plenty of money. We heard, too, that you had gone in a coach to the Secretary of State's offices in Downing-street. Is that true?"

"It is not. I have been very much maligned, or else I have been mistaken for some one else."

"I hope so."

"So do I," said the man who had come to be made a blackbird; "but if there be, really, any diffidence in admitting me, I will retire at once, hoping that at some future opportunity I may have the pleasure of being proposed by some more popular member of the assembly; and of being admitted as a blackbird into it is my great ambition to be, gentlemen, and I feel quite sure that you will admit that it is a laudable ambition, and that I have treated you all with the greatest possible respect, and so I humbly take my leave."

"Not quite so fast," said Will, who mistrusted the candidate. "We will admit you, no doubt."

"Then I am quite happy."

"After the search has proved satisfactory."

"Oh!"

"We don't behave shabbily. We will either admit you, or let you know some good reason why we won't, if you are proposed by the devil himself."

"Very good, very good. I will be back in a little while—I, that is.—What is this for?"

A couple of the blackbirds suddenly rushed upon the candidate and held his arms. They pulled his hand out from the breast of his apparel, into which he had plunged it, and found that it grasped something. Upon forcing open his fingers, they saw that it was a copper ball that he had in his hand, and a very slight examination showed that it was so constructed that it would explode if thrown hardy to the ground or against the wall, and they did not entertain a doubt but that the noise it would make would be terrific, if it did no further danger.

"The door! Guard the door," cried Joe the Cracksman.

"It is," said Will.

"Silence—silence! Peace in the blackbirds' nest!"

Every sound was hushed, but half a dozen strong men surrounded both the candidate and his friend.

"Now search him," said the king of the blackbirds, as the president of the night was called.

"Hold!" said the Linnet. "What is it that you want to know?"

"Who and what you are, that's what we want to know."

"Then I will tell you."

"Oh, no—no!" cried John Stokes—"oh, no.—That will do no good. Are you quite mad?"

"Hold, John Stokes," cried Joe the Cracksman.

There is no knowing exactly what, in his rage, John Stokes might have done, if violent hands had not been laid upon him in such a fashion that he was made as secure from perpetrating any mischief as if he had been in a vice.

"Now go on, linnet," said the president, to the man who stood resolutely, but still very pale, before the fearful array of angry faces around him.

"I will," he said. "When there is no longer any use in disguising the truth, it is much better to admit it at once. I do not pay you the bad compliment of supposing you are such fools as to make it possible that I can deceive you any longer."

"Mad! mad! Quite mad!" cried John Stokes.

"Not at all," said the other. "Listen attentively to me, all of you. It is the duty of an officer of the police to do all he can in his vocation against you. It is but natural that he should do so; and so long as he does that without any other feeling than a public one, he is not to be condemned."

"Go on," said the president.

Claude and his friends felt an interest in this man who, in so critical a situation, had the boldness to defend himself in such a way. They all three hoped that he would be spared, although if they might judge by the scowling, angry countenances about them, they doubted it.

"Go on. Go on!" cried several.

"I will go on," said the man. "I have told you that it is the duty of an officer of the police to do what he can in a legitimate way against you, and at the same time that I tell you all this, I pay you the compliment of supposing that you are all real, downright Englishmen, and not assassins. I am an officer of police!"

The yell that arose at this speech was deafening, and several made a rush forward towards the officer. Claude stepped before him.

"Hold!" he said. "Is it a fact that when this man called you Englishmen, it was only a piece of gross flattery?"

They shrank back, but a voice called out—

"Death to the spy?"

"Death—death!" shouted twenty others.

"Not now," said Claude, as he held his arm over the head of the officer.

"You shall not in a moment of passion! play the parts of cowards, and then

regret it afterwards when it is past recalling. We will hear what this man has further to say."

"Who are you?" cried a ferocious looking fellow with a large red face. "Who, are you that comes here to interfere with us?"

"I am a blackbird, I believe," said Claude, "and if you have any desire to know anything further of me, I advise you to come within reach of my arm, that is all."

"Oh, you can bully, can you?"

"I can threaten when I see occasion, and it is well for those whom I do threaten to take warning by those threats."

"We will soon see about that."

The fellow made a rush upon Claude, but the latter was quite prepared for him, and grappled him by the throat. The struggle that ensued was short but decisive, for Claude threw his opponent on to the middle of the long table, with a crash that broke down a portion of it and scattered the lights in all directions, as well as leaving the bully in a state of complete insensibility upon the floor, in the midst of the wreck which his fall had occasioned upon that spot.

## CHAPTER CCLXX.

### THE CONFEDERATES ESCAPE BY THE RIVER.

"Is there any other gentleman," said Claude calmly, "who is inclined to try his skill upon me, or are we all friends as we ought to be, joined together in one common cause? Is there any one who suspects me of being other than a true member of the family, or that I, with my reputation and my name, and with five hundred pounds reward hanging over my head for my body, dead or alive, can have any other intentions than those in common with all here?"

This speech, with its rough logic, was so much to the purpose, that it was quite impossible but that it should have its due effect upon those who heard it. It came, too, from one whom they were quite prepared to listen to with respect, and the exhibition of physical power that Claude Duval had so recently made was not without its effect in his favour.

One voice cried out—

"Long live Claude Duval! Hurrah!"

It only wanted such an impulse as that, and then all followed it, and Duval saw at once that he possessed a large share of influence with the strange assemblage around him. He wished to use that influence, if he possibly could, in saving the life of the officer.

This was a task which any one but Claude Duval might well have shrunk from with dismay; but the fact was, that he was so much in the habit of doing things that other people would not attempt, that he did not feel inclined to shrink from this one.

"My good friends," he said, "I understand that you give me credit for being, indeed, your friend, and I can say that I would risk my life at any moment rather than a hair of the head of any one of you should be injured. When, four years ago I came to this place and joined your fraternity, I did not do so in idleness or in sport, but I did so in truth and reality, and I look upon you all as my associates and friends."

"Hear! hear! That's it, Duval. That's right!"

"Then let us hear what this man has to say."

"Stop a bit," said the cracksman who was in the chair. "It is quite clear, Claude Duval, that the blackbirds to-night will pay a deal more attention to what you say, than to what I say, and I don't at all object to it, for I admire your courage and your talents as much as anybody can do, so I propose that you

take the chair, and that I leave it, when you will not find a more devoted friend and adherent than Joe the Cracksmán."

"That's right, Joe," cried some dozen or so of voices. "That's a fine speech, Joe! That's all right, old fellow! You won't better that—We don't think the worse of you, old boy! Hurrah for Joe!"

Claude Duval tried to say something of a deprecatory character, but he was voted into the chair, and declared, for that night, king of the blackbirds, with all the honours usually given upon such an occasion.

Upon the whole, Claude was glad that he was placed in such a situation. He felt that it gave him the influence of authority as well as that of an individual, and he hoped that it would arm him with power to prevent any act of violence that might be in the contemplation of the more energetic portion of the fraternity about him.

Jack and Dick kept close to him when he was installed in the chair, and after the cheers had subsided that had heralded him to it, he rose, and showed by his gestures that he had something to say to the rather motley assemblage before him.

All was immediately silent, and it was quite clear from the looks of the officer, that from the moment Claude Duval was placed in the chair he had some hopes of escape from the perplexing situation in which he had placed himself.

"Good friends," said Claude, "I wish that we should all of us hear out what that man has to say. It is impossible we can come to any decision concerning him, without we give him a patient hearing."

"Hear him! Hear him!"

"Now, Mr. Officer," said Claude, "what is your name?"

"James Brand!"

A groan and a shout burst from the lips of the blackbirds as they heard in that name the designation of one of the most formidable and bold of the Bow Street runners.

"Very well; you are a bold man."

"I hope so," said the officer.

"You need not hope it, for you are so—that is past a doubt; and it is a quality that we all rather admire than otherwise; but we have our safety to look to before we give way to admiration of your bravery; so, now, what have you to say to us in your self-preservation?"

"Not much," said Brand. "I knew very well before I came here that I was running a great risk, and yet I do not think you ought to feel so very much infuriated at me as some of you seem to do. As I said before, it is my duty to do what I can to vindicate the law against the law-breakers; but I would fain say something for the man who brought me here, John Stokes."

"Hang him!" shouted several voices.

"Do you mean me, gentlemen," said the officer, with the most innocent look in the world, "or do you mean my friend, Stokes?"

It was impossible to avoid laughing at the tone and manner in which this question was put; and Claude, with his friends, could not but admire the consummate coolness and courage of a man who was in such really imminent danger as that which surrounded the officer.

"Both of you," cried several.

"Oh, that is very expressive indeed," said Brand, "and allow me, in the first instance, to tell you what I can tell you in excuse of this John Stokes; as for myself, I consider that I require no further justification than that I am doing my duty; and there is not one of you who, if he had been an officer and had the courage, which I daresay you all have, who would have scrupled to do just as I have done. And now, regarding Stokes."

John Stoker was very far from putting the bold front upon the affair that the officer did. It was quite evident that he was oppressed by the most abject fear, and that it was as much as he could do to keep himself from some very pitiful display of it. He looked about him as though he were seeking for some face in

which he might see a ray of compassion; but he found none, and Claude was too far off to be looked at.

"Go on," said Duval to the officer, for he was not a little curious to hear what he could possibly find to say for John Stokes.

"I will go on. This man, Stokes, then, committed a robbery, and was caught. He was caught in the very fact, and the proofs of the case were so clear and so undeniable, that it would only have saved trouble if he had hung himself at once, for death by the hangman's hands stared him in the face next sessions."

"Yes—oh, yes," stammered John Stokes.

"Well, it was a great point with the magistracy to apprehend the whole of you here present calling yourselves the blackbirds."

A yell of execration interrupted the speech.

"Oh, be patient, gentlemen; you are not apprehended yet."

"Confound the fellow's impudence," whispered Dick to Claude.

"Hear him out," said Claude.

"No, gentlemen, you are not apprehended yet," added Brand; "but an offer was made to this man, John Stokes, by the Secretary of State, an offer between life and death—the cord or liberty. He was offered his freedom, and a sum of money to go to a foreign country with, if he would betray you all."

"Hang him!—hang him!"

"Now, gentlemen, consider, what was poor John Stokes to do? If he refused, we would assuredly have hung him; if he consented, he had the chance of saving himself; so, upon the principle of self-preservation, John Stokes was right to bring me here to-night."

"Curse the impudence of that fellow," said Dick.

"It is cool," said Claude, "and yet I like the fellow for it. I never could have supposed that there was such a man in the police."

"Nor I," said Jack, "and I should be very sorrow if he were to be murdered in this place to-night."

"He shall not be," said Claude, in a low voice, "if I can possibly help it."

The officer ceased speaking, and then Claude, turning to John Stokes, said—

"Is all that true that Brand has stated?"

"It is," gasped Stokes. "Oh, spare my life!—Have mercy upon me!—It will do you no good to kill me."

"Silence! You will do yourself no good by entreaties of this kind."

"There is one thing," added Brand, "that I may tell you, and that is, that I am as ignorant of the way into this place as I was before. My eyes were blindfolded as I was brought in here, and I know no more than I did before, namely that there is such a place."

"How was that?" said Claude; "were his eyes blindfolded?"

"Yes," said Long Will. "Tom was suspicious of any friend of John Stokes's, so he did so as a matter of precaution."

"Well," said Claude, "perhaps, as you are so candid, Mr. Brand, you will tell me what was the use of the copper ball you had in your possession?"

Brand was silent.

"Will you answer?"

"I hardly know what answer to say to you," he said, at length. "Life is as sweet to me as it is to most folks, and I think that you ought to make a bargain with me, that if I do you all a good turn, you will allow me to go in peace from you this time."

"No—no!" cried almost every one. "Hang him!—hang him!"

"Hush!" said Claude. "I think you are all too precipitate. It is possible enough that to save his own life, Brand may give us valuable information."

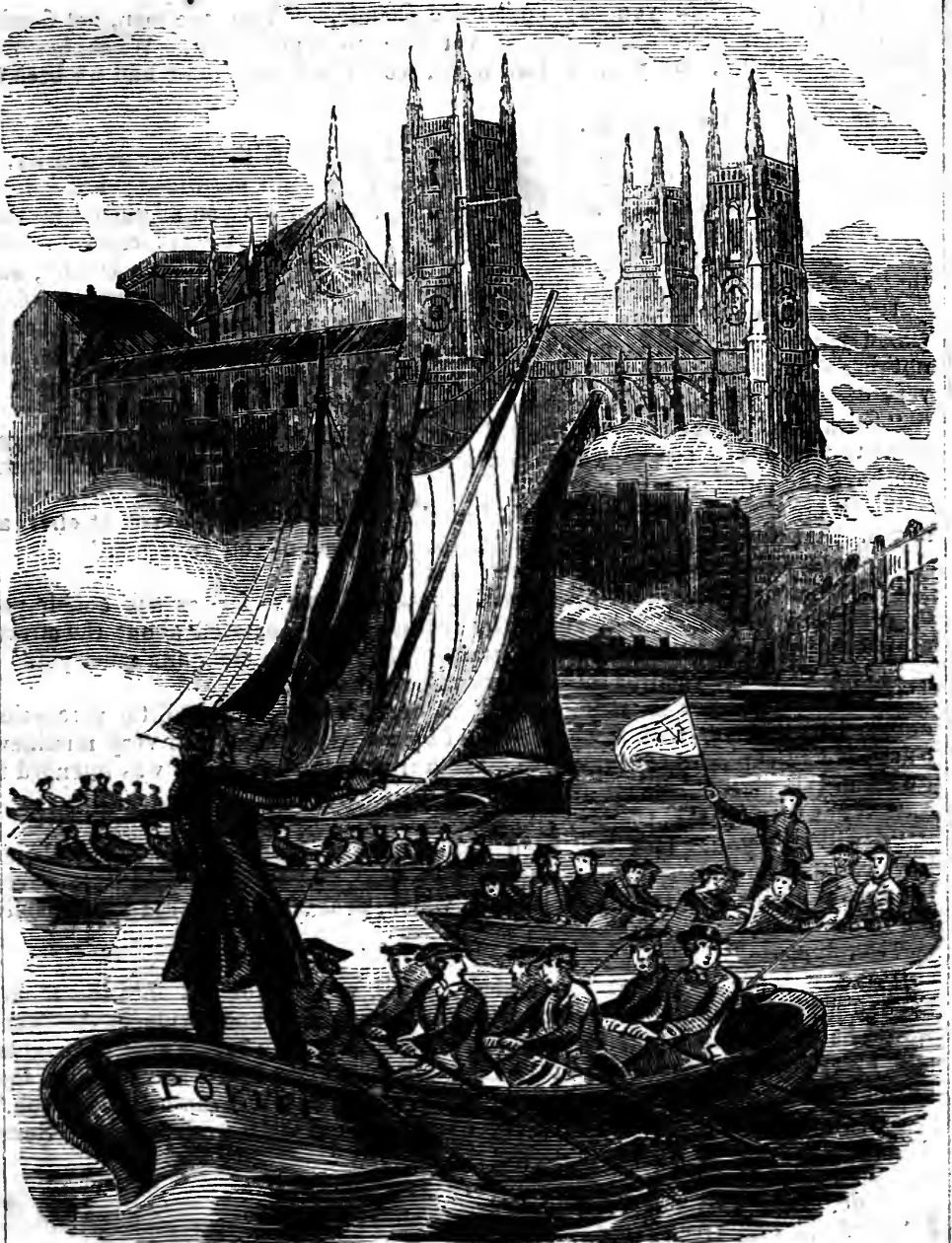
"That is just what I am willing to do," said the officer.



"And my life, too," howled John Stokes.

"Oh, hold your tongue," said Brand; "nobody will think your life worth the taking; don't make that hideous noise."

Claude bit his lips to keep himself from laughing, and then, as he saw doubt and hesitation upon the faces of the blackbirds, he seized the opportunity of endeavouring to turn them in the direction he wished them to go.



THE PURSUIT AFTER THE BLACKBIRDS BY THE POLICE-GALLEY.

"Let me beg of you all to consider," he said, "that your own preservation is of much more importance than the gratification of a blind revenge against Brand, who, setting aside the fact that he certainly is our enemy, is a man whom we may all respect for his bold and straightforward conduct."

Some murmurs of disapprobation came from the blackbirds, but Claude would not notice them, and continued speaking.

"We ought to look to ourselves, and I think that we might safely make a conditional promise to Mr. Brand, that if his information be of great importance to us, we will let him go free."

"No—no!"

"Oh, pause before you say no," cried Claude. "You are men, not fiends. You have good sense about you, if you like to appeal to it. What has this officer done that I, and you, and all of us, would not have done had we been in his situation?"

The blackbirds were silent.

"Listen to me, all of you," said Brand. "I will put faith in your generosity. I don't think that there is one among you who thirsts for my blood; but I don't expect you will let me off for nothing. I will, however, do you all such a favour, then, if there is a grateful feeling in any of your hearts, you will reply to it by giving me my liberty. I will trust you with the secret that will save you all, and that if you like to murder me, the infamy of the deed be upon your own heads."

It would be quite impossible by any language to convey the tone and manner in which these words were spoken. They were boldness itself, and yet there was nothing at all arrogant in them, or in any way defiant or offensive. They made a very decidedly favourable impression upon all who heard them.

"Speak on," said Claude, "we will hear you; and if it will be any encouragement to you, I will tell you, that you are adopting the only course that I think can have the effect of saving you."

"You are a good authority," said Brand, "and so I will tell you at once, all of you, that there is a plan on foot to arrest every one of you to-night."

An uneasy movement pervaded the assemblage.

"The particulars of that plan I will explain to you so far as will enable you to escape its action: There are now, by this time, concealed about the streets a hundred well-armed men. Do not start. They will remain quite quiet yet."

Several of the blackbirds looked very uneasy indeed.

"What I tell you is strictly true," added Brand. "The little percussion copper ball that you took from me, would by no means have been very mischievous if it had exploded, but it would make a tremendous noise. It was intended to go off in this place."

"What then?" said Claude.

"I will tell you. If I had been duly elected a brother blackbird, I should have counted how many of you were here present, and then I should have taken the first plausible opportunity of leaving, which, probably, you would have enabled me to do freely."

"Surely, yes."

"And with my eyes not blindfolded. Well, when I got out into the arches beyond here, I should have cast down the copper ball and exploded it. That would have been the signal for the men in ambush to rush to this spot with lights, and every possible means of overcoming all opposition, and I should then, too, have been in a position to guide them to this apartment, if it can be called such."

The blackbirds looked at each other with consternation and surprise. Some were incredulous of the fact.

"You surely believe it?" said Brand.

"I do," said Claude Duval.

"And I," said Dick Turpin.

"And I," said Sixteen-string Jack.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for giving credence to me, and it will be well if others do the same, for it will be the only means by which they can be saved."

"How do you make that out?" cried one.

"This way," said Mr. Brand, as he very coolly took out his watch and consulted it. "I make it twenty minutes to three exactly. What do you say, gentlemen?"

"Right! right!" cried several.

"What of that?" said Claude. "Go on, Mr. Brand."

"Very well, then. Of course it was not likely to escape the calculation of those who requested me to come upon this expedition that something might happen to me to prevent me from giving the signal at all, and in that case it was agreed that a vigorous attack was to be made upon this place as three o'clock struck by the church in the street yonder, so that, you see, that you have all of you just twenty minutes to get comfortably away in, and to save yourselves."

Everybody rose now in disorder, and as everybody began to say something at once, it was no easy matter to know what they would be about. Claude raised his voice above the din and said—

"Silence! Those who wish to perish will continue this tumult—those who would save themselves will be still.

"That's right," said Bland."

Every voice was hushed upon the instant.

"Hark you all," said Claude. "I think that Brand has nobly redeemed his promise. He has given us information that is of the utmost importance to us; and considering such, I propose that he be let go free."

"No!—no!"

"Oh, consider all of you. It would be not only a criminal act, but, to my thinking, it would be a base act to take his life."

"Hang him!—hang him!" cried all the voices, with the exception of a very few, indeed.

"No," shouted Claude, "it must not, and shall not be! If you reach that man to take his life, it shall first be over my dead body. I will not sit here and see a brutal murder done."

## CHAPTER CCLXXI.

### CLAUDE FINDS THAT BRAND CAN BE GRATEFUL.—

THE feelings of Claude were wound up to such a pitch by the brutal designs of the blackbirds to kill the officer, after he had really given such information to them, that, heedless of what might possibly be the personal consequences to himself, he made a rush as he spoke right along the whole length of the table in the centre of the ken, and jumped down to the floor at the other end of it close to Brand.

Dick and Jack followed his example.

"Now," shouted Claude, in his clear manly voice, while the colour heightened upon his cheek, "now, who will side with me and with justice? Who will be brave enough to do what is right as well as what is wise, along with Claude Duval?"

"And with Dick Turpin too," cried Dick.

"And with Sixteen-string Jack," said Jack.

"I—I—I," shouted some eight or ten of the blackbirds, and then there arose a loud shout from the whole of them, for those who still had the wish to put Brand to death, found that they were in a small minority, and that they would have no chance of carrying their point now against Claude Duval and his adherents.

"That's all settled, then," said Claude, "and I admire you all for so settling it. Mr. Brand, you are free; but you will not make so bad a use of that freedom as to play us false, I am sure."

"I will go with you," said Brand, "until you are out of danger, and then you will be quite at ease upon that point."

Nothing could be very well more judicious than this proposal, as it at once put an end to all fears upon the parts even of the most suspicious regarding the good faith of Brand.

"That is all right," said Claude Duval; "and now you all of you know better what to do than we, so let us follow you at once."

At this moment, one of the scouts who had been sent forth to make inquiries concerning the horses of our adventurers entered, and coming up to Claude, he said in a low tone—

"News of your cattle, Claude Duval."

"Ah, have you?"

"Yes; you will find the exact address where they are written upon this little slip of paper."

"A thousand thanks," said Claude, as he took the slip of paper, folded up as it was, and placed it in his pocket.

The blackbirds had now begun to stir themselves in earnest to leave the old ken, and by the general agreement of various watches that were produced, it was tolerably evident that only ten minutes remained for them to evacuate the place in.

"What course will you adopt?" said Claude. "Recollect that we cannot leave as we came in. There is an armed force there."

"The river!—The river!" cried half a dozen voices. "We must all leave by the river."

"Good," said Claude. "I think, with you, that it is the only chance."

The proceedings of the blackbirds were now tolerably quick. In the first place they got, without much ceremony, from the pockets of Mr. Brand, the officer, a pair of handcuffs, which they placed upon the wrists of John Stokes, and it was tolerably evident that, notwithstanding the imminent character of the dangers that beset them, they did not intend to let him go.

"You will spare him now?" said Brand.

"You mind your own business," replied one who was active in the affair. "Claude Duval has got you off, and that's enough for you."

Brand was silent.

There could be no sort of doubt upon the mind of the officer but that he would have been sacrificed to the fury of the thieves if it had not been for Claude Duval's presence there, and the extraordinary influence which he managed to exercise over the party.

We shall see whether such a favour from Duval to the officer awakened any corresponding sensations in his breast.

It was curious now for Claude and Dick and Jack, to notice the dexterity with which the blackbirds acted. Both Jack and Claude knew that there was another way of getting out of the ken than by the route they had taken to get into it, but Dick did not, he was too lately initiated into the society to have received that information.

Immediately behind the elevated seat—indeed, the seat was placed upon the table—upon which Joe the Cracksman had sat, and into which Claude had been inducted upon his merits, the wall of the ken seemed to be constructed of rather roughly put together wainscoting; and now two of the blackbirds who were good workmen approached it, and had down one of the long panels in a moment.

Another and another of the panels were removed, and then when the whole space was nearly open, there appeared a room, which had evidently been built by workmen who knew their trade.

"What place is that?" said Dick to Jack.

"That is a house," said Jack, "that stands upon the banks of the river. It is empty, but it is rented by one of the blackbirds, who now and then makes a show of living in it. It commands a direct course to the water side, and there is a little quay specially belonging to it."

"That is capital."

"Well, it is not altogether the worst place in the world. But see, they are going fast!"

“How will they get off when they get to the river side?”

“Oh, there are short of forty of them altogether, and they will easily enough get away. A few boats that they can hail will take them off, and they have a desire to avoid observation.”

“They would need to have one.”

“You shall see.”

“Come on,” said Claude, at this moment; “we shall be late.”

The three friends were nearly the last to leave the ken. The officer, Mr. Brand, had gone away the first, for he had been carefully looked to by four of the blackbirds, who contrived pretty well to keep around him in such a way, that any attempt to escape from them would be utterly fruitless. The officer did not appear to be at all put out of humour by this species of surveillance. He felt that, situated as he was, it was of no use to object to anything, and that there was likewise abundance of room to have a little suspicion of him.

Brand, in the whole affair, acted evidently upon the most philosophical principles. He was determined to save his own life if he could; and as he, no doubt, considered that he would be much more useful as an officer for the future alive than dead, he considered that the present escape of the blackbirds was quite a minor evil in comparison to his being knocked on the head, which, by the by, would still not have prevented their escape at all.

He was a clever man, that Brand.

The same number of blackbirds likewise attended upon John Stokes, although in the state of abject terror that that individual was in, one would have been quite sufficient; but they thought that it was probably quite as well to make assurance doubly sure, so they did him the honour of giving him a good guard.

The hour at which the attack was to be made upon the place was now fearfully near at hand, and Claude Duval thought that yet there might be some catastrophe.

After passing through the room that was immediately behind the ken, the wall was put up again with great dexterity, and if it looked as well upon what may be called the ken-side of it as it had done before it was taken down, the officers who should come into the place might well be deceived into the idea that there was no other outlet from the place than that by which they had managed to enter it.

It was Joe the Cracksman who appeared to know exactly the route to pursue, for he took the lead, and every now and then he kept crying out—

“This way, blackbirds. This way. Follow me. This way, blackbirds, and all will be right!”

One, and one only, carried a light, which shed a lurid and strange flickering glare upon the mouldy walls of the old deserted house that they were passing through.

Claude counted no less than five rooms that they made their way through, before a gush of cold damp air told him that they must be close to the bank of the river. Then Joe the Cracksman called out—

“Silence, noble blackbirds! Here we are. Half a dozen steps more takes us to the quay. We must get off cautiously.”

“The flag,” said one.

“Yes, I will not forget the flag.”

“What the deuce do they mean by that?” said Dick.

“I don’t know,” said Claude. “It is some new device that I know nothing of, but you may depend it is all right.”

“I can tell you,” said Jack.

Just as Jack was upon the point of giving to Claude and Dick the required information, a loud shout from the direction of the ken that they had just left came upon their ears, and then there was a discharge of fire-arms.

“Ah,” said Jack, “the officers have made the attack.”

“They have, indeed.”

“I told you so,” said a voice close to Claude, and he recognised it as the voice



of Brand the officer, although it was too dark where they stood for him to be seen.

“Yes,” said Claude, “you spoke the truth.”

“There was no good to be done in any other way.”

“I quite agree with you there.”

“The fact is, that they were more likely to be, from their impatience, a few minutes before their time than after it, and I would advise our friends, the blackbirds here, to get away as fast as they can, for disappointment will, perhaps, induce those who, by this time, are in the ken, to pursue their inquiries a little further, and a fight in the dark here would just be a scene of the most horrible slaughter.”

“You are right,” said Claude. “What are they doing now upon the river-side, I wonder?”

“It’s all right,” said a strange voice. “Joe is getting the boats—ah, here he comes.”

A shrill whistle at this moment sounded upon the night air, and then there came the strange imitation of the notes of the blackbird, which were the private call or pass note of the association. Directly the sound came upon the ears of those around Claude and his friends, they began to move silently towards the banks of the river. Claude followed, and in a few seconds they were all by the side of the stream.

Fortunately for the blackbirds, it was high water.

How they had procured the boats it is hard to say. It is only just possible that they had managed—at that dull hour, when no one was upon the look out—to steal them from a rather popular landing-place that was in the immediate neighbourhood; but be this as it may, boats they had.

The Thames wherries have only of late years been such little miserable things as they are. As time rolls on they will be quite extinct, for now it is a thing of foolish temerity to venture upon the bosom of the stream in a boat not much more secure than a cockle shell, where steamers are crossing and re-crossing in all possible directions.

The boats that were by the bank now, and into which the blackbirds silently made their way, were of a good size, and would very well hold from twelve to fourteen persons each, so that three of them did very well for the whole party with a little crowding.

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## CHAPTER CCLXXII.

### THE PROGRESS DOWN THE RIVER, AND THE POLICE-GALLEY.

THE blackbirds went apparently upon the principle of placing the most precious freight all in one boat; for in the first boat of the little squadron there was Claude Duval, and there was Jack and Dick, and Brand the officer, and John Stokes the treacherous blackbird, who may be considered to have brought all this danger upon them.

In the two other boats, which kept, as Claude thought, very inconsiderately close to the first one, were the other blackbirds.

As they pushed off from the little landing-place, that belonged very especially to the house at the river bank, the early light of the dawn was just visible, and if it had not been that there was a light kind of fog upon the river, no doubt objects would have been visible tolerably plainly. The fog or mist, however, got whiter and whiter every moment, so that it was quite evident that it would soon clear off, and then the daylight would be upon and about them rather suddenly.

“The flag,” said Joe the Cracksmen, “now for the flag.”

"Yes, Joe, all right; here it is."

"What can be the meaning of this, Jack?" said Claude; "you were going to tell us when we were interrupted."

"Why, the fact of it is," said Jack, "the flag is very religious."

"Religious?"

"Yes. It is a common custom at this time of the year for various religious sects to go upon water parties on the river, and they generally carry a flag with them, with the name of their sect or society upon it; and sing hymns as they go along. The River Police don't at all interfere with them, and our friends the blackbirds being provided against such an emergency as this, put on her such a flag, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if they burst into a hymn."

"Well," said Claude, "it is rather a clever trick."

"It will answer, too."

Brand laughed.

"What do you think of all this, Mr. Brand?" added Claude.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't like it."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I cannot shut my eyes to it, and I feel that I have no right to know it, since it is by accident that it all comes to my knowledge, you see; and if I were to make use of this information, it would not, to my thinking, seem like fair play."

"You are an honourable fellow, Brand."

"I try to be so, Claude Duval, and I can safely say this much, that I will not, if I can possibly help it, take any sort of advantage of the little secrets that have come to my knowledge this night."

.. "You are quite right. Good God, what is that?"

"The hymn," said Jack.

Two dozen of the blackbirds had at this moment tried their sweet voices at a hymn; and although there were some among them [who could really sing very well, the effect upon the whole was very ludicrous, for not even the conviction that they were all in the most imminent danger could induce them to execute the hymn with that steadiness and gravity that it required.

"Really," said Claude, "that hymn, or pretended hymn, is the most execrable thing I have heard for a long time."

"It is foolish," said Jack; "they had better, by all means, leave it alone, than bring it out in the manner they do."

Jack gave this opinion aloud, so that it soon spread over the boat; but it had no effect, except to cause some laughing, and the hymn was sung right through, notwithstanding all the disapprobation with which it was regarded by those who were keenly alive to the danger of the position in which the boats, with their closely packed living-freights, were.

Suddenly, as if by magic, the white mist that had been upon the surface of the river rolled off, leaving the water bright and clear, for the Thames was in not quite so bad a state then as it is now. There were not so many abominations upon the banks of it, and you might go from Blackfriars Bridge up to Chelsea every day without being poisoned by the horrid stench on the Surry-side, where certainly all kinds of abominations exist.

The day-light had made some progress now, and although the boats were in the centre of the river, as nearly as possible, they could see the bank upon either side quite plainly.

But in addition to the bank, they could see a large galley, with eight oarsmen in her, and about half a dozen well-armed men likewise, lazily creeping along with the tide.

"What is that?" said Claude.

"A police-galley," said Brand.

The words "Police-galley" were not spoken very loudly, but still they reached the ears of every one in the boat, and created a little consternation.

"Strike up another hymn," said Joe the Cracksmen.

"No—no," said Claude. "Allow me, with all deference, to suggest that you do no such thing!"

"Why not, Duval?"

"The chant is so dire a performance, that I am confident it could not possibly deceive any one who had ever heard a hymn in their lives before; so it is better left alone."

"Oh, you don't know how we can do it. We have practised it. That was only a joke; but now that it is necessary, I assure you we can do the real thing, as you shall hear, if you will be so good as to listen to us at all as we sing it."

"Of course I will, and if I am mistaken in the matter, pray pardon me."

"No offence, Claude Duval. It's all right. I don't wonder at your saying what you did. Now brothers"—here Joe the Cracksman imitated, in a most exquisite manner, the twang of the conventicle. "Now, brothers, raise the flag and sing the hundred and fourth hymn, if you please. Now begin, and confound the scoffers and the mockers."

The flag, which was held by two persons in the stern of the boat, and upon which was painted the words "Lambs of the Fold," was quietly waved to and fro, and the hymn begun.

Claude Duval was astonished! Nothing could be sung better, or with more devotional grace than that hymn. There was not a smile upon any one's face, nor a wrong note uttered. All was excellent and harmonious.

The police galley was brought to, and it was evident that the officers on board of it were regarding the three boats with their full contents with great curiosity.

"Do you think they will be deceived?" whispered Claude to Brand the officer.

"Likely enough. The hymn is beautiful."

"It is, indeed."

"And the flag is just the thing. There is only one danger."

"What is that?"

"It is that the police-galley should come so close as to see that neither the countenances nor the costume of your friends, the blackbirds, are favourable to the assumption of their pious character."

"That is true; but see, they just rest upon their oars to see us pass as a matter of curiosity, and they don't seem disposed to take any further notice of us."

"I own it looks like it. They shan't see me, if I can help it. I said I would do the best I could for you all, and I will keep my word."

With this, Brand took a white pocket-handkerchief from his pocket and tied it round the lower part of his face. He then took off his hat, and in some indescribable manner squeezed it and worked it about for a few moments until he had made it quite a different shape, and when he put it on, no one could have known him for the same man.

"You are good at disguises," said Claude.

"It is part of my business. But here comes the police galley—I thought that all was not quite right, by the whispering of her crew."

## CHAPTER CCLXXIII.

DETAILS FURTHER ADVENTURES AND PERILS ON THE THAMES.

It was quite clear now, that the galley with the police on board it was making way towards the three boats.

"Steady," said Joe the Cracksman in a low tone. "Steady, blackbirds—give them another hymn."

The hymn that they had been singing was duly finished, and a pause had taken

place ; but now, in obedience to the command of Joe, who was evidently held in high esteem by his comrades, another one was commenced, the soft melody of which floated gently over the waters, and really ought to have had all its effect upon the officers in the galley ; but officers' hearts are of a very flinty description indeed.



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POLICE-GALLEY.

Of course, nothing could have been more indiscreet than for the three boats with the blackbirds in them to have made any effort to escape from the officers, for that would not only have been most futile, loaded as they were, but would at once have engendered suspicion if there were none ; and if there were only a slight

suspicion, would have converted it into the certainty that something was amiss.

They steadily pursued their track, and as the police-galley was well manned, a very few moments indeed sufficed to bring it close up to the three large boats with the blackbirds in them.

"Hilloa!" cried an officer from the galley. "Boats-ahoi!"

"Go on with the hymn," whispered Joe.

"Silence, there, with your bawling," cried the officer again. "You can sing your hymns another time, if it's all the same to you."

The hymn at this moment came naturally to a close, and the last notes of it died away very sweetly on the water.

"Hilloa!" cried the officer again. "Do you hear, stupids?"

"What do you want, sinners?" said Joe the Cracksman, in his capital voice in imitation of the accredited twang of a fanatical preacher. "What do you want, sinners?"

"Sinners be hanged!" said the officer. "I daresay you are as great sinners as other people! But come, now, what do you call yourselves?"

"Lambs of the Fold!"

"Lambs of the Fold? Well, I can't understand a bit of what that means, but if you understand it, it's all right, I daresay. Have you seen any suspicious characters on the river?"

"Do you mean in a spiritual sense, or in a worldly sense?" said Joe, with such admirable gravity, that it was as much as Claude Duval could possibly do to keep himself serious.

"Bother your spiritual senses! I mean suspicious characters. That's what I mean, and surely all the world knows what that is."

"Repent! Repent! Repent!" said Joe. "I hope that you have time all of you, and I hope that you have grace enough left to feel the importance of so using that time, as to listen to me while I hold forth to you in a little discourse that will not occupy more than one hour and three quarters in delivering, and at the end of which, I do think, that you all will become lambs of the fold."

"No, thank you," said the officer. "We would rather not. It ain't at all in our line."

"Yes, but I beg of you to listen."

"Hold your row."

Joe the Cracksman put himself into a capital attitude, and then, in a nasal tone, he began—

"Miserable and benighted sinners, you will all go to the devil—you will all be grilled—"

"Oh, come on," cried the officer. "Pull away, my lads." Don't let us listen to this ranting any more."

The eight oarsmen bent their oars, and the police-galley shot past the three boats full of blackbirds.

"What an escape," said Claude.

"It was an escape," whispered Brand. "I know that officer very well, and I could see by the glance of his eye that at first he had his suspicions; but it was the exquisitely sung hymn, and the admirable acting of your friend Joe the Cracksman there, that completely deceived him."

"Not a doubt of it."

"That fellow throws his talents away by not being upon the stage. Nothing could be better than his tones and his attitudes; and a man who can act one thing well can act another."

"Certainly. I suppose, now, we consider ourselves to be free of your friends in the galley?"

"Oh, yes; it's all right. Nothing but some new circumstance altogether could bring them back, after they have once sheered off in such a way."

"That is not likely to occur?"

"Not at all."



Now, both Claude Duval and the officer were clever men, but it will be seen how they jumped to a conclusion rather too hastily, for a new circumstance did occur to bring back the police-galley.

It so happened that a very indiscreet blackbird, indeed, sat in the hindmost boat, and he, fully believing that the little affair with the police-galley was quite over, and that those on board of her had not cared to look even at the three boats, executed the well-known manœuvre of placing his thumb against the end of his nose and spreading out his fingers fan-like, so as in fact to produce what is called a "sight," in the direction of the police-galley.

Now as nothing could be very well more at variance with the true character of a Lamb of the Fold than to do such a thing as that, even at a boat full of sinners, it had all its effect upon the officer who was in command of the police-galley, and who happened at the moment to be looking from under the rim of his hat precisely in that direction, and so to see the "sight" executed.

The first surprise he had before had that all was not quite right deepened in a moment, and he said a few words to his companions. The result of these words was, that the police-galley tacked about again, and came on in rapid pursuit of the three boats containing the blackbirds.

The "sight" that the indiscreet blackbird made was not seen by any one of his companions, or they would have been at no loss to discover the reason why the police-galley came after them again; but as it was, it merely looked like a piece of caprice.

The man who had brought this danger upon himself and his friends knew well the cause of it, and he felt keenly the consequences of his own indiscretion, although he said nothing, for fear of the vengeance of his comrades.

"What does this mean?" said Claude, as he indicated the police-galley to Brand, just as it turned.

"Ah!" said Brand.

"They are coming back again."

"They are. There will be a brush for it now, I am sorry to say; but something has happened to strengthen the suspicion that they evidently had from the first."

"It is a pity. Joe, do you see the galley?"

"I do, Claude Duval, and I think it's all up now. Blackbirds, look to your arms. If it comes to the worst, it is better to die in a fight, than to go out of the world with the compliments of the Sheriff of London, and a rope round your neck."

"Silence," said Brand, "all of you. It may mean nothing after all; do not be premature in anything you say or do."

The police galley now came on very rapidly, and, although by the time the unfortunate "sight" had been made that induced the pursuit, the three boats had got a considerable distance from it, it was evident that three or four minutes now at the outside would render that distance as nothing, and bring the galley on a level with them.

Truly the situation of Claude and his friends was now most perilous, and nothing but one of those extraordinary incidents which beset the career of such men could by any possibility save them from the consequences of capture by the police in the galley.

## CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

### DETAILS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POLICE-GALLEY.

"I RATHER think," said Dick Turpin, "that we are in for it now."

Jack looked rather pale, but he said nothing, while Duval began to ransack his mind for some device, by the aid of which he could escape from the rather fearful dilemma in which he and his friends were in. There can be but little

doubt that if the fraternity thronging the boats had been at all aware of the indiscretion of one of their number in the "sight" business, they would have taken some extraordinary vengeance upon him ; but as no one had noticed him, and as he was not now likely to call attention to his own folly, he escaped the consequences of it.

Brand had thought it just possible enough that the police galley was upon some other task than that which would bring it close upon the boat in which he and his new friends sat ; but a very few moments, indeed, sufficed to put an end to any such idea. There could not be any reasonable doubt but that the police were overhauling the large wherry.

"Lie too, will you?" cried a loud voice.

"Pull away," said he who took the chief conduct of the boat ; "pull away, now, for your lives."

"It is useless," said Brand. "They have not only more power, but are not half the weight that we are."

"Then we are lost," said Jack.

"I regret to say," added Brand, "that I think you will be all taken, and I only hope that you will avoid bloodshed in this affair."

There was an ominous silence as these words were uttered, and the click of the lock of more than one pistol came upon the ear of the officer.

"Lie too! will you?" cried a voice again.

"For Heaven's sake stop," said Brand. "They will fire into you if you do not, for they are not the most patient of men. I know the officer in command well."

"No—no! All's right."

"Right? What do you mean by right?"

It was the chief of the club who had said all's right, and now he turned and looked Brand in the face as he added, in a low, hissing whisper—

"My friend Brand, you have been so truthful and candid in other things, that I hope you have been so in one that to us is more important than all the others put together."

"What is that?"

"It is regarding that little explosive projectile that we took from you in the old ken."

"Ah!"

"Yes, you understand me now, I feel assured. I ask you as a man to tell me if it really possesses the explosive power you attributed to it?"

"Alas, it does."

"Then we are saved."

"Saved? Why, surely you would not—you could not——"

"Duval?"

"I am here," said Duval ; "what would you have of me?"

"Would you be so kind as to look to Mr. Brand. He is a brave and a bold man, and he has now some scruples as to what I may think proper to do, as we are likely to come to close quarters with the gentlemen in yonder boat. I don't ask you to do him any mischief, but only to prevent him from doing us one."

"I understand," said Claude.

"And so do I," said Brand. "I don't see the use of throwing away my life for nothing, so I must just be a spectator of these proceedings, looking upon myself as a prisoner the while."

"It is a wise determination," said Duval. "No one here, I am sure, has any wish to injure you if it can possibly be avoided."

Brand was silent now, but he looked both sorrowful and anxious, for he saw but too well that a fearful collision was about to ensue between the thieves and the officers in the police-galley.

"Tip them another stave," said the Cracksmán. "Let us sing the ninety-

second hymn, if you please, my brethren, and who knows but it may have some effect even upon the flinty hearts of the Philistines?"

It was not with the best grace in the world that the members of the old ken struck up the hymn now, but it showed what great faith they had in the skill and in the judgment of their leader that they struck it up at all. Probably it prevented the officers in the police-galley from firing at them, by getting up again a doubt in their minds as to the real character of those in the boat.

It will be understood that the thieves, although they had not at all slackened their pace, had not increased it visibly, so that the police galley had to make a stern chase of it, which it is quite understood by all persons, is a long chase; and although they appeared to be quite close to the boat, they took much more time than any one would have supposed to overhaul the fugitives. However, there was time enough to make a few little arrangements consequent upon the altered state of affairs.

The Cracksman, who was evidently so highly thought of by the thieves that they all looked to him in the present emergency for advice and direction what to do, stood in the bow of the boat, and his voice was higher than any one's else's in chaunting the hymn that rose from so many throats, and still puzzled the officers regarding the character of the assemblage in the boat. In his right hand, however, partially enveloped in a handkerchief, he held something concealed.

Brand knew too well what that something was. It was nothing else than the detonating ball or shell with which he had intended to give the alarm while in the ken, and which seemed highly likely to answer a very different purpose, indeed.

"Hilloa!" cried a rough-looking man with a very red face, as he stood up in the police-galley. "Hilloa, you, in the boats there. Stop that canting and singing, and answer me, or I shall be compelled to send a few bullets among you."

The police-galley was now so near, that it would have been the height of indiscretion to refuse to stop, and especially as the hymn had come naturally to an end; so the Cracksman cried out in the same conventicle twang which he had before adopted—

"My brethren, stop, and let us hear what the heathen has got to say to us now."

In a moment the rowers stopped pulling, and all eyes were turned upon the police-galley as it came right alongside, and a man in the bow of it put out a boat-hook, and grappled the other craft by the larboard quarter of it.

"Well, friend," said Joe the Cracksman, "what is it now?"

"Why, hilloa!" shouted the man with the red face, "if there isn't Brand!"

"Yes," cried Brand, in a tone of desperation. "My life, I know, is lost by what I say: but I am a prisoner, and these are your men that you want."

These words were hardly out of Brand's mouth, when Duval presented the pistol that he had in his right hand at his head, and placed his finger upon the trigger.

"Fire away," said Brand. "I expect it."

"No, by Heaven," said Claude, "I cannot. You are a brave fellow, and have only done what I should have done myself in your situation."

"I have done my duty," said Brand.

Duval lowered the pistol.

"You shall not die by my hand, Brand," he said. "It would be murder."

"By Heaven, I am sorry I spoke," said Brand, and then he let his head droop upon his breast, and would not look up.

"Surrender, all of you!" shouted the red-faced man from the police-galley. "Surrender at once, or, by all that's good, I'll sink you, and send every man of you to the devil."

"Friend," said Joe the Cracksman, "you don't call that good, do you?"

"Fire at that fellow!"

Bang, went a pistol, and the bullet whizzed past the head of Joe, who instantly cried—

“Blaze away—blaze away! They will have it.”

Some half dozen shots were fired upon either side, now and then, and the cries of several who were wounded arose above the oaths and execrations of the others. It was quite a mimic naval engagement, and the folks upon the banks of the Thames must have been not a little amazed to see what was going on.

But this unequal fight was not to last beyond the moment. Suddenly there was a tremendous report, as if a cannon had gone off. A cloud of black smoke rose up in the morning air. There was one fearful shriek, and then all was still. A puff of cold wind blew the smoke aside, and the police-galley was gone.

“Pull away,” said Joe the Cracksman, “pull away, and we will sing the two hundred and twenty third hymn, my brethren, commencing with the line]

‘Let us love all human kind.’”

Those who had been rowing bent to their oars again, and about half-a-dozen voices struck up the hymn. Some who had been wounded by the fire-arms of the officers, lay at the bottom of the boat groaning, and two had ceased to groan any more in this world, for they had bidden it adieu, their wounds having proved immediately fatal.

Brand the officer heard the stunning report, but he did not move from the attitude he had assumed. He only slightly swayed to and fro, like a man in a state of great mental agony.

Duval was rather astonished at the extraordinary change that had taken place in the aspect of affairs, and although he was at a loss to account for what had happened, he could not help looking at Dick and Jack with an air of much more interest and excitement, than any ordinary circumstances could induce in him.

## CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

### THE CHALK LANE AT GRAVESEND.

THAT it was the fearful detonating shell which had done so much mischief in the police-galley, all the thieves were well aware, for they had seen it in the hands of Joe the Cracksman, and they had fully guessed to what use he intended to put it. Probably they had hardly thought that the effect of it would have been so stupendous as it was.

The fact is, that Joe the Cracksman had cast the shell with all his force into the galley, and in its explosion it had knocked the bottom out of the boat, and so confounded the police by the concussion, and the volume of thick, choking, blinding smoke that came from it, that they had not been able to take any steps for their own safety, and they had perished to a man. This wholesale mode of disposing of the police was rather shocking to Duval and his friends, and the looks they exchanged were quite translatable into the fact that they wished themselves out of the present company as soon as possible.

Joe the Cracksman saw their looks, and when the second hymn was over, he spoke to Claude—

“You don’t like this sort of thing, Duval; neither do I; but let me ask you what else there was to do?”

“Nothing,” said Duval. “Do not let me for one moment be thought to cast any censure upon you for what you have done. When men play at the sort of game we do with the officers, the penalty for the loss of which is death, we may as well do our best to win.”

“Just so,” said Joe the Cracksman; “it comes to this, that they would have killed us if we had not killed them; and for my own part, I prefer the latter course by a great deal.”

“And so do I.”

“So do we all!” cried some half-dozen of the thieves.

"What's to be done now?" asked Dick. "Of course this affair has been seen from the shore. Would it not be safer now to run in somewhere, and leave the boats?"

"Not yet," said Joe; "not yet."

"I defer to you entirely in the matter," said Dick, "and feel quite sure that you will decide correctly."

"And so do I," said Duval.

Jack, too, intimated his acquiescence in this feeling likewise, and then Joe the Cracksmen, finding that he was duly elected the commander-in-chief of the expedition, spoke firmly.

"I recommend," he said, "that we push right on for Gravesend."

The nods of his companions showed that they thought this a good and wise determination.

"The fact is," added Joe, "that we have safe quarters at Gravesend. We know where to go. There are landing places there that are only known to our fraternity, and this affair, I feel confident, will make such a noise that it will be weeks before we dare show our faces again."

"I hope it will not be so long," said Dick, "before we are on the road once more."

"Well," said Joe, "of course, you can do as you like, all of you, but we have hiding-places among the old abandoned——"

"Hush!" said one, and he pointed significantly to Brand.

Joe bit his lips and uttered a not very complimentary exclamation upon his own forgetfulness of the fact of the officer's presence in the boat, and the stillness that succeeded was only broken by the roll of the oars in the rowlocks, and the wash of the water past the sides of the boat, as it sped along at a good rate.

Brand could not possibly be off knowing and feeling that some reference was being made to him, by the abrupt manner in which the council of war, as it might be called, had terminated. He looked up and saw some dozen pairs of eyes scowling at him.

After looking from one to the other for a few moments, and finding little else than threatening aspects bent upon him, Brand spoke, saying in a much calmer and bolder tone than most men could have assumed, in his position—

"I know that you dread what I may do and what I may say, but you should all of you recollect that I have kept my word with you, and given you all the information that I had. You have overcome your foes in a complete and frightful manner, and I think that now you might put me on shore somewhere, and so get rid of me."

"There are other ways of getting rid of people than putting them on shore," growled one of the thieves.

"Would you murder me?"

"No," cried Duval. "That cannot be done. It would be a murder in cold blood, and nothing but a murder. I hope that there is no man here who would stoop to such an act."

The silence that followed this bold avowal of an opinion was sufficiently expressive of the fact, that it was not exactly tasteful to the majority, and from that moment Duval feared for the life of Brand.

The officer himself was evidently of the same opinion, but yet he managed to carry the idea off in a way that showed the indomitable courage of the man, and that he would do all that was possible for his life.

"I wait your answer," he said. "Whatever crimes may be laid to your charge, I don't think you will be inclined to add to them want of faith with one who trusted you."

"Oh, we will talk of all that when we get to Gravesend," said Joe.

"Very good, gentlemen. I am, of course, as regards the time and mode of my liberation, quite at your disposal."

"But it is understood, let me hope," said Duval, "that no harm is to be done Mr. Brand?—for, as he truly says, he has kept faith with us."



"How do you make that out?" growled one of the thieves. "Didn't he call out to the boat's crew that we were the men they wanted?"

"He did; but you, if you had been in the same situation, would have done the same thing, but for one little circumstance."

"And what's that?"

"Just that, judging from your thirst for blood, it is doubtful to me if you would have had the courage."

"What, do you doubt my courage? Blood and fury, the man who doubts my courage is—is——"

"What?"

"Nothing. Never mind. It don't become me to call names. I treat such aspersions with the contempt they deserve. Doubt my courage, indeed! That is a good one!"

The other blackbirds only laughed at this.

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## CHAPTER CCLXXV.

### CLAUDE AND HIS COMPANIONS SAVE BRAND'S LIFE.

THE tone in which Joe had said that it would be at Gravesend that they would talk further about the liberation of Brand, was one that was so decisive, that there could be no doubt of his fully meaning it. Claude did not think it wise to say anything more just then upon the subject, or to press his advocacy for Brand too far.

From the looks, however, that Duval exchanged with Dick and Jack, he saw that they were fully of his mind, and that they would aid him by force, if necessary, in saving Brand from death. It would appear, too, that the officer was not himself backward himself in noticing these friendly indications, for he watched his opportunity, and when he thought no one observed him, he took Duval's hand in his, and gave it a friendly pressure, which Duval returned, for there was something touching in the situation of that man now, surrounded as he was by foes, appealing to him, Claude, as his only friend.

It must not be supposed that during this time the rowers has been idle. On the contrary, the boats had been impelled through the water at considerable speed, and had got a long way from the spot of encounter with the police-galley.

One of the blackbirds spoke to Joe in a surly tone.

"Bill is gone," he said, "and so is Job."

"What do you mean?"

"Dead as mutton, that's all."

"Ah, is it so? Poor fellows! Well, it can't be helped. Is any one else baldly hurt?"

"No—no!" said several voices.

These words called Duval's attention to the fact that there were two dead bodies lying in the bottom of the boat. The pistol shots from the officers had done more execution than he had thought.

"Well," said Joe, "it won't do to go to shore with such witnesses of having had a brush with the police, as these two bodies would be; so, over they must go. The Thames is as good a family vault as any of us are likely to have."

"Are you sure they are dead?" said Jack.

"Lor, yes," said one of the thieves. "They is stiff 'uns, and no sort o' mistake, I can tell you."

"Over with them, then," said another.

"Stop a bit," said Joe the Cracksman. "Let me take a good look about us first."

He glanced carefully all round, and finding that no other craft was sufficiently near to take notice of what they were about, he said—

“Yes, over with them. All's right.”

It will be recollected that at that time the Thames was not, by any means, such a crowded highway as it is now. There were no steamboats, and a wherry



THE BLACKBIRDS THROWING OVER THE DEAD BODIES INTO THE THAMES.

might go gliding along for a long distance upon the quiet bosom of the stream without meeting another; nor were the banks of the river near so populous as they are at present, when not a square inch is unoccupied. Under these circumstances, then, it was not a difficult thing to throw the corpses of the two men overboard without exciting any attention.

Those who were rowing rested for a moment or two upon their oars, and the others dragged up one of the dead bodies from among their feet, and sent it over with a sullen plunge.

"Good day," said a voice.

"Silence!" said Joe. "This is no time for joking. Over with the other. That will do. Now pull away, comrades, and forget the past, except so far as it may do us good for the future."

The two dead bodies slowly sunk, and the muddy water rolled over all that remained of those two men, who, but half an hour before, were engaged in jesting and laughing, as though their tenure of life were eternal.

As if, too, by a sort of retributive justice, one of the men was he who had made the "sight," and brought the police-galley upon them; and so, by that trifling, ridiculous, and heedless action, he had not only lost his own life, but he had hurried into eternity more than a dozen fellow creatures.

Such are the great events that occur in this world from trivialities, that bear no sort of comparison with their results.

"Now," said Joe, "the sooner we see Gravesend the better, for there will be a hot pursuit, I can tell you, within the next hour or so. Give me an oar, and I will have a pull at it. Keep in to the shore, and we shall be out of the current, which is adverse to us at this bend of the river."

The thieves now worked away with right good will, and although the boat was rather heavily loaded, it shot through the water at good speed, and in another hour they were within sight of the rough, straggling coast of Gravesend.

Joe gave his directions to his friends in an undertone, and from the route of the boat now, it was evidently not his intention to go to any of the regular landing-places by the town, but to run on shore at some unfrequented spot. There could be no part of the banks of the Thames that at that time presented greater facilities for such a manœuvre than the bit of coast close to Gravesend.

There is still to this day the corner of the lane, abutting upon the river, at which the blackbirds landed, along with Claude Duval and his companions. A few of the most miserable cottages that can very well be imagined stood at the entrance of it, and extended for about a couple of hundred feet up the lane. These cottages are in the same state now that they were sixty years ago, and are apparently in the occupation of the very poorest of the laundress class.

What other hidden and mysterious modes the inhabitants of those pestiferous little dens have of obtaining a livelihood, Heaven only knows; but their appearance is of the most squalid character that can be possibly conceived.

When the boats touched the shore, Joe the Cracksmán sprang out on to the straggling, chalky beach, if it may be called such, and then he called out—

"Hand me Mr. Brand."

From this little circumstance alone it was tolerably evident that it was considered to be a great point to keep Brand a prisoner in perfect safety, and Claude Duval had his suspicions that all would not go so well as he would wish with the officer.

Brand was of the same opinion, and from the glance he cast at Duval, seemed to say—"I look to you and to your friends for safety!" Duval nodded in answer to that glance, and Brand looked satisfied. Whether he felt so or no was quite another affair.

"Now, Mr. Brand," said Joe, "a bullet always hits a man at speed, so I should advise you to remain with us quietly."

"I have no intention to try to escape by running," said Brand.

"That's right."

"I don't see that I have anything to gain by such a course."

"Why, no, of course you haven't. You have, on the contrary, everything to lose."

"So I suppose, for it is hardly likely that you or your friends would be so cowardly as to take my life."

Joe looked at him, and then commenced whistling, as he pretended to be watching the disembarkation of the blackbirds.

A couple of dirty, squa id-looking children came from the lane and looked on in amazement, for it was not often that any boat put in at that not very tempting spot.

"Be off with you," cried Joe, to them, "or I will smash you."

This was quite an intelligible threat to the children, who, no doubt, were used to all sorts of violence, and they at once, at top-speed, made their way into the first of the little cottages that they came to.

"What's to be done with the boats?" said one.

"Send them adrift," said Joe the Cracksman.

## CHAPTER CCLXXVI.

SHOWS HOW THE ROBBERS TRIED TO DECEIVE CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS.

"THIS way," said Joe, and he led the way up the lane: he had previously given some whispered orders to two of his companions, who, from that moment, attached themselves to Brand the officer, one walking on one side of him and one on the other, so that it was quite out of the question his giving the blackbirds the slip, even if he had had any intention so to do.

Joe walked up to Duval, and began a whispered conversation with him.

"Well, Master Claude," he said, "I think we may take upon ourselves to say that we are all safe, now."

"I am glad to hear that."

"I knew you would be, for the sake of others more than yourself. That was a capital move that sinking of the boat, with the officers in it, by the very means they had thought they should ensure our capture with."

"It was a sad necessity."

"Oh, yes—yes, sad enough. It's one of my principles to never do mischief till you can't help it; but when you do do it, take care that it is quite effectual."

"Not a bad principle, Joe."

"No, I should think not. By the bye, did one of our fellows let you know where your cattle were?"

"He did. I have in my pocket a note of the place. The horses are in the city, and, in fact, they are put up at a stable in the Old Bailey, as nearly opposite the gate of Newgate as possible."

"Humph! Rather an awkward place."

"A little; but I am not going to abandon my horse because he happensto be in an awkward place."

"Certainly not. Any one who knows anything of you can safely enough swear to that; and, between you and me, you can't do better than get them as soon as possible, for one good reason."

"There is not much reason wanted, beyond my own wish to be mounted and upon the road again."

"Yes; but there is another reason for expedition, and that is, that as your escape, by the next few hours, will be spread all over London, it is just possible that the officers, knowing what sort of person you are, will remove your horse to some other place, where it will be in greater safety."

This was a possibility that had not struck Claude Duval; but now that it was proposed to his consideration, it had all its effect upon his mind, and he looked rather anxious.

"You understand me?" said Joe.

"Too well. Dick, where are you?"

Both Dick and Jack were close at hand; and now when Claude turned towards

them, they stepped up to him and Joe, upon which he told them the state of affairs, and added—

“I think that we can't do better than get to London as quickly as we can, and make some attempt to secure our cattle.”

“In daylight?” said Jack.

“It is daylight, indeed, now,” said Claude, looking about him. “It is very awkward, to be sure.”

“I fear,” said Dick, “that we must wait till night before we set about it. Where are the horses, Claude?”

“In the Old Bailey, at the old Angel Yard, just opposite the regular entrance.”

Dick perpetrated a long whistle as he got this, to tell the truth, rather startling intelligence, and Jack looked rather aghast.

“I hope,” said Claude, “you neither of you see anything in that circumstance to lead to the conclusion that we are to lose our horses?”

“Why, no, confound it, that would be a pity.”

“Such a pity,” added Claude, “that I feel inclined to run some risk to prevent it; so, if the cattle were in the prison itself, I would make an attempt to get them out.”

“I believe you would,” said Dick.

“And I am sure he would,” said Jack. “He is fool-hardy enough for anything. My advice may not be palatable, I daresay, but I give it against making any attempt for the horses while they are in their present situation. They won't be killed, and it is ridiculous to suppose that they will be always kept in the Old Bailey; so there are sure to be plenty of better opportunities for getting hold of them than the present one.”

“I don't deny the truth of what you say, Jack,” said Claude, “but what are we to do, my good friends, in the meantime?”

“Oh, we shall live somehow.”

“Well, I don't desire the assistance of any one upon this enterprise, if they don't like it; of course, if a man thinks any particular expedition a fool-hardy thing, I can't expect him to patronise it with his presence; so I shall go alone.”

“No,” said Dick, “I am with you.”

“And do you think,” said Jack, “that I would let you go alone? No, Claude, I may have my own ideas of the affair, and I may be right or I may be wrong; but I do not know that I have, as yet, shrunk from going where you chose to lead.”

“Never, Jack; and, what is more, I will take upon myself to say that you never will.”

“Then,” said Joe the Cracksman, “the very best thing you can all do is to go at once to London and make your arrangements. You can get into the high-road by passing right through this lane and turning to your right, and you will be sure to find some sort of conveyance to the metropolis.”

“But I thought,” said Jack, “you had some hiding-places here?”

“We have.”

“Then I am decidedly of opinion that the best thing we can do is to stay in it till night. We are twenty miles off London, it is true, but that is not such a very serious distance, even if we had to walk it, which is not very likely, as we should get a lift on the road in some sort of conveyance, without a doubt. But till night, if I were you, Claude, I would remain; for if we go to London now, we must hide somewhere, and if that is to be the case, why not hide here?”

“You speak reasonably, Jack,” said Claude; “be it so, provided our friends the blackbirds have no objection.”

“Objection! How can we?” said Joe. “Are you not one of us?”

It was quite impossible, under the circumstances, for Joe to make any other kind of reply; but yet it is difficult for a man to conceal wholly those nice shades in his tone and manner which enables another to see that he is consenting to something with a bad grace; and Claude and his friends could not but suspect that Joe wished them away. The question then arose in Claude's mind of “Why did



he so wish them away?" and to that he could not at the present find a ready answer.

"Then that is quite settled," said Dick, "that we remain here till nightfall again, is it?"

"Quite," said Claude.

Joe the Cracksman, upon this, rather abruptly quitted the side of Claude Duval, and made his way to his own more immediate friends and comrades. As he went on he said something to each of the blackbirds whom he met, and they in general replied to him by a nod; but what that something was, neither Duval nor his friends had any means of knowing.

"I only wish I felt quite sure," said Jack, in a whisper, "of the good faith of that fellow."

"Do you doubt him?" said Claude.

"Indeed I do. His conduct is, to say the least of it, rather extraordinary and suspicious, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps I do, Jack, but not in the way that you mean. I believe thoroughly and entirely in his good faith to us."

"Then that alters the case."

"I think you understand me, Dick, and that you, Jack, will understand me likewise when I say that the apparent odd conduct of Joe the Cracksman does not arise from any want of faith towards us, but from want of faith to another who is in danger."

"Ah!" said Jack, "you mean Brand?"

"I do."

"You are right there, Claude, by Jove; and I would wager a thousand pounds to a sixpence that they want to hill him."

"Heaven forbid," said Claude. "It would be a dastardly act, and, what is more, it shall not be done. If they take his life, they shall first dispose of mine."

"And mine! And mine!" said Dick and Jack.

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## CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

### A NIGHT OF PERIL AND ADVENTURE.

WITHOUT a doubt, the officer, Brand, thought that Claude Duval and his two friends would protect him to some degree; but it is hardly to be supposed that he imagined they would go so far as to fight for him. Such, however, was the intention of Duval and his friends.

The officer was evidently uneasy, for he saw how strictly guarded he was, and the looks of some of the blackbirds about him were certainly not very pleasant or assuring. Ever and anon he sought the eye of Duval to give him assurance that he had yet a friend, and as often as he did so, Claude nodded to him, so as to reassure him and convince him that such was the case.

What a miserable state of mind Brand must have been in during all the time that he was in such very unusual company, for him, with the dread continually pressing upon him that he would never be able to leave that company a living man.

But now Joe the Cracksman had apoken a word or two to almost every one of the blackbirds, and he made his way up to Claude again, assuming as he did so as easy and unconstrained an air as he could, as though there was no hidden motive upon his mind.

"Duval," he said, "our hiding-place is close at hand."

"So I imagined."

"It will be very useful to you to know it, for if you should be ever hard pressed,

and within a few miles of this spot, you will be able to avail yourself of it, and once within it, you may almost defy the efforts of the police to seize you."

"Indeed?"

"Ah, I see you are incredulous, but I shall soon have the pleasure of convincing you that all is right."

Duval had looked about him, and for the life of him he could not devise where the hiding-place could be.

It will be proper now briefly to describe the place that he and his friends and the blackbirds were in. We have already said that the place which they had chosen to land at was the commencement of a lane that was at right angles to the river.

The fact was, that all that part of the coast had been extensively worked as chalk pits. It had at one time been a precipitous cliff of chalk, rising some two hundred feet from the edge of the water, something like the cliffs that so profusely and so majestically terminate the coast of Kent, some fifty miles further on than Gravesend. These chalk pits, thus lying so near to London, had been very profitably worked, and immense pits, where the chalk had been taken from, were in all directions; and in some places the solid face of the cliff had been taken down, and the pit had changed its character, and looked more like an immense cavern opening to the river.

For the convenience of getting the chalk to the immediate bank of the Thames, various cuttings had been made in the shape of lanes, right through the cliff, beginning at its base close to the river and terminating upon the bleak and barren loam, which supported a scanty crop of grass and nettles, at its summit. Of course, these cuttings were slanting, having just as much incline as would enable horses to ascend them without too much fatigue; and, as a consequence, they had to be of considerable length.

Time had done much in the way of picturesquely adorning these cuttings with vegetation. The naked chalk cliff for years had on each side raised itself like a solid white wall merely, but in the course of time weeds had sprung out of crevices; and as a little loam had, by rains and storms, been washed down the face of the chalk, a goodly crop of weeds had found root.

Here and there, too, from the roots of old tree that had been cut through, there sprung up young saplings; so that a space of twenty years made the bare, bleak, barren-looking chalk cutting, an umbrageous lane, the thick vegetation of which almost hid its sides, and frequently closed over head, to the almost total exclusion of the daylight.

Such, then, was the place in which the blackbirds were upon this most memorable occasion.

It did not seem as if, beyond the place being rather dark at all times, and every now and then sides of great height, that there was any extraordinary facilities for hiding; but there were such.

Joe observed that Duval looked curiously around him, and he said with a smile—

"Well, Claude Duval, have you found out our hiding-place?"

"No."

"Nor will you, I think; but come, it is time we took possession of it, for we don't know how soon the Philistines may be after us."

"There is danger, certainly," said Claude Duval.

"Yes, much. Hilloa! Blackbirds, are the scouts all right at the top of the lane?"

"All right, Joe," cried a voice.

"Do you place sentinels?" said Claude.

"We do. A couple of our number are at the top of this cutting in the old chalk cliff, and a couple at the commencement of it by the cottages. They will whistle us an alarm should any one attempt to come either way."

"But it is a regular path."

"It is, and yet days will pass before any one comes up it or down it, and upon the present occasion it won't be very pleasant for any one to attempt to do either."

"Well, where is your hiding-place?"

"I will tell you first, and then I will show you. To the left of this lane there is one of the oldest of the abandoned chalk-pits, and about twenty feet upon the face of the wall of chalk in the midst of the old weeds, and the blackberry bushes, and the tall thistles that all but choke up its entrance, there is a narrow slanting opening that leads right through the wall into the pit."

"Ah, I understand it now."

"Of course you do; but it requires a little nerve and a little dexterity to descend into the old excavation. Some folks would go head first, perhaps."

Claude smiled.

"But that is not our way. All you have to do is to place your feet in, and place your arms over your head, and you will slide down all the way as comfortably as possible. On the floor of the pit where you will alight, there is a truss or two of hay and straw, and the incline of the narrow passage is such that you reach within six feet of the ground, and alight upon it in perfect safety."

"So I should think; but how do you get out of the old gravel pit again? You do not ascend the hole in the wall?"

"No. There is another orifice that leads from there into the lane again in the same way, so that as we stand here as in the pit, there are two hollows crossing each other."

"I understand."

"That will do. The sooner we avail ourselves of the accommodation on the other side the better."

"Yes, but——"

"What would you say, Duval?"

"Do you mean to show Brand the secret?"

"Yes."

"Would it not be a wiser plan to let him go now at once, before he knows too much?"

"He knows too much already. Do not bother yourself about him, Duval. That part of the affair will all come straight enough, I warrant you. Come along. Let us ascend the cliff. There are some old footholds in the precipitous sides, which you will soon see when once you begin the ascent. Come—come."

Duval followed Joe the Cracksman; but as he did so, he said to himself—

"I will not have Brand murdered, though, for all that."

## CHAPTER CCLXXVIII.

### CONDUCTS THE FRIENDS TO THE THIEVES' HAUNT.

Joe the Cracksman ascended first the face of the cliff, and Claude Duval followed him. It was no part of Joe's intention, though, to be the first to descend through the little hole in the chalk. He went to a small ledge about five feet above it, and pointed it out to Duval.

"Do you see it?"

"I do see what I suppose is it."

"All's right."

"It may be all right, and I dare say it is; but it looks for all the world like getting down somebody's chimney."

"Yes, it has that look, I grant you; but it is amazingly comfortable when once you are in it."

"Umph!"

"Now, blackbirds, time and tide wait for no man. Let us be off while we may. Who'll go first down the flue?"

"Oh, I will," said a rather surly-looking fellow.

"That's the ticket. You are a good weight, and if there should be any obstacle, you are just the sort of fellow to clear it away for us. Mind how you go, now; good folks are scarce, o'd fellow."

"Oh, none o' your gammon," said the man, as he thrust his feet into the hole in the side of the cliff. "None o' your blessed gammon, Mr. Joe, if yer pleases Good mornin'."

The man clasped his hands over his head, and as he said, in his own classical vernacular, "good mornin'," away he went out of sight in a moment through the hole in the wall.

It looked a perilous and most uncomfortable thing to slide out of sight in such a fashion through that narrow opening in the cliff, which certainly was not so wide as to leave a tolerably bulky person a couple of inches of room to spare.

Joe the Cracksman laughed at the expression of Duval's face.

"He is all right enough, I dare say," he said.

"So do I," replied Duval; "but it is not pleasant"

"Hilloa!" said Joe, with his mouth to the opening.

"All's right," replied the man who had descended, and the voice came up through the shaft in strange, hollow tones and echoes.

"There, you see," said Joe, "he is in the pit now."

"I wish I was," said Claude, with a smile.

"Will you go now?"

"Not just yet. Wait a bit; I will see some more of the blackbirds make the descent, for it is rather curious to observe them disappear in such a fashion from the daylight."

By this time, Jack and Dick were upon the same ledge with Claude Duval and Joe the Cracksman; but they had not seen any one make the descent yet. The blackbirds, however, now began very rapidly to do so, and the "All's right" that came sounding up as each one reached the pit in safety, sounded like a voice from the infernal regions.

After more than half of them had disappeared, Joe called out in a rather odd tone of voice—

"Mr. Brand."

"I am here," said the officer.

"You have seen what has been going on here, Mr. Brand, so I will now trouble you to do so likewise. You may descend with perfect safety. Hilloa in the pit there!"

"Ay, ay!" said a voice.

"Brand is coming."

"All's right."

"Now, Mr. Brand, if you please. They will take care of you in the pit, as you are not used to this mode of descending. All you have to be careful of is, not to stick out your toes or your elbows; you will slide, then, along the chalk like a lump of butter on a hot plate."

Some of the blackbirds set up a laugh at this little joke, but Brand did not seem to think the affair, take it for all in all, was any laughing matter at all, and he spoke seriously, and yet he spoke in a manly way, without exhibiting any signs of fear.

"I address myself to you all," he said, "and I appeal to you all if I have not kept my word with you. It was an understood thing that I was to be released as soon as it could be done consistently with your safety. Surely that time has now come—I do not want to know any of your secrets. You might have dispensed with my presence before this had it so pleased you, and I can only say that it would have pleased me very well if you had done so. What on earth now can be the use of me accompanying you to your haunts?"

"That's not the question, Mr. Brand," said Joe. "Here is the hole in the wall, and it is my particular request that down you go."

Joe looked angry, and the blackbirds looked excited.

"I will speak," added Duval, "and I care nothing for the black looks of any man. I say that the officer ought to have been released before now. Surely, I and my two friends here have as great a stake in this affair as any of you; our safety and our lives are as precious to us as your own, and we are all three of the same mind, namely, that Brand ought to have been let go before, but not having been so let go, it is full time to do it now."



JOE, THE CRACKSMAN, COMMANDS BRAND TO DESCEND INTO THE CHALK-PIT.

"No—no!"

"Who says no?"

"I do," said Joe the Cracksman. "I suppose I may presume to have an opinion, although Claude Duval is here?"

"I don't know what you mean about having an opinion," said Claude.



“Right and wrong are scarcely matters of opinion, and in this case, in particular, it is a matter of fact that the officer was promised his freedom, and upon the strength of that promise he made to us all certain disclosures.”

“No!” said a voice.

“I say yes, and that those certain disclosures saved us all.”

“No!” said the voice again.

“Whoever says no to that, lies,” said Claude Duval.

“Don’t call me a liar,” said a burly-looking ruffian, “or I’ll mark it down against you in my memorandum book.”

“If you will have the goodness to come up here,” said Claude, “and show me any such book in which you keep the record of revenges you are too cowardly to pay off at once, I will cram it down your throat and make you swallow it, as sure as you are a living man.”

The blackbirds rather laughed at this, but the man who had provoked such a speech from Duval thought that it was just as well not to put him to the proof of his words, so he remained where he was.

“If Claude Duval has said all he has to say,” remarked Joe, carelessly, “I will speak.”

“I have finished,” said Claude.

“Very well. Then all I have to say is, that I differ very much in opinion with him, and that I think that Mr. Brand, the officer, ought to be detained some time longer. I will not take upon myself to say how long; that will depend entirely upon circumstances.”

“What is to be done, then?” said Dick.

“What we always do,” added Joe, “when there is a difference of opinion among us, and what I humbly suppose you will think reasonable enough, which is to put it to a show of hands. We are all blackbirds, and no doubt we all mean what’s right by each other—it would be a hard thing if we did not; so I propose that it be put at once to the vote whether Mr. Brand be liberated now, or kept a little longer with us. Do you object to that, Claude Duval?”

“I cannot object to it.”

“Very well. Blackbirds, you understand the question. As many of you as wish Brand to go at once, hold up one hand.”

There were only three hands held up, namely Claude’s, Dick’s, and Jack’s.

“On the contrary.”

All the blackbirds held up their hands.

“Mr Brand,” said Joe, with all the coolness in life, “I will trouble you to descend through the flue, if you please. Turn in your toes and keep your elbows straight as you go down.”

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## CHAPTER CCLXXIX.

### THE EXECUTION IN THE OLD CHALK PIT.

BRAND looked amazed at this mode of settling the question, and Claude Duval felt that it placed him in such an awkward position, that there was really no help for it but to acquiesce in the arrangement. The taking the vote was so specious a mode of getting out of the difficulty, that for the time being he was puzzled to know what to say.

Brand looked at him imploringly:

“I think you must descend,” said Claude.

“If you say I must, I must.”

“Stop a bit. I will go first, I think; and you Dick, and you, Jack, will follow Mr. Brand.”

“We will.”

There was just the ghost of a smile upon the face of Joe the Cracksman for a

moment, as Claude spoke and adopted such an arrangement. He knew perfectly well that Duval had his doubts as to the sort of reception which Brand would get in the pit when he should descend.

Just as he was then preparing to go down himself, Jack laid his hand upon his, Claude's, shoulder, saying—

"Stop a moment, Duval. It will be just as well to let our dear friends in the pit know that it is not Brand that is coming, but you."

"So it will."

Claude had not thought of that. If Brand was to encounter any immediate danger upon effecting his descent, it might, in the hurry of the moment, fall upon him, Claude; so he turned to Joe as he said—

"Will you be so good as to say who is coming?"

"With pleasure; but you are not correct in your surmises. There is no foul play meditated. I will not pretend to be so blind as not to understand perfectly what you mean."

"Nor will I," said Duval, "be so unwise as to deny it; but I will take your word that all is right."

"You may."

"Heregoes, then."

Despite of everything in the shape of warning that Jack began to say, Claude Duval allowed himself to go through the opening in the side of the cliff. It was a very odd sensation so to shoot out of the daylight into such a narrow and gloomy place, and if the transit had not been very rapid, it would have been almost intolerable. As it was, it did not last anything like half a minute, and then Duval let his feet sink into some hay and straw, and opening his eyes, he found himself flying on his back in the daylight again.

"Hilloa! is it you?" said a voice.

"Yes," said Claude. "Here I am."

He scrambled to his feet and looked about him with surprise and pleasure, for he found himself in one of the most picturesque-looking spots that he had ever beheld, and one which he little expected ever to be found so close to London as it was.

The chalk pit was of considerable extent, and the rugged sides of it rose up to a height of upwards of one hundred and fifty feet around it. The bottom of it was one mass of vegetation, and trailing weeds depended from the sides in the most picturesque confusion. There was a sombre calm, too, over the whole place, which lent it quite a mysterious air.

"This is the blackbirds' nest," said one. "How do you like it?"

"I think it charming."

"That's a good job, for it shows that you think with us; for to tell the truth, we all think it charming."

"It merits the title. Why it is an abode fit for a prince. I must say that I never saw a spot that I liked better. If I was to go about picking and choosing for a retreat, this is the very one I should hit upon, I assure you. It has many advantages."

"A few."

"Not a few, to my judgment. And now show me the way you get out of it, if you please."

"It's quite impossible for any one to get out of it," said the man, "unless he happens to know the secret. To climb the face of the excavation looks an easy thing, but far from being that, it is quite impossible. There are some little rivulets from the high ground above, that keep the chalk wet; and it is so confoundedly slippery, that no one can possibly keep a foothold upon it for a moment."

"I should think not."

"It has been tried, and all have failed at that kind of fun; but you see that clump of thistles about twenty-feet up above you?"

"I do."

"Well, there are steps to that spot from here, just the same as there are to the hole in the wall on the other side in the lane; and when you are up there, you will find just such another opening, into which you go in the same way, and it brings you out among the old weeds in an obscure corner in the lane, as safe as possible."

"Thank you for the information," said Duval. "I shall not forget it."

"You can't very well, when once you know it. And when once the officers find it out, why, the sooner the old chalk pit is blown in the better, for it will be of no further use to the family, I take it, after that."

"Hilloa!" said a voice that sounded as if it were miles off, in the centre of the earth. It made Claude start round with surprise.

"That's Joe calling through the flue," said one of the blackbirds, as he stooped close down to the little opening through which Claude Duval had so recently only emerged, and cried in answer—

"Hilloa, above there!"

"Brand's coming."

"All right."

The blackbird stepped aside, and in another moment the officer appeared from the opening, and fell upon the hay and straw there collected: he immediately, however, sprang to his feet, looking rather scared at this mode of transit from the lane to the chalk pit.

"All's safe," said Duval.

"Oh, yes," said Brand, "so long as I can hear your voice, I do think all is safe, indeed.—It was much against my will that I came here."

"Oh, never mind that," said one of the blackbirds, "you will not regret it, I can tell you."

Brand was silent. Probably he detected the double meaning that lurked under that speech, and felt that, without imprudence, he could not make a reply to it.

Duval looked at him.

"Well," added the blackbird, "it's all right."

"Oh, yes," said Brand, "there can be no doubt in the world about it's being all right, can there, Mr. Duval?"

"There shall be no doubt," said Claude, and the words as well as the manner in which they were spoken seemed to have the effect of very much reassuring the officer, who managed to creep still closer to Claude Duval, feeling, as no doubt he did, that he was his staunch friend.

In the course of the next few minutes, both Jack and Dick had descended the curious little tunnel into the chalk pit. The remainder of the blackbirds followed in rapid succession, and last of all came Joe the Cracksman himself.

"Here we are," said Joe, with a forced kind of jocularly, "here we are, all of us, as snug and as comfortable as we can possibly be. Why, Duval, don't you think you might stand a siege in this place?"

Claude shook his head.

"Why, what's the matter with it?"

"Nothing at all; but as for a siege in it, that would be rather awkward if the enemy got upon the heights and took a fancy to pepper us with a few bullets."

"Oh, that can't happen. There is a space of fifty feet, if there's a bit, between the brink of the pit above there, and the high road, so that there is no sort of likelihood of our being seen by any one. But we won't deal in possibilities, nor bespeak danger. We have found this a good shelter before, and we shall find it a good one again, no doubt."

"It is my fervent hope that you will," said Claude; "and I don't know how you may feel, but for my part, something in the shape of a breakfast would not be the worst thing in the world."

"I have been thinking of that. Who will volunteer to go to Gravesend and get some victuals and drink for the lot?"

"I—I—I!" cried several voices.

"Very well; settle it among yourselves; only two of you are quite enough."

Here's money. You must keep a sharp eye about you that no one follows you, my men."

The blackbirds promised to do that, and departed on their errand. Jack and Dick were as much pleased with the aspect of the old chalk pit, as Claude had been, and was still. They could hardly have conceived it possible that so thoroughly romantic a region could be found in such a place; but there it was, with all its rich and extraordinary vegetation before their eyes; and if they had not been disturbed in their minds by various considerations, they would greatly have enjoyed the beauties of the place.

That mental distraction that they felt, the reader will, no doubt, attribute to its right cause, namely, an increasing anxiety regarding the probable fate of Brand the officer. The blackbirds were in numbers quite sufficient to have insisted, in defiance of Claude Duval and his two friends, upon the sacrifice of that unfortunate man; but it would seem as if they had a lurking dread of so cold-blooded a deed; for although, as the sequel sufficiently proved, it was all along determined upon, they would much rather have got rid of Claude and his associates before putting the sentence into execution.

The strange, enforced kind of jollity with which Joe the Cracksman spoke, would, without anything else, have been sufficient to convince Claude that something was meditated; and he kept as close to Brand as he could without such a proceeding looking too marked, for fear some random blow should be dealt to the unhappy man which might do the deed he, Claude, wished so much to prevent.

"Now, my lads," said Joe, "who is the cleverest at making a fire? for I don't see that there is any necessity for our taking our victuals cold."

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## CHAPTER CCLXXX.

### A DREADFUL SCENE TAKES PLACE IN THE OLD CHALK PIT.

THERE was nothing now that Duval longed so much for as an opportunity for a little private conversation with Dick and Jack. He could pretty well tell by their looks that they were of the same opinion as himself regarding the dangerous predicament in which the officer was; but then, if it had any effect at all upon him, it had that of making him still more anxious to consult with them as regarded the best means of ensuring the safety of Brand.

The fact was, that Claude Duval, under the circumstances, considered himself quite committed to the preservation of the officer; and he would have left the blackbirds with the conviction that he had connived at a deliberate and cold-blooded murder, if he had shut his eyes for a moment to the fact that Brand stood in imminent danger of death.

What the grand mass of the thieves thought of the affair, it was hard to say; but they looked upon Claude Duval and his friends now as decided encumbrances, and, no doubt, wished them far enough off, although it was not likely that they would commit any overt act against them.

While some of the blackbirds were busy in lighting a fire in a hollow close to one of the chalk walls of the pit, Claude caught the eye of Dick, and very slightly intimated to him to follow him. Dick, who was standing close by Jack, gave him a nudge with his elbow as a hint to come after him; and then, as Claude strolled about, affecting to be admiring and examining the pit, his two friends soon joined him.

They were at a sufficient distance from the blackbirds for what they said to each other, provided they said it in a low tone of voice, not to be heard, and it was Claude who spoke first.

"My friends," he said, "these fellows want to murder Brand."

"I know it," said Dick.

"And so do I," said Jack.

"We must not permit it."

Jack looked rather alarmed.

"Nay, Claude," he said, "what do you suppose we three can do against so many as are here assembled?"

"Much. We can do much. Three determined men can do an immense deal, especially when they are upon the right side."

"I agree with you there," said Dick, "and while I am here he shall not fall a victim to the fears or the passions of these men. It is that fellow, Joe the Cracksman, who is at the bottom of the whole affair. I don't think for a moment but what the others would really have let him go."

"I am of your opinion there," said Jack; "but still, the question is, what is to be done in the matter?"

"That, Jack," said Claude, "I was in hopes you would have been able to suggest."

"You are jesting with me, Claude."

"Ah, Jack, you are lukewarm in this affair."

"No, I am not, and to prove to you that I am not, I here tell you that I will, without question, debate, or objection, accede at once to whatever plan Dick and you decide upon for the purpose of attempting the rescue of Brand."

"That is something like yourself, Jack."

"There is one mode of doing the business," said Dick, "which I think ought to succeed. You know that these fellows think a great deal of putting things to the vote, 'Ay or No,' as, indeed, they did the question concerning the liberation or otherwise of Brand, you recollect, only a little while ago. Now, I think that the very best thing we can do is to bring the question forward of his life or death, and have it decided one way or the other by them. We shall, at least, know then what they mean to do."

"A good thought, Dick."

"If they decide upon sparing him, I think they will keep their words; but if, on the contrary, we find that they carry their intention to take his life, it will be time then for us to adopt more particular and efficacious measures to preserve him. Nothing will be easier than to put arms into his hands, and then we are four."

"Capital!" said Claude. "What do you think of it, Jack?"

"I agree that it is the only way of proceeding."

"Very well; then, I will propose the question to the blackbirds. Let the breakfast, or whatever meal they choose to call it, pass off in peace first, and then I will move in the business."

All this time that they had been thus talking, Joe the Cracksman had, with an uneasy, sidelong step, been moving towards them, but Claude Duval had had his eye upon him, and suddenly turning round, he said—

"Well, Joe, we have settled it."

"Settled what?"

"Why, that nothing in the world could take us alive out of this place. The only mischief that could be done, would be by fire-arms from the brow of the cliff yonder."

"Oh! ah! Yes—yes!"

Joe was evidently disappointed: he had, no doubt, expected some sort of communication regarding the intentions of Claude and his friends in the matter of the officer, for he could have taken his oath, from his own conviction, that it was concerning Brand they had been consulting.

"Yes," said Jack, "we are quite unanimous upon that head."

Joe put as good a face on the matter as he could, as he said, after looking about him a few moments—

"I don't think that even then they could do us much harm, there are so many hiding places, and the vegetation is so thick that it would be all random firing."

"So it would—so it would," said Duval. "And now I am quite ready for the breakfast, if the breakfast will only return the compliment and be ready for me."



"This way," said Joe. "All is ready now. We are old soldiers in this kind of war against property that we are always engaged in, and we don't take long in getting a meal served up."

The blackbirds fully merited the eulogies as regards quickness in their cookery that Joe passed upon them, for they had managed the affair capitally; and although the repast was rather of the roughest sort, still it was extremely welcome to hungry men.

They did not scruple to give Brand something to eat, but it was evident that the poor fellow took it with a very bad relish. The thought that he would never get out of that chalk pit alive was clinging to him, and his sensations must have rather closely resembled those of a man condemned to death, and who, by the cold courtesy of his jailers, is accommodated with a breakfast before the hour of execution.

In about a quarter of an hour the meal was completely dispatched. The men who had gone to Gravesend had brought back word that all was quite favourable, and that not the slightest idea seemed to be abroad that any such parties as the blackbirds were in the neighbourhood, so that, in perfect safety, the congregation of questionable characters rejoiced at the announcement of this report, and prepared to pass the day in that place of rest.

It was then that Claude Duval suddenly rose, and in a clear voice said—

"Blackbirds!"

There was a general commotion at this sudden address upon the part of Claude Duval, and Joe the Cracksman bit his under lip, to conceal the deep vexation that beset him.

Jack and Dick stood close to Duval, for they did not know what the affair might end in, and Brand, too, was within a very few paces, looking very pale and ill indeed. The deep anxieties of the last few hours had told very much even upon his strong and well-knit frame.

"Blackbirds," added Claude Duval, "I have something rather particular to say to you."

"Say it," cried Joe.

"I mean to say it, but I hope that the mere fact that I have it to say is not very disagreeable to any here present."

"Oh, no—no," cried several; and then Joe forced a laugh that sat but oddly upon his countenance, as he said—

"Oh, no—no; disagreeable, indeed—disagreeable to any of us! I am quite sure that it is impossible for Claude Duval to say anything that is disagreeable; quite—quite."

"Thank you," said Claude. "With such encouragement as that, I will proceed at once; and feeling myself to be one of the fraternity, I speak freely when I say, what is to be done with Brand, the officer?"

There was a blank silence upon this.

"I say again, what is to be done with Brand, the officer?"

No one spoke.

"It is quite out of the question but that you all have formed some sort of opinion upon the affair. I have, and so have my two friends here; and all that I want settled is the question that I ask. In fairness to the man himself, it ought to be settled. It is unworthy of us all to keep him here in a state of suspense."

A confused murmur arose from the blackbirds, and Joe the Cracksman looked around him, and nodded to two or three of them; then he spoke:

"Perhaps we might answer you, Claude Duval, in what you would think terms not at all agreeable. But there is one thing that I will do, and that is to put you in mind that it is necessary for the safety of us all to observe—

"Hold!" said Dick.

"Why should I stop in what I am going to say? It is no harm. I was only going to add the one word, caution. Is there any harm in that?"

"None," said Dick, "none whatever; and I, too, will add a word, and that is sincerity; and I hope that that will be thought quite as much, if not a little more of than caution."

"Very good," said Joe, "I have no objection. Sincerity and caution! Blackbirds, these are the two words that are to guide you. And now let us hear what further our distinguished friend, Claude Duval, has to say."

Duval was afraid that the experiment he was about to try would prove a failure, in more ways than one; but still, as he had made a beginning, he felt strongly the impolicy of leaving off, and he was determined to go through with the affair.

The blackbirds were evidently very deeply interested in what was going on, and they crowded round Duval, his friends, Brand, and Joe in a rather dense throng. There was a heightened colour upon the face of Claude, and Dick had his hands in his pockets, where each of them grasped the stock of a pistol upon which he knew he could depend. Jack looked much excited and full of serious anticipations of a disturbance.

## CHAPTER CCLXXXI.

### THE BLACKBIRDS PLAY A TREACHEROUS PART.

"For the sake of common justice between man and man," said Duval, "for the sake of our peace in the time that is to come, and for the sake of this man, Brand, who was brought with us contrary to his wish to this place, I ask you to decide by your votes his fate."

"Hear! hear!"

"All right," said Joe.

"I think that it is beneath us one and all, to keep any man in such a state of doubt and uncertainty, as to what is to become of him, as Brand must be in; and now, as I have, I hope, said enough to convince you that we ought to come to a decision, let me say a little as to what I think the decision ought to be."

"Excellent!" said Joe; "excellent! Hear him, blackbirds!"

"In the first place, then," added Claude Duval, "we made a sort of bargain with this man Brand in the old ken, that if he gave us valuable information his life should be spared. That we are all here now is a proof that he did give us valuable information; and I put it to you all to say whether we have not found that the information he gave us was strictly correct."

"Quite so," said one.

"Very well, then, such being the case, as he has kept his word with us, it surely behoves us to keep ours with him. It would be, I have no scruples in saying, one of the most dastardly, cowardly, and ill-advised acts in the world, to break faith with this man. And yet there have been some dark hints, some strange words, and some actions, that would lead one to believe that some mischief was intended to him. I cannot really think it; but if it should be so, I hope that you will all of you now take a better thought, and if I have been wrong entirely, it will be a good thing that it should be at once definitely settled that no such piece of folly and villainy, for it would be both, is intended."

"Hear! hear!"

Claude ceased speaking, and all eyes were turned upon Joe the Cracksman, who, finding that something was expected of him, said—

"Well, I am ready to vote."

There was a slight laugh at this, for everybody had expected that he was going to make a speech. Duval did not dislike anything that would put the blackbirds in good humour, for he knew that when people laugh they are not very blood-thirsty, so he laughed likewise, and cried out—

"Let it go to the vote, then, at once. Life or death to Brand; the officer. Let all who are of opinion that his life should be spared, hold up one hand."

The whole of the blackbirds held up their hands, including Joe, who then said—

"Why, it is carried unanimously, Claude."

"So I perceive. On the contrary—None. That is settled."

Brand drew a long breath.

"Now, then," said Dick, in a voice that all might hear, "all we have to do is to show Brand out of this place, and have done with him."

"We will take his positive promise



CLAUDE CONGRATULATES BRAND ON HIS SAFE DESCENT INTO THE CHALK-PIT.

and engagement," said Duval, "that he will say nothing of the existence of this place."

"Mind how you! go," said Joe to Claude. "Here is the opening in the

cliff, and you will find it land you comfortably in the lane."

"Thank you, that will do. It is all clear, no doubt."

"I should say so. It is not very likely

that our friend, Brand, has stuck in the way, as he would have let us known as much by this time."

"So he would. Farewell."

Without another moment's hesitation, Duval let himself through the opening in the cliff, and found himself in the lane with great alacrity. The moon was slowly rising, and the scene around him was one of great beauty. Jack came next, and then Dick. After that the voice of Joe the Cracksman sounded through the opening.

"All right?" he asked.

"Quite," called out Claude Duval, "quite right. Good evening, and good luck to you all! Farewell!"

## CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

### THE TRAGEDY IN THE OLD LANE.

THE object of the three friends was, now, to get to London as quickly as they could, and then to adopt some bold and decisive step for the recovering of their horses; so they, at a quick pace, made their way up the lane, and reached the high road, which was at some distance from the old chalk pit.

"Now for a conveyance to London, if one can be got," said Dick. "I should think that some cart or waggon would be sure to pass us soon."

"Not a doubt of it, Dick," said Claude, "and as such is to be our mode of getting on, we need not hurry, I take it, but walk at our ease."

"Exactly; but still, every mite is a mite nearer our destination; so come on."

They walked at a strutting kind of pace; but they had not got many hundred feet from the head of the cave, when such a shriek came upon their ears, that they all three involuntarily stopped, and faced about to the direction from whence it came.

"What on earth is that?" said Jack.

"What a dreadful cry!"

"Hush," said Claude, "hush! It may come again! No—all is still.—It echoes through my head. It was a fearful cry. Oh, Dick, and you, Jack, it sounds perhaps odd to you both, and you will think me too much the slave of my imagination, after what we thought we saw; but, something seems

to whisper to me, that that shriek came from the lips of Brand, the officer."

"Good Heaven!" said Jack.

"I will see to it," said Dick, with sudden energy. "I had my suspicions all along, and now they are confirmed. You are not mad, Claude, nor are you the slave of your imagination. We have all been duped by some clever trick in supposing that Brand was free, and my opinion is now, that the blackbirds are murdering the man."

"Come," said Claude.

Without another word, he set off back again towards the lane and the chalk pit.

While Duval and his two friends are now making the best of their way to the spot from whence they had so recently come, we will carry the reader back again to that chalk pit where the blackbirds were assembled, and which was yet to be the scene of a tragedy that they had one and all determined should take place as soon as Claude Duval and his friends were got rid of.

That tragedy was the death of Brand, the officer, for Claude had been juggled, and Brand was still a prisoner in the hands of the thieves.

The blackbirds made sure that Claude Duval and his two friends would start for London as quickly as they could.—The great importance to them that the recovery of their horses was seemed to point to such a proceeding as beyond a doubt; and if Claude Duval had gone off at speed, ten minutes at the most would have sufficed to take him and his friends far beyond earshot of anything that might take place in the chalk-pit.

But we will not anticipate. The reader is not yet well aware of how it was Duval was deceived regarding the supposed liberation of Brand.

We have stated, that when darkness did come over the face of the land, that in that chalk-pit, with its precipitous sides, it was a tenfold darkness; and so rapidly, too, did it come on, that in the course of a very short time it was impossible to distinguish objects with any degree of distinctness. It was at this juncture that, acting under the orders of Joe the Cracksman, two of the most active and determined of the blackbirds flung themselves upon Brand the officer, and bore him to the ground

at once, and gagged him with a cork, which they had prepared for that purpose, and which effectually prevented him from giving any alarm.

After that, they took off his coat and hat, and it was one of the very men who had thrown him down only a short time before, that personated him to Duval, and made believe to leave the pit. As for Brand himself, he was securely hidden behind some luxuriant bushes that afforded a perfect place of security for him, and would, indeed, have sufficed to hide him even in broad daylight.

After this, there can be no doubt but that the death of the officer was determined upon.

The ten minutes, then, that Joe thought amply sufficient to ensure the sufficient distance of Claude and his friends having elapsed, a deathlike stillness reigning in the chalk-pit, he spoke—

“Blackbirds,” he said, “we none of us like the job we feel forced to do.—We are forced only to it by self-preservation; but, as I say to you all, we none of us like it. Brand must die!”

“Yes,” said the throng, and the whispered assent died away upon the night breeze.

Brand heard that “yes,” and he knew that it was his death warrant; but the gag was not removed from his mouth, and he could not speak. It was very dreadful to think that he should die in such a fashion. No wonder that he made the strenuous efforts to free himself.

“Bring him here,” said Joe.

The unfortunate wretch was brought forward, and the thieves gathered in a dense and small circle about him.

“Brand,” said Joe, “I am sorry for you—we are all sorry for you; but men are at times compelled to do deeds that they may much regret, and yet must do them. The secret of this place must be kept; besides, you know us all now too well by sight, and it is too much to ask of you to neglect making use of the information which the last twelve hours have given you. If you were to promise to do so, and we were to let you go upon such a promise, we could not in our hearts blame you for breaking your word. It is your

business to hunt us, and it is our business to take care of ourselves as well as we can; so I tell you that, without bearing any particular malice against you of any kind, or description whatever, we have no resource but to put you out of the way of doing us a mischief.”

Brand made painful efforts to articulate; but he could only utter a strange noise in his throat.

“We will not hurry a man to another world,” said Joe, “in such a way as this. I think he must see the justice of what we say. Take the gag out of his mouth, and let him speak.”

The cork was at once removed from the mouth of the unhappy man, and the moment it was so, he uttered that loud and startling cry which had come upon the ears of Claude Duval and his companions.

“Help—help—help!” cried Brand, with the hope that his cries might reach some friendly ears. “Help!—murder!”

“Down with him!” shouted Joe.

He was knocked down in a moment, and a handkerchief twisted round his neck so tightly that he was nearly suffocated, and could not speak.

“I didn’t expect this,” added Joe, “or I should not have had the gag taken off him; but it’s no matter. The sooner now we finish the job, my friends, the better.”

“All’s ready,” said a voice.

“Very well. It’s an ugly affair, so let us get it over.”

In a hollow of the chalk-pit, where the debris of many seasons’ vegetation had collected until there was a tolerable thickness of loam, a young tree had sprung up and thriven. It was about twenty feet in height, now, and there was a branch near to the top of it which was strong and supple. To this branch the blackbirds had fastened another piece of wood, so that they could run a stout cord over it.

They had made up their minds to hang Brand.

Hanging was in all probability the sort of exit from this world that most of them were doomed to make, and, therefore, it was no wonder that, as a mode of bidding good-bye to Brand, it was uppermost in their minds. The poor wretch himself had no idea of the



mode by which they meant to take his life, although that he should be murdered by them was now a proposition that came before him in all its ghastly and horrible reality. He tried to scream again, but as often as he did so, they tightened the handkerchief firm round his throat, so that he could utter no sound but a faint gurgling noise, strongly indicative of the fact that he was half choked, and in this fashion they dragged him on towards the temporary gallows.

"Quick, blackbirds—quick!" said Joe. "The sooner this affair is settled the better for all parties now."

"Oh, no—no!" said Brand, suddenly slipping free of the handkerchief in consequence of it turning by the force with which it was held. "Oh, no—no! spare me! I will swear to anything you like, only spare my life!"

"Away with him!" said Joe.

"You will have nothing to fear from me. I will promise to come once a month, if you like, and place myself unarmed in your power, that you may deal with me according to my acts. Oh, spare me!"

"Quick! quick!"

"I will no longer be an officer! I will leave the police! Surely that will satisfy you. And, if you like, I will join your fraternity. Life is sweet, and it is better to be a living thief than a murdered officer."

"Pshaw! Hold your noise, Brand. Meet your fate like a man. If any of us in the course of fate get to the gallows-tree, you don't find us howling and begging to live, and offering to be police-officers if they will let us off."

This sounded so ridiculous, that, notwithstanding the awful job they had in hand, the blackbirds could not forbear a smile, and Brand was still dragged on towards the fatal tree.

"Now say your prayers, if you like," said Joe, "for in another minute off you go."

They fixed the noose they had constructed at one end of the rope round his neck, and four of the blackbirds took hold of the other end, at some few yards off.

"Will nothing save me?" said Brand.

"Nothing, so you had better put up

with it, and die with a good grace like a bold fellow, as we always thought you were."

"No—no! you don't know what it is to die—to feel that the world and you are about to part for ever. I have a wife, too."

"So have I," said Joe; "and I would rather be hanged any day than know that she and I were in the same country; so that goes for nothing at all."

"I have children."

"Well, somebody else will have all the trouble of them; so that don't much matter; so once more good-night, Brand. I tell you, as I told you before, that we are sorry for it, but we can't do other than what we are doing, and it's just what you would do yourself, old fellow, if you were in our place."

"Oh, no—no! I have money—hidden money. Pause a little, while I recollect myself to tell you where it is."

"We don't want it."

"We may as well hear what he says about it, Joe," said one.

"Oh, nonsense! How can you be such a fool? A man with the rope round his neck will say anything to give himself the chance of drawing half-a-dozen more breaths. It's all stuff!"

"Indeed, it is not, Joe," said Brand. "I have been always a careful man, as you all know, and I am not without means, I can tell you. Let me only free, and I will put a booty in your hands such as you little dream of."

"Oh, stuff, Brand—stuff!"

"Nay, Joe, let's hear him. These officers hide swag, you know, for years sometimes, that they lag! hold of from some poor devil or another, who has risked his neck to get it. Come, Master Brand, what have you to say?"

"But if I give you such information, will you promise to spare my life?"

"Oh, we will consider of that."

"How can you expect me to speak without some sort of promise?"

"Why, if we do hang you, still, you know, you won't be any the worse off; and by telling us what you know about the swag, we shall be all the better off."

therefore, you will go out of the world with the satisfaction of having done a good action, you knew; and only think of that!"

Brand was silent.

"Well," said Joe, "I have let you go on having your own way, all of you, in this, and you see now what a stupid affair you are making of it. You had better run him up to the tree at once."

"Oh, no—no!" cried Brand. "I will tell—in a moment I will tell. As you say, the swag is no good to me now."

"Not a bit."

"Well then, gentlemen, you must know that I always took care of myself in any little affair that I could do myself a good turn, and so, as I said before, I have collected some money as well as some goods. I should be able to tell you all better about it if this rope was not so tight round my neck, but it half stops my breath."

"Listen to me," said Joe.

"Well, Joe, we do."

"Am I captain of the blackbirds, or am I not?"

"Yes, you are, Joe—you are. You know that well enough."

"Very well, then. Unless my orders are obeyed, I here renounce all authority among you, and will never again set foot in a ken where any of you may be. Run that man up to the tree."

Brand uttered a last shriek, and in another moment he was swinging in the air, and the blackbirds were twisting the end of the rope round and round the stump of the tree.

"Halt!" cried a voice at the top of the cliff near the main road. "Make ready! present! fire!"

A rattling volley of musketry came into the chalk pit.

### CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS  
GET THEIR HORSES AGAIN.

It will be remembered that we left Duval, and Dick, and Jack, making their way at full speed back from the London-road to the chalk-pit again, after having been alarmed by the first loud shriek of Brand, the officer.

That some fearful tragedy was being enacted in the chalk-pit they could not doubt, but what it was, considering that they were under a firm impression that Brand must have escaped, was beyond their conception to fathom.

They did not speak a word as they hurried on, but the sudden volley of musketry, the echoes of which spread far and wide, brought them to a stand-still in a moment, and they were as still as statues, till Claude Duval broke the charm that held them, by saying—

"Good Heaven, can either of you say what is the meaning of all this?"

"Not I," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Dick Turpin; "but I suspect——"

"What, Dick?"

"That it is by far our best plan to look to ourselves. That volley of fire-arms is something more than suspicious. There was about it a military preciseness which gets up a suspicion in my mind."

"What is the suspicion, Dick? Do you think the blackbirds are really beleaguered in the old chalk-pit by the soldiery?"

"I do, indeed. But we are near at hand. Our appearance on the road cannot awaken any suspicion, as it is a public thoroughfare. Let us proceed as though we were going to Gravesend, and we shall then soon find out the state of affairs in the pit, and among the blackbirds."

There could be no possible objection to such a course as this, and they all three proceeded at a slow, but not creeping pace, towards the bit of high road above the chalk-pit.

They had not proceeded far when they saw, glancing in the dim light, the muskets of the soldiery, and then a voice called out—

"Who goes there?" and there was the ring of a musket as it was brought to the charge.

It was necessary at once to reply to the challenge, and Claude Duval said—

"We are peaceable people. What is the meaning of all this?"

A sergeant stepped up to them, and said—

"Where are you going, and where do you come from?"

"We are tradesmen," said Duval,

"and can give you our cards. We are on our route to Northfleet, but hearing a firing like guns, we came back to see what it was all about. I'm Mr. Brown, of the High-street, Gravesend, grocer and cheesemonger—and this is Mr. Smith, egg merchant—and this is Mr. Green, the well-known upholsterer, you understand."

"Well—well," said the sergeant, "you had better go back again. There are thieves in one of the old pits, here, and we are assisting the civil power to apprehend them, that's all; you had better be out of danger."

"Danger!" cried Claude Duval. "Did you say there was danger, sir?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Oh, dear, then I'm sure that don't suit us. Come along, neighbours! This gentleman in the red coat says that there is danger, and that is quite out of our lines of business. We bid you good evening, sir, and only hope you will be as successful and as cunning in all your undertakings as in this one."

The sergeant laughed as the three friends walked away. He was quite satisfied in his own mind that he had very much frightened them, and it did not at all surprise him to hear them set off at good speed the moment they got a little way from the spot. How little did that sergeant suspect that the united rewards for the apprehension of those three men, whom he had actually had at arm's length, and whom he could have surrounded with a force sufficient to render all resistance madness, exceeded the sum of two thousand pounds!

"It's all up with the blackbirds," said Dick Turpin, after they had gone about half a mile, and felt that they could speak freely.

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude Duval, "provided one thing has been done, and that is, a guard placed at the end of the lane. There is no sort of doubt now in my mind but that the fellow who went to Gravesend for provisions was watched back again, and that has brought the military upon them."

"But that scream," said Jack. "I can't forget that shriek!"

"We shall possibly get at the mean-

ing of that, some day, Jack, but not now. Our only course is to go to London at once, and get possession of our horses, if it be possible so to do."

"You know where they are, Claude, and, therefore, it is possible."

"I hope it is. They are at a stable adjoining to, or belonging to a carrier's yard immediately opposite to the door of Newgate in the Old Bailey; not a very pleasant locality for us to go to."

"Far from it; and yet possibly as safe a one as we could find. But I have no idea of walking all the way to London."

"Ner I; but, hark! I hear an odd rumbling noise upon the road, which betokens the presence of some vehicle, and the tinkling of bells makes me suspect that it is a waggon."

"Yes," said Dick, "and it seems to me to be proceeding at the magnificent rate of about two miles an hour."

Dick laughed; but they all three stood in the roadway watching for the waggon, the dangling lantern in the front of which was soon visible.

"Here it comes," said Claude. "I will speak to the driver. If he is going to London, we may as well go with him until we meet with a quicker conveyance; and, after all, the two miles you talk about, Dick, are four."

"But, good gracious! it would take us five hours to get to London Bridge."

"Never mind," said Jack. "Anything is better just now than being a post on the road; and, besides, as Claude says, we can leave the waggon as soon as any quicker mode of travelling suggests itself; and if it really gets on at the rate of four miles an hour, you must recollect, Dick, that on the average, we should not walk quicker than that, so we save our legs by the use of the waggon, at all events."

"Be it so," said Dick. "I am willing. Hail the waggoner, Claude, will you?"

"Yes. Hilloa! Waggoner there! Hillo!"

"Woa!" said the man, who was lazily trudging on by the side of the eight great fat horses who pulled the waggon. "Woa!"

The horses seemed to consider of it for a moment or two, and then they stopped.

"To London?" said Claude.

"Yes, master."

"And room for three?"

"Lor bless you, yes, to be sure. We comes from Charlton, but we ain't got nothing like a full waggon. Get in, gentlemen, if you pleases."

They all three got into the waggon with expedition, and as it was very dark, they, of course, fell over the legs of everybody that were there before them; but at last, when the cursing and swearing incidental to such a process were over, they succeeded in getting into a comfortable corner among some straw; and the waggoner having requested his lazy cattle to proceed, the huge lumbering vehicle was in motion again in a few minutes.

"Well, sir," said a voice, "pray go on."

By this, Duval and his friends found that by their entrance something in the shape of an anecdote or a very amusing gossip had been put a temporary stop to.

"Oh, I have not much more to say," replied a rough voice. "The fact is that we officers see strange things."

"Officers!" thought Claude and his companions.

"Of course you do," said another voice, "and you ought to be well paid, for yours is not only a dangerous profession, but it is one that gets you no credit, even after all your danger."

"But did they really escape them?" said a third voice.

"Oh, yes. I will tell you how it was. You see, the keeper of the lock-up at Bow Street and the officer who had apprehended them, sat by the fire in the lower room, and, of course, they rationally enough considered that all was right; but Duval and his associates actually made a hole in the ceiling of a room they got into, and then escaped out at the window of the apartment above."

"Oh—ah!" said everybody. "That was it, was it?"

Dick Turpin gave a slight kick to Claude Duval, for there, sure enough, was an officer interesting the people in the waggon with a tolerable accurate account of their last escape from the lock-up at Bow Street, and with which the reader is well acquainted.

"Do you know him?" whispered Claude to Dick Turpin.

"Not by his voice; and it is so plaguery dark that I can't see so much as the tip of any one's nose."

"Nor I. We can but wait a little."

"Hush!"

"There's one thing, however," added the officer, "that it is as well should be known to as many people as possible, as it may make the fortune of somebody, and that is, that the rewards offered for their apprehension are now increased."

"What's the amount?" said one.

"I can't say exactly; but it's nearer two thousand pounds than nothing."

At this there was a general expression of surprise, and the officer added—

"Ah! I should consider myself a made man if I could only lay hands upon Duval and those with him."

"What suppose they were to get into this waggon?" said one.

"Ah! that would be too good a thing."

"A great deal," said a woman's voice; "and as for me—I only hope they won't, for I should be frightened out of my life if they did."

"So should I," said another female.

"Well, so should not I," said the officer. "I should be ready to jump out of my skin with joy."

"Dick!" whispered Claude.

"Yes. Here you are."

"Answer me what I ask of you. We had better keep up some sort of conversation together, or they may take it into their heads that we are suspicious characters, for all we know."

"Very good."

Claude now spoke in a conversant tone, but so as he might be very well heard by all in the waggon.

"Well, neighbour," he said, "will you take four-and-eight for the sheep, or will you not? It's a fair offer."

"Four and ten," said Dick Turpin, "I do think would be nearer the mark. You won't see such in the market every day, I can tell you."

"Well, I will think of it. But do you anything in pigs?"

"Only at the fall of the year," said Dick. "I can let you have the pigs, though, at your own figure."

By this time, Jack became aware of

what they meant, and he thought he might as well say something likewise, to keep up the delusion.

"I have laid down six acres of man-gold this season," he said "and I do hope you'll take some of me, neighbour Smith."

"Well, I'll see when you cart 'em," said Claude.

By this time the people in the waggon were quite assured that the three strangers who had recently got in were in the farming line, and that they were intent upon bargaining with each other for beasts and for field produce. The conversation became rather general, until the officer said—

"Perhaps some of you farmers or graziers can say how the corn crop will be this year?"

"Why, hardly good, sir," said Claude; "but still, we hopes as it will be finish, not that we grows much ourselves, as we does more in beastes than in corn crops, you see."

"Yes, oh, yes; and you find that pay?"

"Tolerable, sir; but not like thief catching."

At this, there was a general laugh, in which the officer joined.

"Thief catching," he said, "is all very well, but sometimes we catch a tartar, and then, you know, it is not quite so pleasant."

There was another laugh at this, and then some one cried out—

"Hilloa! Mr. Waggoner, mind you stop the coach for me when it comes up, now, will you? Don't let it pass."

"It's a coming now," said the waggoner. "I can hear the guard's horn, now, and I can see the lights."

"Dang it, we will go by the coach," said Claude, "for I shall lose a good customer if I don't get to London quick."

The sound of the guard's horn belonging to some stage coach now came clearly upon the night air, and the waggoner called out—

"It's the royal mail from Maidstone. Here it comes. Hoi! hoi! coach a-hoi! hilloa!"

The flash of the lights of the mail-coach partially illumined the waggon, and the three friends got out of the slow

and lumbering vehicle, and inquired if there were places.

"Yes, get up," said the guard.

The other person who went by the mail likewise, was a respectable-looking tradesman-like man, and they were all soon on the roof of the four-horsed coach, which looked quite bright and shining with its lamps, and its scarlet-coated guard, and heaps of luggage.

"All's right," said the guard.

The coachman then chirped to the horses, and in another moment the mail was off, and the lumbering, slow waggon with its team was far behind.

"This is an escape," said Duval.

"What did you say, sir?" said the guard.

"That it is quite an escape to get out of a waggon at the pace of four miles an hour, into such a coach as this with its spanking team."

"Oh, ah, sir, it is indeed. We do rather go along, I take it. Why, it's a matter of seventeen miles to London now."

"And when shall we get there?"

"In two hours, including all stoppages, and one bait to change horses at Greenwich. What do you think of that?"

"Why, that it is capital going, that can't be denied, my friend."

The guard was so satisfied with the approbation that Claude Duval bestowed upon the coach and its performance, that he entered quite into a history of it—how long it had been built—how it was at first not intended for a royal mail, until that honour was thrust upon it by reason of its being so light in draught, and such a capital coach altogether.

To all of this Claude listened as though he were deeply interested, and presently the coach stopped at Greenwich to change horses. This operation was performed with all that celerity which used to mark the proceedings of the then quickest mode of travelling in Great Britain. How all that is changed now, and how the railroad, with its panting engine, makes the mail-coaches of the last century seem in comparison what the slow waggons were to them in their day.

In due time the mail-coach rattled over old London Bridge, and the mo-



ment that it drew up, Claude and his companions dismounted, and paying liberally for the ride they had had, they stood in the midst of London just as St. Paul's clock pealed out the hour of twelve at night.

The streets of the city at that hour were not nigh so populous as they are now. The citizens of London went to bed at soberer hours than they now think of retiring, and the quietude of London was then as great as some country



THE BLACKBIRDS ABOUT TO HANG THE OFFICER.

town can boast of now—for it is a boast surely to be able to hear oneself talk to a companion in the street, and not to be continually running the risk of being

run over by some horrible omnibus, or infernal machine in the shape of a cab.

Alas! alas! it is the omnibus and the cab that have made London the

Babel that it is, and filled the thoroughfares with racket and danger. We are not of the number who look upon the good old times, as they are called, for everything that is excellent: on the contrary, we admire many great changes that have taken place; but to the omnibus and to the cab we are enemies to the back bone; and, for the sake of peace, and comfort, and safety, and humanity to the horse, we proclaim war to the knife against such vehicles.

#### CHAPTER CCLXXXIV.

##### THE HORSES ARE RECOVERED BUT TO BE LOST AGAIN.

CLAUDE DUVAL and Dick Turpin and Jack assembled by the light of a flickering old oil lamp, not far from the Royal Exchange, to debate upon the best course to pursue in furtherance of the great object that had brought them to the metropolis.

That object was the recovery of their horses.

"I have every possible reason," said Claude, "to rely upon the information that I have received from one of the blackbirds, that our cattle are in a stall, opposite to the wicket gate of Newgate."

"Of that there is little doubt," said Jack. "They are in the custody of the Sheriff of London; and I happen to know that there is the stable in which cattle belonging to persons who are amenable to the law are really placed, so that the information you have, Claude, tallies with experience and known facts."

"Ah!" said Dick, "mind you, I intend to make a try to get my gallant steed out of the power of the Philistines; but still, I cannot conceal from myself, nor am I at all desirous of concealing from you, too, that I look upon the enterprise as one of the most troublesome and doubtful that can possibly be undertaken."

"Well," said Claude, "there are but two ways of setting about it. The one is to try something to get at the cattle and gallop off with them, and the other is to attempt by some bold manoeuvre to persuade those who have the custody of them that we are entitled to them."

Dick shook his head, and Jack shook his, and then the former said—

"I don't think that any open mode of proceeding would answer. If we do anything at all, it strikes me it must be in the secret way. The hour is late. It is quite possible that there may be only some watchmen upon the premises, and if that is the case, a bold push might do the business."

"I would advise," said Jack, "that we go at once to the place and make what observations we can. Who knows but something may turn up when we get there that may alter all our plans?"

"Good," said Claude. "Come on." A watchman, who had been looking at them from the other side of the way, now crossed over, and turned the full light of his lantern upon them.

"Ah! Charles!" said Claude to him in a boasting tone, "how are you to-night? Wife and family all well?"

"Move on, will you?" said the watchman.

"Oh, certainly, sir, with great pleasure!"

"I've half a mind to take you all up. I don't believe you are after any good, a-whispering and a-talking here at this time of night."

"Perhaps you would like to know what we are about?" said Dick.

"Yes, I should, stupid," said the watchman.

"Well, then, we intend to carry off the Bank of England to-night, and to divide it between us in the Hampstead fields."

"Now, if I don't take you upon my own account! Oh, murder!"

"You'll find some difficulty in taking yourself up, I think," said Dick, as with one blow he sent the watchman prostrate in the kennel.

It was quite expedient for them to get off now from that spot as quickly as they could, and they went arm-in-arm at a quick pace just as the watchman found his rattle and began to spring it. To the next guardian of the night they met, Duval said, in a very serious voice—

"There is a fire in Lombard Street, my good fellow, and you had better hasten there as soon as possible. It's at a banking-house, and they are throwing the gold out at the window with a shovel."

The watchman did not wait to thank them for such a piece of intelligence, but he set off as fast as his legs and his huge white great coat would let him, to the scene of commotion.

Fleet of foot as Claude Duval and his friends were, they soon scampered along Cheapside, and made their way down Newgate Street to the corner of the Old Bailey. There they had to draw aside, for the purpose of letting pass them a riotous set from some club in the neighbourhood, which had just broken up, and conveyed its noise and racket into the public streets. The shouts and the profane songs of the half-drunken party died away in the distance, and then Duval and his two friends walked on to the other side of the way, and getting into a doorway, they confronted the gloomy old pile of Newgate.

"There it is," said Claude.

"Ay," said Jack with a shudder. "It would need, indeed, to be something particular that would tempt me to this spot."

"We won't look at it," said Dick. "Let us go to the inn yard, where our special business lies."

They walked on till they got to the inn yard, which was exactly opposite to the market of Newgate. All was dark and drear about the place. A solitary lamp, that was nearly out, cast a flickering light upon the spot, that was positively worse than darkness.

"I have thought," said Claude in a low tone, "that the best thing we can do will be to ring at the bell of the stables of the inn, and see if any one is up."

"Do so," said Dick; "we will keep back in the shadow here."

"They got right into a deep doorway with a huge overhanging portico, and Claude Duval finding a large wooden handle to a bell, slightly pulled it, and produced a tolling sound within the yard. No notice was taken of this, and after a few minutes he rang again. He then heard the sound of a bolt being worked up and down to withdraw it, as it evidently fitted very tightly into its socket, and then a little wicket was opened in the large wooden gate, and a man, with a dimly-burning lamp, ap-

peared, and asked, in a sleepy voice, what was wanted.

"Is Mr. Groveland within?" said Claude.

"Groveland? You mean Wilkes, I suppose?"

"To be sure I do. Wilkes it is. I come from Mr. Groveland. How I do confuse names, to be sure."

"Well, then, he isn't, and he is."

"That's a strange answer, my friend."

"Well, he's abed, in course, at this hour o' night. But what do you want, now? Do say what it is at once."

"Are you the ostler?"

"Gracious, no! I'm the watchman. The ostler is gone to bed too. Now, do say what it is?"

"Why, I wanted to know if there was any chance to-morrow of my having a coach and four horses for about half the day. The coach belongs to Mr. Alderman Pump, you see, and so I——"

"Oh, dear me! can't you come, now, at a christian hour, my good fellow?"

"Well, I don't want to trouble you. Is there anybody else upon the premises?"

"Not a soul, I tell you."

"Then," said Claude, as he stepped at once within the wicket gate, and pointed a pistol right at the face of the watchman, "if you give the least alarm, or so much as speak above your breath, I'll scatter your brains over the yard."

The watchman retreated backwards till he fell over an iron chain that belonged to a crane close at hand, and there he lay upon his back as if he had been suddenly deprived of all sense and motion.

Claude went to the wicket and only said "Come in," and then Dick and Jack entered the inn yard, and Duval closed the little wicket door in a moment.

"Watchman!" said Duval.

The watchman only groaned.

"Get up at once; you shall have better pay for this one night's work than you can get for a year. Listen to me. You may as well make a hundred pounds as any one else. I am Claude Duval."

"Oh—oh, the dev——"

"Silence!"

"Yes, I—that is—oh, dear, of course; but I feel that I am the watchman of

another world. I am as good, I mean as bad, as a dead watchman, and this is the last hour of my watch——”

“Silence, and listen to me. This is a matter of life and death to you, watchman. You may die upon the point of principle in not giving up the trust reposed in you, or you may live and pocket a hundred-pound-note.”

“Principle, did you say, sir? Die upon principle? Principle be hanged! I'd rather live than have all the principle in the world.”

“But your character?” said Dick.

“Character be blowed, sir! What's the use of character to a dead watchman, I should like to know? And touching that hundred pounds, why—why——”

“You would be very glad to touch it?”

“I should indeed, gentlemen.”

“Very well, get up.”

“Yes, gentlemen. Here I is. Don't be holding of that pistol in the line of my head, if you please, Mr. Duval. Oh, don't!”

“Listen to me. There are three horses here, in charge of the sheriff of London.”

“Ah, I smell a rat.”

“Well, never mind that just now. There are three horses here, I say, and they belong to us. We intend to have them. Can you take us to them?”

“To the stall where they is I can, but not to the 'osses. The stall is locked up, you see; but I can show you where they is, and no mistake. But I'll take the liberty of putting out my lantern, and they then won't have any chance of looking out at a window and seeing of us.”

“Do so.”

The watchman blew out the candle that was in his lantern, and he said, in a voice that was evidently struggling between fear and cupidity—

“Gentlemen, you offer me a hundred pounds to let you take the 'osses, if you can get 'em?”

“We do. And if you refuse, we shall be under the necessity of shooting you.”

“Then I consent.”

“But, look you, you will have to come for your money at twelve o'clock to-morrow night to Blackheath.”

“Oh, lor!”

“You need not be alarmed. If you have ever heard anything of Claude Duval, you have heard that he don't break his word with any one, so you may make sure he is not going to begin to do so with you. We have not the money with us, but we will get it for you by midnight to-morrow, if you will be at the gate at Greenwich Park that opens to Blackheath at the hour mentioned. I tell you this beforehand, lest you should prefer being shot at once to aiding us in this little matter.”

“Don't mention that again. Oh don't.”

“You consent, then?”

“Rather. Of course I do. As for the 'osses, what can it matter to me whether you has 'em or the sheriff? It isn't the likes of me that the likes of you stops on the highway, and I have got a wife and family to look to, and only get nine shillings a week as a watchman; so I feel as if this was a kind of a bit of a God-send to a poor man, and I will trust to your word, Mr. Claude Duval.”

“You have decided wisely. Now, take us to the stable, and we will manage to get at the cattle.”

“Hilloa!” said a voice. “Brown! Brown!”

“Oh, lor, that's Mr. Wilkes,” said the watchman, “a-calling to me out of his bed-room window. What shall I do now?”

“Answer him,” said Claude, in a whisper; “tell him it's all right, and we will keep close here in the shadow of the court by the gate. You have nothing to fear. Answer him boldly.”

## CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

CLAUDE MEETS WITH A SEVERE SHOCK  
IN THE OLD BAILEY.

THE watchman was evidently frightened, as well indeed he might be, for such an adventure as that in which he was now engaged was rather new to him. He shook so that his teeth chattered in his head.

“Hilloa!” said the voice from the window. “Watchman, where are you now?”



"Answer him at once," said Duval, "or it will be the worse for you."

"I'm afraid it will," groaned the watchman, "but I'm going to answer. Yes, sir—yes, Mr. Wilkes, I'm here."

"Where are you? I don't see you."

"Tell him your lantern has gone out," said Claude.

"Please, sir, my lantern has gone out, that's the reason, sir."

"Then why don't you light it again?"

"Confound you," whispered Claude, "why don't you tell him you are going to do so directly?"

"Confound you," said the watchman in his fright, "I'm going to do so directly."

"This fellow will ruin all," said Dick Turpin.

"What's that you say?" cried Mr. Wilkes. "You are drunk, fellow, and I'll take good care to discharge you in the morning. I tell you, you are drunk, fellow."

"Say you were speaking about the lantern, you idiot!" said Claude.

"I was speaking about my lantern, you idiot, if you please, sir," said the watchman.

"Upon my life, this is pretty language to use to your employer," said Mr. Wilkes, "and if I was not afraid of taking cold, I would come down stairs and turn you out of the place at once, you rascal, that I would; but, as it is, you may depend upon being discharged to-morrow, and without a character, too."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" murmured the watchman, "now I am in for it, rather, I take it! What will become of me?"

"The hundred pounds!" whispered Claude.

"Oh, ah—that is something."

"It is more than you could save if you were to stay in your place for twenty years, so you are better off with that and your discharge than you would be without it and still keeping your situation. But how came you to be so absurd as to speak to your employer in such a way?"

"Oh, dear! didn't you tell me?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, now, I'll be hanged if I didn't think you did. But it's done

now, and can't be helped, so I must just do the best I can for you, gentlemen, and trust to you, for, you see, I have lost my place all through you."

"I beg your pardon," said Claude; "it is not through us at all."

"Oh, dear—yes."

"Oh, dear, no. It is through your own folly, my man—nothing else. If you had only answered your master as you ought to have done, all would have been well enough with your place. But we can't stop to dispute that question with you. Take us to the stable in which are our horses at once."

"Come on, gentlemen—this way."

The night-porter spoke in rather a gloomy tone. Perhaps, after all, he had his suspicions that the one hundred pounds was too much in perspective, and that there was no very good security of its forthcoming, even provided he did go to Blackheath to get it, according to the directions that had been given him; and the loss of his place was a positive event, that he could have very little doubt of indeed, after what had occurred between him and his master upon that interesting occasion.

The man led the way along the old walls of the yard, so that they should not be likely to be seen by getting into the open space, and then stopping before a pair of old doors, he said—

"Here is the stable that the three horses are in. They have been well fed; for the sheriff, who is a saddler by trade, has been several times to look at them, and says they are prime ones, and that he will ride the dark bay mare himself."

"Will he?" said Dick Turpin. "I should like to catch him, that's all."

"Then, that's yours, sir?"

"It is."

"Then, by Jove, you are Dick Turpin?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Oh, lor! that I should be with such a highwayman as Dick Turpin, and sich another highwayman as Claude Duval, at this time of night. It's enough to makes one's hair stand on end, it is. Please, what's the other gentleman's name?"

"Sixteen-string Jack!" cried Jack.

"Oh—oh! Is it possible? Well, I often thought I should have liked to



be a highwayman myself; and if I had only thought nobody would have arrested me, and I should never have been took up for it, I don't know but that I should have gone upon the road some odd day. But there is the door, gentlemen, and, you see, it is fastened by a padlock."

"Was fastened, you mean," said Jack.

"Was, do you say, sir? Why, they have never forgot to lock it, have they?"

"No; but I have picked the lock, and the stable is open. Now, comrades, let us decide upon the best course."

"I think," said Claude, "that the thing to do will be, to saddle the three horses in the stable, and, likewise, mount them there. Then let the watchman go and throw open the outer gate sufficiently wide for us to go through, and then we can make a bold dash for it, and be off at once, and never mind how much clatter our horses' heels make. I'll warrant that before any one can be in the saddle to be after us, we shall be a couple of miles off."

"That is the way to do it," said Dick.

They all three went into the stable at once, and then Jack lit a match, and held it up, upon which Dick exclaimed—

"Ah! here is my Bonny Bess, looking as bright and as beautiful as ever."

At the sound of Dick's voice, the creature made a whining sound, and began to rub its head against him, to testify the pleasure it had in seeing him again. Jack and Claude found the saddles, and began hastily to fasten them on to their respective steeds, and Dick soon followed their example. The watchman remained hovering about the door of the stable, and in a great fright, as his muttered ejaculations sufficiently testified.

"Oh, lor!—oh, lor!" he said. "I do hope all this will end well. I never was in such a fright in all my life. Oh, dear! What, suppose there was to go for to come to be a scrimmage now, what a pretty situation I should be in, in the midst of it."

"Hold your row!" said Claude.

"Yes, sir; oh, yes."

"Don't keep up that muttering and grumbling at the stable door; somebody will hear you at last, and then we shall

have a fight for it; and when that once begins, it is hard to say who may or who may not get a stray bullet in his head."

"Don't mention it, sir, I beg. I feel already as if one was going right through my nob, I do indeed."

"Are you all ready?" said Dick.

"In a moment, Dick," said Claude. "Now I am. How do you get on, Jack?"

"I have only to fasten the throat rein. Now it is done. Shall we mount?"

"To be sure."

They were all three in the saddle in a moment, and then it was that they felt a degree of exultation that on foot they could never feel. The mere fact that they were mounted again upon their good steeds, and they were, both man and horse, quite fresh and full of life, was sufficient to give them great spirits; and they felt as though they could afford to scorn any danger that could possibly now approach them.

And yet one glance at their situation will show how very precarious it was. There they were in the midst of London—opposite to Newgate itself, and at the mercy of any little circumstance which might have the effect of betraying their position to their worst foes.

"Watchman," said Claude.

"Yes, gentlemen; oh, dear—oh, dear! Here I am."

"You are a poor coward. But remember that your money will be ready to-morrow night at the place I have mentioned to you, and it will be your own fault if you do not come for it. And now go and open the outer gate gently, so that we may ride out."

"Yes, yes; and the sooner you do ride out the better, gentlemen. Let me beg of you not to make a clatter in the inn yard. When you are outside, it don't matter, of course, to me a bit."

"We will be careful."

It was an anxious moment now that which preceded the opening of the great gate of the inn yard to allow Claude and his friends to pass out into the Old Bailey. They were in complete darkness; but, as well as they could, they kept their eyes fixed in the direction of the gate. Then they heard the fall of an iron bar, and Duval

cursed the stupidity of the watchman, who thus doubled their danger by a want of ordinary caution in his proceedings.

"That fellow will ruin all yet, if he don't mind," said Jack.

"He is a desperate fumbler," said Claude; "but a moment or two will suffice now to save us."

"It will—it will."

The gate creaked back upon its old hinges, and by stooping in his saddle, Claude could see that it was fairly back.

"Now!" he said.

With one accord they walked their horses across the inn yard, but it was impossible upon the stones with which it was paved to prevent the shoes of the cattle from making a noise. Of course, the horses stepped freely and firmly, and twelve legs, each armed with an iron shoe, do not come down upon stones quite as softly as velvet upon velvet.

"Holloa! What's that?" cried the voice of Mr. Wilkes again, from his window. "I'm sure I hear something. What is it?"

"The devil, sir!" said Claude. "He has mistaken the house, that is all, but he will call upon you to-morrow. Don't you hear his hoofs?"

"Watch! watch! Thieves!"

"Off with you both," said Claude. "Let us turn to the left."

"Yes, yes!" cried Dick and Jack.

The watchman shrank on one side, and as they went out at the gate, he said—

"Don't forget me to-morrow, gentlemen, I beg of you."

"We won't," said Claude. "Hush!"

They were in the Old Bailey, and with a bound, Duval was half way towards the end of Newgate Street, when a hackney-coach came into the Old Bailey round the corner. It was accompanied by a couple of mounted men, and as it lumbered along, one of the windows was broken, and a voice cried in screaming accents—

"Claude—Claude! Oh, where are you now to save me?"

If the whole of Newgate had suddenly, without the least warning of the approach of such a catastrophe, tumbled down, and presented nothing but a mass of ruins before his eyes, Claude

Duval could not have been more completely astounded than he was by this cry from the person in the hackney-coach. It thoroughly bewildered him. For the moment it stopped his breath, and he staggered in his saddle, as though some mental blow had been struck at his head by an invisible hand.

Then in a voice that rang through the street, he shouted—

"By Heaven, 'tis Cicely!"

Yes; too well had he recognised that voice as the voice of his wife—his Cicely, whom he thought he had left still in such perfect security and comfort at the farm-house by Ealing Common; and now suddenly, at such an awfully critical moment, to discover her in a coach in the Old Bailey, and to hear her calling for help, was enough to make him doubt for a moment the fact of his waking existence.

The sound of his voice reached the ears of Cicely, for, indeed, and in truth, she was in the hackney-coach, and the shriek of joy that came from her lips, was an answer to his in a moment.

"Drive on!" shouted one of the horsemen. "Drive on, coachman! Curses on you, don't you see you are close to Newgate?"

The coachman had been alarmed at the cries, and had instantly pulled up, as he would have done had he, in some crowded thoroughfare, been made aware that he either had driven over some one, or was upon the point of doing so. But before he could put the old miserable horses into motion again, Claude Duval was at the side of the coach.

"Cicely!" he cried, "speak again! Is it, indeed, you?"

"Oh, Claude!—Claude! Save me!"

"Ay, will I."

The two horsemen who accompanied the coach, when they heard the name of Claude mentioned, uttered a shout of gratification, and one cried—

"Why, here he is! This is our man. Down with him!"

One of them aimed a blow at Duval, and struck him on the shoulder with a staff. Claude had drawn a pistol, and at once he shot that man dead, as he cried out—

"Dick and Jack, ride off. Don't wait for me—ride off, both of you."

"Not yet," said Dick.

"Yes, you be off with you."

"I will die first," said Jack.

"Help!—help! Police! Watch!—watch!" cried the other horseman who was with the coach, as he slipped off his horse, and ran with all his speed towards Newgate.

The sound of rattles began to be heard from several quarters, and Claude dismounted as he shouted to the coachman—

"Keep your horses quiet, or I'll blow your brains out. Keep quiet, coachman, or it will be the worse for you."

"Oh, lor, yes," said the coachman; "all I want's among you all is my blessed fare. That's all I wants among you all, if you pleases, gents."

## CHAPTER CCLXXXVI.

THE FRACAS IN THE OLD BAILEY HAS  
DISASTROUS RESULTS.

CLAUDE DUVAL kept the bridle of his horse over his left arm, while with his right hand he tried to open the coach door, but it was made fast by some means, and resisted him.

"Cicely," he said, "how is this? The door is fast."

"It is tied with a cord."

"Ah, that will do—I see it. A knife—a knife!"

"Here," said Jack, close to his head.

"Here is one."

"A thousand thanks."

With the knife that Jack handed to him, Claude cut the thick cord that kept the coach door shut, and in another moment Cicely was in his arms.

"Claude—Claude, you have come to save me! Oh, God! I thought they would have taken me to prison; but you have saved me."

"Mount—mount! Let me help you on the horse, Cicely."

"Yes, Claude—oh, yes. With you, to the world's end if need be. They took me a prisoner, Claude, because I would give them no information where they might find you, and they threatened me with death. Is this Newgate?"

"It is—it is. But you shall tell me

all another time, Cicely. Moments are now most precious. Our lives all hang upon a thread."

"They do, indeed," said Jack.

Claude had just succeeded in getting Cicely upon the horse, and was upon the point of mounting himself, when with a rush and a shout, some couple of dozen men from Newgate tore up the street, and began firing pistols at random, as they approached the party by the coach.

"Lost!" said Jack.

"No, no!" cried Claude. "Hold my horse's head, Dick, or you, Jack, do it. If I can only gain the saddle, all will be well again. Stoop low, Cicely—oh, stoop low, and avoid the bullets."

"Yes, Claude, yes; but the horse is hurt."

The horse began to plunge furiously. It was quite out of the question for either Dick or Jack to hold the half-maddened animal, and it was equally impossible for Claude Duval to mount it. Still he would not relinquish his hold of the bridle, and still his foes advanced.

"Surrender yourselves," cried a voice, "or you will be all butchered as you stand. Surrender, Claude Duval. You have not a chance."

"Never!" said Claude, as he now with difficulty drew his pistols with his disengaged hand, and fired them one by one at the advancing men, and then threw them to the ground as quickly as he discharged them.

"Fire, Dick! Use your pistols now, Jack. Our only chance is to keep them in check. They are cowards, after all."

Dick and Jack kept up such a continual fire for a moment or two that the officers and officials of Newgate who had rushed out to capture the party were staggered; but then a voice cried out—

"Fire a volley upon them. Dead or alive will do for us."

About twelve or fifteen fire-arms were discharged at once. Cicely uttered a shriek, and fell over upon the neck of the horse. Claude caught her in his arms, and with one piercing cry of anguish, he held her bleeding form to his breast. In another moment he was surrounded, and half-a-dozen hands had hold of him. Claude Duval was taken!

A man got hold of the bridle, too, of Dick Turpin's horse; but with one blow from the butt-end of rather a heavily-mounted pistol, Turpin laid him prostrate; and then putting spurs to

his horse, he went off like the wind towards Holborn. Jack, too, escaped by riding over a couple of the officers, and striking right and left with the heavy end of his riding-whip, which



THE CAPTURE OF CLAUDE AND DEATH OF CICELY.

had a couple of ounces of lead let into the handle of it, and did fearful execution.

Half-a-dozen of the officers pursued them; and the horses of the two who

had been with the hackney-coach being mounted by a couple of the most courageous of the officers, they kept close upon their heels. It was a chase for life or death that.

That Dick and Jack would have had considerable trouble in escaping was pretty certain if one of the officer's horse's had not fallen upon the lower part of Skinner Street; and Jack perceiving it, turned upon the other, and made a blow at him that rather staggered him, although it did not hit him quite so fair as Jack intended to do.

This gave them a little latitude, and they went up Holborn at a pace that, considering the ascent, which was then much worse than it is now, was truly tremendous and appalling. It was well that the hill, though sharp, was short, and that they were soon upon the head ground, as the cattle could not have kept up at such a pace. As it was, however, Holborn was dashed through in its whole extent in a very short space of time, indeed, and they gained the long straggling thoroughfare of Tottenham-court-road, feeling satisfied then that no one was pursuing them.

It was then that Jack pulled up, and letting the reins of his horse slip along his arm, he placed both his hands upon his face, and sobbed aloud.

"Poor Claude!" he said—"poor Claude!"

Dick looked at him in silence. He felt that no ordinary topic of consolation would suffice at such a moment.

"Dead! dead!" said Jack. "Well, they are satisfied now. They have killed him at last, and Cicely, too, who loved him so well. They have died together!"

"Jack, you do not know that?"

"Oh, yes—yes. I saw her fall."

"But you did not see Claude fall?"

"I saw the hands of twenty murderers upon him, Dick. Do you think they would spare him?"

"Yes, Jack. They wanted to take him alive, and, in my opinion, they have. Oh, Jack, this has, indeed, been a fearful night!"

"It has—it has!"

"But come, now. We are men, and, therefore, like men, you know, we should meet such evil fortune as comes to us. Cheer up, Jack!"

"Cheer up, did you say?"

"Yes, I did; and why not?"

"Oh, no—no! This is the end of it all. I have but one wish now."

"Well—well, ride on gently, Jack. Remember that we are in London yet, and that our enemies may still be after us. What is your one wish?"

"That I were dead!"

"Oh, pho! You are not at all like a dead one yet, Jack, nor is Claude either, for all we know. Come—come, you look at the affair much too gloomily. There is hope yet, you know."

"Alas! it was a natural impulse for me to fly from the spot when I found that I could do him no good; but I ought to have staid and died by his side, that is what I ought to have done."

"No such thing, Jack."

"But I say yes, Dick. Do not tell me it is no such thing; you do not know how close was the bond of union between us."

Dick Turpin could not but see that Jack was in no mood to be reasoned with, nor did he blame him for the excess of feeling that he betrayed upon the occasion, for he knew how close had been the companionship between him and Claude Duval.

"Jack," he said, "your feeling is natural upon this occasion; but still, in the absence of information regarding the fate of Claude, you go too far."

"No—no. It will be a reproach to me as long as I live that I did not remain and die with him, as I ought to have done, and then all would have been well; I should have been spared the heartache which I have now, and which will never leave me."

Dick put his horse to a trot with the hope that Jack would instinctively follow the example, and he was not mistaken, for Jack assumed the same pace, probably hardly knowing that he did so at the moment.

Now a silence of some quarter of an hour's duration ensued between them, and they got right to Camden Town, and took the left-hand road, that would lead them to Highgate. More than once Dick Turpin looked back, and listened to hear if they were pursued by any one, but such was not the case. Of course, it was absurd for the officers on foot to come after two well-armed and well-mounted men; and the accident



that had happened on Holborn Hill to the two officers who were on horseback had had the effect of completely stopping their progress.

It was Jack, now, who first broke the silence by turning to Dick, and saying—

“Can you form any opinion, Dick, as to how it came about that Cicely was in that hackney-coach?”

“Yes, Jack, I can. Did you not hear her say that they had taken her into custody because she would not give the information concerning Claude Duval?”

“Yes—yes, I heard something.”

“That was it, and no doubt they would have made up some sort of a case against her; but it was the most unfortunate thing in the world that she should arrive in the Old Bailey at such a moment as that.”

“It was—it was.”

“Yes, it has ruined Claude, for, after all, what could they have done with Cicely? Even if they were quite sure she had nothing to do but to tell them at once where to find Claude, no jury could commit her of the only legal offence they could bring against her of harbouring a felon, considering that she is his wife, which fact she could easily prove.”

“Yes—yes, it was most unfortunate, as you say, Dick. This is, indeed, a most sad night for all of us. Where are we going now, Dick?”

“Towards Highgate.”

“But what good can we do to Claude at Highgate? It is of no use surely our going there.”

“Yes it is, Jack. Listen to me, now, patiently. I think that you are in a more composed frame of mind than you were, and that, therefore, I may tell you all my hopes and fears. May I do so, Jack?”

“Oh, yes, go on—go on, Dick.”

“Then, Jack, in the first place let us consider what we know and what we do not of the affair. We know that Cicely is taken—we know that Claude is taken, but we don't know if Cicely be severely hurt or not—and we don't know if Claude be hurt at all. Now, here are you and I, both free and uninjured, and capable and willing to assist them both in every possible way, so,

after all, their situation may not be so bad as it looks.”

“You give me better hopes,” said Jack, drawing a long breath.

“To be sure I do; but you are so easily depressed, Jack. That is the one fault of your character.”

“I cannot help it,” said Jack, mournfully. “Claude himself, poor fellow, has often told me of it, and begged of me to try to conquer the feeling, but I cannot; however, Dick, I will now submit to your directions in all that has to be done; only let us, if you would keep me from going out of my mind altogether, do something as quickly as we can.”

“We will—we will. But it must be evident to you, Jack, that the first thing is to get accurate information of what has taken place.”

“Yes—yes!”

“Well, then, I propose that we go at once, now, on to the Gate-house Tavern at Highgate, and put up our horses at some other place, so that we shall be separated from them, and seem to arrive there from country-ways on foot. There we will wait until the newspapers tell us what situation Claude and Cicely are in, for the affair will make quite a sensation, you may depend, and every particular will be published.”

“Be it so, Dick.”

With this determination, then, they rode right through Highgate, avoiding the Gate-house as they went, and they did not pause until they got to Finchley, where they drew up and asked at a road-side inn if their horses could be kept for a few hours, as they were going to call upon a gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had no accommodation for them. The answer was, of course, in the affirmative, and they left their horses well housed; then, on foot, they turned back to Highgate.

On the road they made what alterations in their apparel were in their power to do, so that by the time they reached the long straggling High-street of the village, they could hardly have been recognised as the same two persons who had ridden through it only half an hour before at a canter.

The Gate-house Tavern at Highgate stood then upon the same spot that it does now, only the old building has

disappeared and the modern structure, although bearing the same name, is not that which was at one time rather notorious as a baiting place for the knights of the road.

The change that Turpin and Jack had made in their appearance was rather for the better, as regarded their respectability and their looks, and they were received at the Gate-house with usual courtesy as gentlemen, although there was a little surprise at their appearing at such an hour as that. Still, there was then so much traffic on the Great North Road, that the hotels and inns were all open all the night.

All that they ordered was some mulled wine and a couple of beds, which, in the course of a quarter of an hour, they were accommodated with; and then Dick Turpin, as he shook hands with Jack for the night, said—

“Get some sleep, Jack. Remember that we can just now do nothing, but that if we are ever to do anything for Claude it must be by exertions that will require all our strength and power, so we ought to take care of ourselves.”

“You are right, Dick. Good-night!”

They parted for the night, and Dick Turpin threw himself upon the bed, having only taken off his coat and his boots, and was soon fast asleep. Poor Jack, on the contrary, sat in an arm-chair, and ordered a fire to be lit in his room; and thus, for hour after hour, he sat, gazing at the burning embers, and in deep and profound thought regarding the position of Claude Duval.

It was not until the dim light of early dawn began to peep in at the window of the bedroom that Jack fell into an uneasy slumber; and then he was haunted with horrible dreams, and he fancied that he was in the midst of a vast crowd, that, with uproarious shouts, surrounded a scaffold, upon which he could see Claude Duval about to be executed. With all his exertion he could not get at him, and when he tried to call to him, he found that his voice had turned to a weak whisper.

With all the fright and terror of the dream upon his mind, Jack started and awoke, upon hearing some one knocking at the door of the room.

“Who is there?” he cried. “Who is there?”

“Don’t you know me, Jack?” said Dick. “Open the door.”

Jack did so, and Dick Turpin entered the room.

“Why, Jack,” he said, “you have not slept a bit.”

“Oh, yes, I have,” said Jack, with a shudder. “I have had too much sleep.”

## CHAPTER CCLXXXVII.

THE ST. JAMES’S CHRONICLE GIVES NEWS TO DICK TURPIN AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

DICK could not but see by the face of Jack that he had passed but a very indifferent night, and he shook his head as he said—

“Jack—Jack, have you been husbanding your strength as I asked you to do, for the purpose of trying to do something for Claude?”

“No,” said Jack, after a pause.

“I thought not.”

“But I will, Dick. The morning light has brought something like peace to me, and I feel much better than I did. I am getting more myself. You shall not have cause to complain of me, again. But I have had such a dream.”

“A dream?”

“Oh, yes. You smile, Dick, but it was a dreadful dream. I thought that—”

“Hold, for mercy’s sake, Jack! If you don’t wish to give me the horrors for the rest of the day, I beg you won’t tell me anything about your dream. Do you know, it almost drives me crazy when I hear any one begin with ‘I thought that I was so-and-so, and then I thought,’ and so on. Come—come, Jack, chase such nonsense from your brain. You know that one who was better acquainted with human nature than either you or I are has said—

‘We are such things as dreams are made of.’”

“Yes, I remember; and he likewise says—

‘And our little life is rounded by a sleep.’

I wish that mine were so. I should like to close my eyes for once and for ever. But I have promised you that I will make no more such allusions, or give way to such feelings, and I will

keep my word. Only tell me what you would have me do."

"Why, in the first place, Jack, I would have you attend to what I consider is of the greatest importance just now to us both.

"What is that, Dick?"

"Breakfast."

"Ah! I might have guessed what you were going to say. Well, be it so. I will not say that it will be unwelcome to me, and I hope that by the time it is over, we shall hear something of Claude Duval."

"If the newspapers reach here by that time, of course we shall. Let us order breakfast in a private room, and ask for the morning paper as soon as it can be got; but we must not appear to be too anxious about it, you know."

"Oh, no—no."

"I will be careful."

The Gate-house Tavern at Highgate, was a very large old rambling house, and there were so many rooms in it upon the first floor, that twenty people might almost have breakfasted quite privately, so that Dick Turpin and Jack had no sort of difficulty in getting accommodated. In the course of a quarter of an hour, a good breakfast of hot coffee, rolls, ham, and fine fresh butter, and plenty of cream, was before them, to which they did justice.

The room that they were in was a very pretty one, so far as its aspect was concerned, for it looked upon one of the ponds that were in the town, and there grew, close up to the window, a plum tree, some of the thick old branches of which were half inclined to make their way into the apartment, and, as it was, the leaves rattled in the morning air against the window panes.

"You can let us have a newspaper," said Dick to the waiter.

"Yes, sir, yesterday's."

"Thank you; that will do till to-day's comes. When do you have it?"

"The post-boy drops them at the door, sir, at ten o'clock every morning."

"Thank you; that will do."

The waiter bowed himself out. An hour had yet to be passed before the time when the post-boy would leave the papers of that morning; so Dick

and Jack wiled away the time as well as they could; and there was one thing that they made up their minds to, which was, that it would be highly desirable to get some cash as quickly as possible.

"My exchequer," said Dick, "is rather on the wane, and I think we are bound to keep our appointment with the porter at the inn."

"Do you think heremains true to us?"

"Indeed, I do."

"Well, then, let him have his money by all means, Dick, if we can get it; and the only way we can do so, is by going on the road to-night, and seeing what kind of luck we shall have. I know, too, that Claude has little or no money; therefore, if he still lives, we must take care to get some for him."

"The St. James's Chronicle, gentlemen," said the waiter, as he laid the paper, still damp from the press, upon the table.

Jack did not dare to look at the waiter lest he should perceive the anxiety which was but too manifest upon his face; so he hid it in his pocket handkerchief until the man had gone out of the room, and then Dick took up the paper with a grave countenance.

"What does it say?" gasped out Jack.

"Have patience, and compose yourself. Recollect where we are."

"Oh, yes, yes. But look at once."

"Hush! I will read to you all that concerns us in a voice loud enough for us to hear; but not loud enough for any one else to overhear, I hope."

"Do so, Dick. I feel that my agitation is too great to permit me to read it for myself."

Dick unfolded the paper, and, as a heading to one of the columns on the inside, he saw the words, "Capture of the notorious Claude Duval. Dreadful affray in the Old Bailey."

"Here it is," he said. "Listen now, Jack, and whatever I read, do not let your feelings get the better of you."

"I will not, I promise you that, Dick, if you will solemnly promise not to keep a word of the statement from me."

"Upon my word I will not."

Jack sat with his hands tightly

clasped together, and in profound silence, while Dick Turpin read as follows :—

“Last night, or rather at an early hour this morning, the Old Bailey and its neighbourhood were thrown into a state of indescribable confusion and alarm, by a scene which took place nearly opposite to the entrance of Newgate, concerning which, we will endeavour to give our readers the full particulars.

“It appears that the daring exploits of the notorious Claude Duval had so far attracted the attention of the highest authorities, that it was deemed desirable to resort to extraordinary means for his apprehension, and, after the most diligent inquiries, it was ascertained that a female of doubtful character, whom he calls his wife, was concealed at a farm in the neighbourhood of Ealing. It was then resolved at once to apprehend this person, and her capture was cleverly accomplished by a couple of active officers from Bow Street.

“Upon the coach in which she was being conveyed to Newgate reaching the corner of the Old Bailey, it appears that a most daring attempt was made to rescue her, by three mounted men, who shot one of the officers dead on the spot, and then proceeded to release the female from the carriage. The alarm, however, was given, and a strong force coming from Newgate, succeeded in capturing one of the ruffians, who turned out to be no other than the notorious Claude Duval himself.

“We regret to say that in the *mêlée* no fewer than four officers have received severe wounds, and two have been shot dead upon the spot. The female, too, who had been placed upon a horse, in order to effect her escape, was badly wounded.

“Claude Duval himself is now in Newgate, and it is expected that in a very few hours his associates will likewise be in custody.”

Dick paused, and looked at Jack. He was very pale.

“You see, Jack,” said Dick, “that there is no mention of Claude being hurt in the least.”

“No. But poor Cicely—she is hurt badly.”

“Yes. Shall I read on?”

“Is there more?”

“There is, Jack. The account goes on to another hour or two.”

“Yes. Let me know all.”

Dick now read in a subdued tone, which betrayed considerable emotion.

“We stop the press to announce shortly, that the female who was the original cause of the *fracas* is no more. She expired in the prison at about half-past four this morning, making the fourth victim already dead upon this extraordinary and desperate occasion.”

“Dead!” said Dick. “So poor Cicely is dead, after all. Killed in a street brawl at last.”

“It seems so”

“Alas, poor girl! It is a sad fate for her. Is it not so, Dick?”

“It is, indeed.”

“After this, Claude will not look up. He will abandon hope. He will not even try to escape now, poor fellow! And if we see him, he will tell us that the best and the kindest thing we can do for him, is to let him die. I know that that is what he will say to us.”

“Yes, Jack, in the first flush of his despair Claude Duval may say so, and may feel so, but that will pass away again.”

“Think you so?”

“I am sure of it, Jack, and so we will not take such an answer from him, if we should succeed at all in seeing him. This has, indeed, been a sad—a very sad adventure.”

“Is there no more?”

“No—no. Stop! What is this? Oh, only some editorial remarks: ‘We congratulate the respectable portion of society upon the apprehension of the notorious Claude Duval the highwayman, who, no doubt, will now expiate his offences against the safety of his fellow-men at the Old Bailey.’”

“That will do for that,” said Jack. “They will all have a kick at the dead lion.”

“When you have quite done with the paper, gentlemen,” said the waiter, popping his head into the room, “the gents down stairs would be much obliged if you could let them have it”

“Oh, certainly,” said Dick, gaily. “There is no change whatever in the

price of meat, or either of corn, I see."

"Ain't there, sir?"

"No. You can take the paper. Thank you."

"Thank you, sir. Coming—coming—coming!"

The bells below were ringing violently, and the waiter rushed out of the room with the *St. James's Chronicle* in his hand.

It was then that Dick Turpin and Jack looked at each other in silence for some few minutes, and Dick was just about to say something, when the door of the room was abruptly opened, and a man, attired in a rough great coat, made his appearance in the room. The moment he saw that some one was there, he drew back, saying—

"Beg pardon, gentlemen. Didn't know anybody was in this room."

He was gone, then, before Dick or Jack could make any reply to him; but to the surprise of Dick, Jack slowly rose, and going to the door, he locked it carefully, and likewise slid a bolt that was in the lower part of it into its place.

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"Did you know that man? But no. Why do I ask you? Of course you did not, or you would not sit so quietly there."

"Who is he?" said Dick, starting up.

"Hush!—hush! We must make no noise. You have heard of a Bow-street runner named Godfrey, I suppose?"

"Yes. By Jove, I have."

"That's the man, then."

Dick mechanically produced a pistol.

"Put it up again," said Jack. "It is of no use. . . By the sound of voices, there are plenty of people down stairs, and although we might take a life or two, we should be sure to be over-powered in the long run. Force will do nothing for us in this emergency, I assure you, Dick."

"You are right," said Turpin, as he put the pistol into his pocket again.

"You are quite right, Jack. I am enraged, however, at—at——"

"At what, Dick?"

"Pardon me for saying it, but I was

about to add, at your coolness and decision, Jack."

"Danger awakens me to the full use of all my faculties, I think," said Jack, "And now I tell you that my opinion is: this Godfrey only came up stairs to look on, and that it was no mistake his opening the door of this room. I think that he knows us, too, Dick."

"The devil you do!"

"Yes; and that he is now organizing a plan for our capture. We must concoct some plan, or we are lost, at once!"

"To be sure. The window!"

"Hush! hush! What do you hear?"

"Footsteps upon the stairs, and low voices. They come nearer, Jack. Open the window, that's a good fellow! I am quite convinced now that there are a dozen people slowly creeping up the old stairs. The window, Jack!—the window! But don't make any noise over it, or we are lost! That will do. Bravo! that will do!"

"Are they coming yet, Dick?"

"They are; but they come slow, for they think to take us by surprise."

## CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

DICK AND JACK GO UPON THE HEATH,  
AND MAKE A TRAVELLER DISBURSE.

JACK, while Dick was listening within some couple of yards or so of the door, had so cautiously opened the window of the room that it made not the least noise. Those who were coming up to the apartment from below were evidently coming with extreme care; and no doubt they were marshalled by Godfrey, the officer, who contemplated making a secure capture, even if it were at the expense of a life or two.

"Come," said Jack.

Dick, quite noiselessly, went towards the window. There was a good view of a garden below; but the height was very inconsiderable indeed, and, besides, by the assistance of the plum-tree there could be no possible trouble in the way of descending.

What a mercy for them it was that they had not their horses there at such a time!

"After you, Jack," said Dick, in a



low tone. "After you. Let us be off at once, if we can. Get out at the window."

"No, no—go first."

Tap! tap! came gently at the door of the room. There was no time to parley about precedence, and Dick at once got out, and slid down to the ground comfortably enough by the aid of the plum-tree. Jack got out of the window, too; but as he held on to the tree, he gently and noiselessly closed the casement again.

"That may give us five minutes' stretch," he said; "and a minuet is now to us as good as a life."

"Good!" said Dick. "Come on!"

They were both in the garden, now. A low fence was at the other end of it, and it was by that means only shielded from the high road through the village, so that it was a hazardous thing to cross that fence at all. But that was no time for doubts or hesitations, and they ran across the garden till they got to a kind of outhouse; but the moment they reached that, a voice said—

"Hilloa! who are you?"

Dick looked into the outhouse, and he saw a lad cleaning shoes and boots, and looking with amazement at them both.

"It's all right," said Dick. "It's only a joke! You didn't see us, mind, or we shall lose our wager."

"Wager?"

"Yes, to be sure. There's your share of it for not seeing us."

Dick placed some five or six guineas—he did not wait to see how many there were—in the hands of the boy, who immediately transferred them to his pocket, as he said—

"I am blind and deaf, too, gentlemen."

"That's right. We want to leave the garden."

"This way. Hilloa!"

A loud crash at that moment came upon all their ears. The door of the room so lately occupied by Dick and Jack had been burst open by Godfrey, the officer, and they knew that they had not another moment to spare.

"Quick!" said Dick, "which is the way?"

"Here you are," said the lad, as he opened a door at the back of the out-

house that led at once into the village, close to the top of a lane.

"That will do," said Dick. "Come on, Jack."

They did not pause another moment, but cowering down, they ran along by the garden railings of an old red brick house, and then past a blacksmith's forge, till they got to the top of the lane, down which they dashed at great speed. Those who know the lane, know that it goes down-hill from Highgate for some distance, and that circumstance gave the fugitives a great advantage in the speed they made. The hour was one at which not many persons were about, so that they escaped observation from any chance pa-senger in the lane, and Jack who was foremost, cried out to Dick—

"Follow me; I know every inch of this neighbourhood. Make no scruple of following me, Dick."

"All's right, Jack. I will keep up with you."

After they had got about a quarter of a mile down the lane, now, Jack made an abrupt turn to the right, and burst his way through the hedge that skirted the road. Dick followed him, and then they both set to work to pull the bushes and blackthorn over the gap they had made in getting through the hedge, so that it should not be observed. It was then that Dick said—

"Jack, I think we have done them!"

"Don't holla before you are out of the wood, Dick."

"No, but there is a chance now."

"There is, and a good one, too. If we keep along this way at the back of this side of Highgate, we shall reach Finchley over the fields; and I do think if we can once get our horses we shall give them the slip."

"Not a doubt of it."

On Jack dashed across a wide meadow, and then they came to another hedge, at the base of which was rather a brawling, formidable water course. That was no time to stop for trifles, though, and they both jumped it without a moment's hesitation, and scrambled up the bank on the other side, little heeding the clay and mud that stuck to their hands and clothes. There was a turnip-field on the other side of that hedge.

Through the turnips they went at a good rate.

"Hoi! hoi!" cried a man with a smock frock on. "Hoi! That won't do, you must not come there, you know. Go back."

"I think I see it," said Dick.

The man began to run after them, but they had got the start of him, and they cleared the hedge on the other side of his turnip field, and got into a meadow before he was half-way towards it.



TURPIN AND JACK RECOGNISED BY THE OFFICER AT THE GATEHOUSE TAVERN.

"On—on," said Jack. "We won't give up our speed, Dick, till we cannot help it. On—on!"

"All's right," was Dick's response, and over the field they went. But now

they came to rather a serious obstacle. A wall, encircling some garden, skirted a long way out to the left, right into the fields. It was so formidable a thing to try to surmount, so they had

no resource but to go round it, which with great regret they did ; but they found that on the other side there was an enclosed paddock, with some cattle in it. No doubt that was private property, and they were trespassing by going through it ; but they did not stand upon ceremony, but vaulting the paling, over they went.

Their progress was rather accelerated across this paddock by a young ox taking it into his head to run after them, with the idea that they were running away from him ; and as they did not admire being tossed, they got out of that individual's way as quickly as they could, and then Jack paused, and held his hand to his side, as he said--

"Done up, Dick."

"I don't wonder at it," said Dick.

"We have run a mile."

"Have we, though?"

"To be sure we have, and I would rather slacken my pace a little, I assure you."

"Then I may well feel exhausted. But, Dick, if you think you can go on a little faster than I can you know, you had better do so, and let me come at my leisure. Save yourself, Dick."

"Pho! pho! Jack, don't be saying such things to me, old fellow, at this time of day. We will sink or swim together. If the Philistines catch one of us, they may as well catch both. You don't mean to say that you have come to a dead stop?"

"Oh, no--no. I am better now. A pain caught me in the side that was all, but it has gone again, Dick, and I can get on, though not so fast."

"Allow me to say, that there is no occasion now for such a mad sort of hurry about it, Jack."

"No--no, not so much occasion certainly, Dick, that I admit freely. There is not so much occasion ; but still, our horses are some distance off, and the sooner we get to them the better it will be."

"No doubt ; but let us regulate the pace, now. Stop a bit, though, Jack, altogether."

"What for, Dick?"

"I will get upon this stile, and take a look about me. Perhaps I shall see that, not being pursued, we can take things a little easier altogether. You

lie down while I make an observation of as extended a character as I can."

Jack flung himself upon the grass, and after the race that he had had it was a great relief for him to do so, indeed ; and Dick climbed right on to the top bar of the stile they were close to, and holding right on by the branch of an alder tree, he was able to see far away across the meadows.

"Not a soul," he said.

"That's a mercy," said Jack.

"Only our friend, the ox yonder, very angry at our escape. That is the only enemy ; but I am sure, upon my life, Jack, I don't think that in all my experience I ever had such a desperately narrow escape as this of to-day."

"It was a close touch."

"Much too close to be at all pleasant, I can assure you. But we will go on, though we need not hurry ourselves."

Dick descended from his elevated position, and then Jack, having found much relief to the pain in his side from the few minutes' rest he had had, rose, and they went on at a brisk walk only.

They came now to several openings to the right, which, if they had chosen to avail themselves of, would have taken them into the main road ; but they did not think it at all prudent to do so. They kept in the fields until they saw the house at which they had left their horses ; and they considered that there would surely be some back way to it from the fields.

Just as they were talking about that probability, they came upon one of the openings we have mentioned as leading to the main road, and as they did so, they heard the clatter of horses feet. They drew back, and flung themselves flat upon the grass, by the side of some timber that had been recently felled ; and they saw six horsemen come up, and pause at the entrance to the turning that led into the fields. There was a cottage with a garden full of clothes hanging out to dry at the corner of the turning.

"Hoi! hilloa!" cried one of the horsemen. "House! house! Is anybody at home?"

"What is the matter?" said a female voice.

"Have you seen a couple of men pass here, my good woman?"

"Oh, I don't know. What do I care about them? I don't attend to whether men pass or not."

"Well, but have you?"

"Go along with you, do, and don't bother! No, I haven't. There, now, I suppose that will satisfy you. But I have seen a boy and a cow."

"It's out of the question that they could have got this far," said another of the mounted men, "even allowing that they took this road at all. They are hid in Highgate, somewhere, that is my opinion."

"Well, well," cried he who had first spoken, "let us come on."

They rode off at a sharp trot.

"What the deuce are they going to do?" said Dick.

"Give notice, most likely," replied Jack, "to the different villages all down the road that if we are seen we are to be secured, if possible. They will stop at every public-house, including that at which our horses are; but as they will mention two men and not two horses, they will get no news of us, I think; and our best plan is to let them get a good quarter of an hour's start of us now."

"Be it so, Jack. It's a rest at the same time, if you are at all comfortably situated. Are you so?"

"Oh, yes! yes! But this is not the sort of thing that you are accustomed to, Dick."

"Why, no, I can't say it is; but variety, you know, Jack, is charming."

Jack shook his head.

"Not this sort of variety. A succession of pleasures may be delightful enough, but a succession of risks, such as have fallen to our share lately, I must confess I don't exactly like so well. We have fallen upon cruel times, Turpin."

"We have, so far as poor Claude is concerned; but if he were with us I should not much mind our present situation."

"Oh, but it is a dreadful thing, Dick Turpin, when you come to consider that here we are, like a couple of Esaus—all men's hands are lifted against us, and our hands are lifted against all men! Here we are in our native country, outcasts and wanderers upon the face of the earth—hunted like wild beasts from

town to country, and from country to town—a price put upon our heads, and our deaths considered not only a lawful act but a public benefit. This is adreadful state of things, is it not?"

"Sixteen-stringed Jack," said Dick, "allow me to advise you to leave the profession, and to go into the church. I have heard of many a fellow who has tried the road, and found he did not get on there, and then gone, by a divine call, of course, to be a parson. Why should you not leave the road, now, and take to the pulpit?"

"Ah, I see that you will not attend to me."

"Jack, I know, and you know, too that we cannot be no other than what we are. Society won't own us, Jack. If we were to offer ourselves to the community at large, all that we should get for our repentance, and our wish to amend our ways, would be a halter."

"True. That is true."

"And, therefore, Jack, do not let us waste our time in vain regrets. We are what we are, so such we must remain. So, now, my dear fellow, let us get on and secure our two good steeds. We will go upon Blackheath and Shooter's Hill to-night; and it will be a bad thing if between us we cannot get some good booty. We must pay our friend the watchman of the inn in the Old Bailey a part of his debt, if we cannot conveniently let him have all of it. Come on."

"I am ready," said Jack. "Come on, then. There is truth in what you say, Dick."

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## CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

### TAKES A GLANCE AT THE AFFAIRS IN NEWGATE.

THEY found, as they had anticipated, that there was a back entrance from the open country to the inn at which they had left their horses; and as they were instantly recognised by the ostler, they had no difficulty in substantiating their claim to their steeds.

"We came across the fields," said Dick, as he saw the man look with some surprise at the condition of their

## GENTLEMAN JACK; OR,

clothing, which, to tell the truth, had suffered not a little in their headlong route. We came across the fields, but we scarcely found the meadows dry enough."

"No, sir," said the man, "there's been a deal of rain, and they won't be dry for some time, I take it. I'll get a brush from the house, sir, and rub you down a bit."

"No, thank you. Just get out the horses, and we will be off."

"Very good, sir."

The horses were brought out, but Jack kept a good eye upon the road, as he could not exactly take upon himself to say if all the officers had ridden past or not, although a party of them had done so. Dick paid the ostler liberally, but not to such an amount as to create any surprise that he came by his money too easily, and they both mounted.

"You'd better look out on the road, gentlemen," said the ostler, "for they do say as there's a couple o'highwaymen on it."

"Indeed! Who says so?"

"Why, the officers have been here, you see, and they says so, and I thought I had better tell you of it in case you happened to see anybody on the road that looked like 'em."

"Thank you. Good-day."

The ostler touched his seal-skin cap, and then Dick and Jack rode out of the inn-yard into the open road in the most independent-looking manner in all the world. If they had been magistrates of the country they could not possibly have looked more cool and self-possessed.

"Jack," said Dick, "does that fellow suspect us?"

"Yes."

"You really think he does?"

"I saw it in his eyes, Dick. I cannot take upon myself to say whether he means to do anything or not contingent upon his suspicions, but that he does think we may be the two highwaymen he spoke of is certain enough."

"Confound him!"

"Nay, we ought not to confound him till we know whether he is inclined to be an enemy or not to us. Recollect that he might have detained the horses."

"True; he might have done so; but as we have got them, I rather recom-

mend a good canter, or perhaps a gallop."

"Fair and softly, Dick. We will get out of the high road as quick as we can; that will be one good job done. Ah!"

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"Look!"

Jack did look, and about twenty yards in front of him he saw a man on horseback with a cutlass by his side, and holsters to his saddle, and, altogether, a most mounted police-officer-like look about him.

"What's to be done?" whispered Jack.

"Put a bold face upon it, and ride up to him."

Dick did so, and bolting up to the man, he said, in a voice as though, he were very angry about something—

"Do you belong to the police?"

"Yes, sir, I do," said the man.

"Well, I only wish you were in the fields at the back of my house, instead of being on the road here. You see this horse that I am riding?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I very nearly had him stolen only a quarter of an hour ago from my paddock, at the back of Swains-lane to the north, by a couple of men, who were skulking about there for no good. They ran off when I called my servants."

"Two men, sir—on foot?"

"On foot, of course; but they did not seem inclined to be on foot for one moment longer than it would take them to steal a horse."

"Sir," cried the officer, "can you tell me which way they went?"

"Yes. Towards Hampstead, as fast as they could."

"Hang me, if I didn't think they would go that way, only Mr. Godfrey would not have it. Thank you, sir, for your information. The two men, sir, are notorious highwaymen that we are upon the look-out for. Good-day, sir."

With this, the officer, who was completely taken in by the bold, angry, and off-handed manner in which Dick Turpin had spoken, clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped in the direction of Highgate, to give the news that he thought he had now got of the fugitives.

"That will do," said Dick



"Yes," replied Jack, "I think it will. I could no more have faced the fellow in such a way, and looked so cool and collected while I spoke to him, than I could have flown."

"Oh, Jack, extraordinary emergencies have to be met by extraordinary means, and there was no other way of disarming this great danger but by looking it steadily in the face."

"Which," added Jack, "is the way to disarm and to vanquish most great dangers, as well as small ones, if people could but be brought to think so."

Dick nodded, as an acquiescence to the truth of this proposition, and then they went on for about a mile at a rate which precluded the possibility of further conversation.

It was no easy thing to find direct routes to the neighbourhood they wanted to go to from such a very opposite end of the suburbs of London as they were now at. It was a long stretch to get to Blackheath from the neighbourhood of Finchley. There was the absolute necessity of crossing the Thames somewhere or another; and, beyond the fact that they did not think either London Bridge or Blackfriars at all safe for this purpose, they had no very distinct idea of which way they ought to go.

After about a mile further, they kept down a turning to the left, which, at all events, they thought was the best way they could then go; and Jack called out to Dick, saying—

"Have you decided upon our route, Turpin?"

"Troth! no! I have not. Have you?"

"Well, of course, I have not decided, because that is for you to do, as well as for me; but what do you say to getting across the country, now, westward to the Edgware Road, and then skirting the parks, and getting boldly over the bridge at Westminster? If we, after that—admitting that we get so far in safety—keep to the left, we must come out about the Old Kent Road, and then all is easy."

"That will do, Jack. Be it so. I was just thinking what bridge would be the best, but now you mention Westminster, I cannot but believe that it will be the safest for us."

"The distance, too, Dick, will not be

quite so great as it might look, considering where we now are, and where it is we want to go to."

"Certainly not. That will do, Jack, nicely. How far, now, should you say, at a rough guess, is it to Blackheath, from this present spot?"

"It will be but a rough guess, Dick; but talking of it in that way, and not at all pledging myself to accuracy as regards a mile or two, or, perhaps, three, I should say it is thirteen miles."

Dick nodded.

"Ah! Jack!" he said, "you know the country round about London pretty well, I do think."

"Tolerably," said Jack.

It was no part of the policy of the confederates to seek any adventures in the day-time. There was already too much racket about them, and too much excitement in the public mind concerning them and their doings, for them to run more risks by any attempted exercise of what they considered to be their professional calling on the road, as they went along. They thought, and no doubt, upon good grounds, that the impression would still be, both on the part of the officers, and the part of the public, that they were hanging about the northern suburbs of the metropolis, and so, their sudden appearance at Blackheath would be totally unlooked for, and they would be able to make, probably, a good night's work of it in that locality.

How far this calculation was correct or not, time, and a very short time, too, will now show to the reader.

The Edgware Road was gained by traversing one of those long shady green lanes that lie between it and the Great North Road from London, and which in the summer time have such a delicate freshness and thoroughly country aspect about them, that it is marvellous they are not better known to the pale and dust-covered inhabitants of London. But the fact is, that when a cockney and his family goes a short distance into what he calls the country, it is always upon some high road, until he comes to a public-house, and there he sits him down over his glass until it is time for him to wend his way back again to the pent-up, confined place of his home again. The pleasant out-of-the-way

spots—the cool lanes—the verdant meadows, are as much unknown to the genuine Londoner as though they were a thousand miles away from him, instead of almost at his very door.

But this is a digression. Dick Turpin and Jack of the sixteen-strings soon left the Edgeware Road behind them, and made their way down Park Lane without any molestation, after which they got through a portion of Pimlico, and fairly emerged close to Westminster Abbey and within sight of Westminster Bridge.

They could but feel now that they were, as regarded their personal safety, in rather a dangerous locality for Westminster was better protected by the police than any other locality, of London, on account of the number of persons of importance connected with the government, who resided within its limits. Still the danger was that of a few fleeting minutes, for when once the bridge should be crossed they would be in a different region—for squalid and dirty as the other side of the water is now, it was pretty, and cleanliness and beauty itself, in comparison with what it was a hundred years ago.

“Now,” said Dick, as they cantered towards the bridge, “if any officer of the police should happen to see and recognise your face or mine, it would be a capital morning’s work for him.”

“It would, indeed, unless I thought proper to reward him for his cleverness and interference with a bullet.”

Dick laughed.

“I don’t know, Jack, but that such a thing would serve the fellow right, and I should feel myself inclined to add to the reward by giving him another.”

They reached the bridge, however, and no one favoured them with more than a mere passing glance, so that their progress might be said to be exceedingly satisfactory indeed, so far; and so the moment they had crossed it and were in the old, dirty, and squalid road on the other side, Jack drew a long breath, as he said—

“Welcome to all the misery, and the squalor and the dirt of over the water. We are a hundred times safer here than we were on the other side of the bridge.”

“I think we are, Jack, and now I have good hopes that we shall see

Blackheath to-night, and feel something like the feelings of old times stealing over us.”

“Ah, if Claude were but with us!”

“Yes, that is a damper indeed, Jack.”

“It is. I do not wish to give way to superstition, but with a shudder I feel as if a something whispered to me that his doom is sealed.”

“What mean you?”

“I think that his time has come, Dick.”

“What! For death?”

“Ay, Dick, for death! I wish I did not think it, but I do in spite of myself. The shadow of a dreadful fate for Claude Duval seems to be resting upon my heart, and I cannot shake it off.”

“But you must shake it off, Jack.”

“Alas, I cannot!”

“Then it will be your master, and it will have one injurious effect which you do not calculate upon, if you do not rid yourself of it.”

“What is that, Dick?”

“It will paralyse your energies so that, taking all your attempts to be useless, you will fail in everything that you try for the benefit of Claude Duval.”

“Oh, no—no, it will not have that effect, Dick, for I will die for him if it be requisite; and, indeed, I have often wished that when his career ended, mine should do so likewise.”

“I could heartily scold you, Jack, for giving way to such gloom, but I will not. Come on at a good canter now, and I’ll warrant that if the moon peeps down upon you on Blackheath to-night, and if we have anything in the shape of good fortune, you will be in quite a different frame of mind.”

“I hope I shall, Dick.”

“I know you will. This is the pace to go at. How the folks look at us, Jack, as we pelt along; we are creating what may be called a sensation. Mind that pig, Jack.”

Jack had very nearly ridden over a pig who was basking, if we may be allowed the term, in the kennel, with a depth of about six inches of very luxurious mud about him.

Jack, however, did not ride over the pig, but jumped over that obese and alderman-like individual, and they

paced their way till they got into the Old Kent Road, and then at a more moderate pace they entered Greenwich, having done the distance from Finchley, which was rather more than thirteen miles that Jack had estimated it at, in the space of an hour and ten minutes.

"Pretty good going," said Dick, as they trotted through the town.

"Where shall we put up till night, Dick?"

"Let us ride on to Eltham. It is a quiet hum-drum sort of place, where you don't see a stranger above once a week. I think a man might go there and not be found out by his friends or by his creditors, if he were to remain there for twenty years. I am confident that he might stay until time had made a sufficient alteration in his appearance for him to pass as somebody else in the world."

## CHAPTER CCXC.

### A NIGHT SCENE UPON BLACKHEATH AND SHOOTER'S HILL.

THE horses were not distressed by the ride from Finchley to Blackheath, and then on to the village of Eltham, but both Jack and Dick knew how very desirable it was to rest horses some time before they showed distress, so they alighted at the most creditable-looking inn in Eltham, after being well stared at by everybody in the village.

"Dinner," said Dick, "and the best of everything, and plenty of it, for the cattle."

This was an order that set everybody upon the stir at the inn, for the last gentleman that had been there had only had bread and cheese and half-a-pint of ale, and that was five weeks ago.

"A lively place this, landlord," said Dick, as he sat down with Jack in the well-sanded old parlour of the inn.

"Oh, very, sir," said the landlord, making a hideous grin. "However lively, sir, you may call it, we have had a good deal to think of lately."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, gentlemen. The pump has been out of order, and Mrs. Brown, who keeps the mangle of Eltham, has

lost a hen, she says; therefore, with two such incidents, the public mind of Eltham, you see, sir, cannot exactly be brought to a state of stagnation."

"I should think not."

The landlord made his bow and exit, and Jack, looking at Dick, said with a laugh—

"Is that fellow a wag?"

"Not a bit of it. This place, I take it, would drive any man of ordinary energies insane in about a week, I think."

"It would me; but is there not an old palace or something of the sort, here?"

"Yes, but I think we had better, do you know, keep quiet. It don't want now but four hours or so to night, and the clouds are heavy, as if it would turn out a windy, and possibly enough, a rainy one, so we shall be able to get upon the heath and upon Shooter's Hill early. Let us stay here, Jack, till we feel that it is time to go out upon business."

"Be it so—and here comes the dinner."

We will now skip four hours and rather more by the leave of the reader, and behold the deep shadows of an unusually dark night dropping down upon Eltham and upon the whole country round about it, and wrapping up the bleak and bare heath as if in a shroud of direst black. Shooter's Hill, with its mass of vegetation to the right of the road, and the turret of its imitation castle, were completely lost amid the darkness, and ever and anon the wind came in fitful gusts across the wide expanse of the heath, carrying upon its noiseless wings particles of winter belating rain about the hour of midnight.

"It is time," said Dick, as he looked from the window of the snug room in which they were. "It is time, Jack."

"And I am ready, Dick. But before we leave this place, let us take the opportunity of looking to our pistols."

"Ah, yes, well thought of."

A few minutes sufficed for them to see that their arms were all in order, and then Dick Turpin rang the bell and ordered their horses.

"The horses, gentlemen?" said the landlord. "Oh, dear—oh, dear, it's a

raining—that is to say, it's a mizzling. I did think you were going to stop here, gentlemen. There's capital beds. Hem! We haven't had anybody to sleep here, do you know, gentlemen, since last September twelvemonths."

"Your beds must be well aired, then," said Dick.

"Oh, yes, sir, they are, indeed. We all sleep in them in regular order. There's the blue room, and the green room; and the red room, and No. 10, 11, and 12. Those are the bed-rooms; gentlemen, and we go from one to the other to keep them well aired for the gents; and the cook, gentlemen, if there's one uncommonly damp, sleeps in it two nights, as she is rather a warm kind of individual, in consequence of the kitchen fires, you understand."

"We have no doubt about the excellence of your accommodation; but business calls us to London."

"Well, if you must go, gentlemen, you must; only I am very sorry to lose you, as I am afraid we shall be dull afterwards."

The horses were brought to the door, and Jack and Dick mounted, and rode off. The inhabitants of Eltham flew to their doors and windows to see them go as well as they could, in the darkness that was over all things; and, no doubt, the advent of two strangers in the place who had actually dined there, served these simple people as food for conversation, for not only the rest of the evening, but some days to come.

The heath was reached; and then Dick and Jack drew rein, and tried to look about them. How bleak, and how black and dim the place was! They might, for all that they could see, have been in the midst of some uninhabited region of vast extent, where neither bird nor beast had a home.

"Now, Jack," said Dick, "this is the sort of night upon which professional gentlemen such as you and I may cry 'Stand!' to a man in; and as we want money, we must get it in our old way here. Where shall we post ourselves?"

"On the commencement of the ascent of Shooter's Hill Road."

"Be it so. This is the direction, I think. Come on."

We must now premise that the snug villas and the rows of houses that skirt Blackheath now had no sort of existence at the period of the life of Gentleman Jack. The heath was nothing but a wide expanse of open country, and although several roads were made across its expanse, it was about as rude and uncouth a looking region to be near a great city as could be well conceived.

Blackheath had been famous, some years before that period, for a number of daring robberies that had taken place upon it, and in its immediate neighbourhood; but by the death of the perpetrator of them, who had been shot one night by a Colonel Standish, who resided at Lewisham, they had been arrested, and since then the heath had not been popular among the knights of the road. The present visit of Dick Turpin and Jack, however, promised to have the effect of raising its reputation a little.

It was only by guess that they could at all make their way to Shooter's Hill, for see they could not, and there was every probability of their going out of the right track, which, in fact, they did to a limited extent to the left; but they regained it again, owing to striking upon the road itself, which wound around Greenwich Park, and over the heath, and then right up the hill.

"We are right now," said Jack. "The road is here."

"How far will you go upon it?"

"I think just to the commencement of the rise, for there either horsemen or carriages are compelled to slacken their pace; so it will be a good opportunity for us to step forward and lighten their purses a little."

"Quite philanthropical, too," said Dick, "for they will be able to ascend the hill all the better."

"To be sure they will; and here we are. I can feel, as well as slightly see, that we are upon the rise of the hill. And now, Dick, I don't care how soon we make a little cash."

"How cold I am!" said Jack.

"It is what poor Claude used to call a shuddery night, Jack."

"Yes—yes. I recollect the expression. He has often used it."

As Jack spoke, they heard the tramp



of footsteps approaching, and they were both silent in a moment. They had taken their station upon what horsemen and carriage drivers would call the near side of the road—that is, to the side next to Greenwich, so that they could come out from the deep shadow of the clump of trees close to which they were at a moment's notice, if it were requisite so to do. The



person who was approaching came on at a quick pace, and there was a kind of hurry about the walk which led Dick and Jack both to suspect that he might have something about him worth the taking.

"Halt!" cried Dick.

"Ah! who is that?" said the traveller.



"Resistance is in vain," said Dick. "Your money is what we want. You are now covered by a pistol, and if you are indiscreet, you are a dead man."

"I have no money—indeed, I have none worth the taking. A few shillings, perhaps, are all that I have about me."

"We don't know that."

"But I assure you it is a fact. Now, if you want to stop any one with money, there is Mr. Croke coming in his chariot. He lives a little way over the heath. He is a rich man, and a lawyer, and he is too old, too, to show you the light pair of heels that I can; and so good-night."

With these words the man scampered off at such a rate, that, in the darkness, all pursuit was quite out of the question.

"Not a very good beginning," said Jack. "Which way did he go?"

"Up the hill. But what odd sort of light is that upon the heath, Jack? There is a something coming through the darkness. It looks like some great animal with two flaming eyes."

"Why, Dick, what are you talking about? It is a carriage, I tell you, and those are the lights. We can see them, but not the vehicle. I wonder if that fellow told us the truth when he said somebody worth the stopping was coming?"

"I should not wonder. Keep quiet."

From out of the gloom some distance now before them, emerged a man on horseback; and, as Dick and Jack had calculated upon every one driving up gently to about that spot, he slackened the speed of his horse, and, in fact, reduced it to a walk.

Dick made his steed give a bound that brought him right in the path of the horseman, and by good fortune and accident rather than that he saw to do it, he got hold of the bridle of his horse, as he cried—

"Stand, or you are a dead man! Your money, sir, quickly!"

"Oh, have mercy upon me!" cried the horseman. "Help!—Oh, mercy! Don't kill me!"

"Your life is not worth a minute's purchase if you don't be quiet," added Dick; "and if you do, it is as safe as if you were in your own bed. Your money, sir!"

"Yes—yes, good Mr. a—a—Highwayman—yes, if you please. I haven't but twenty pounds or so with me; but if you will spare my life, you shall have them."

"Quick—quick!"

"Yes, sir—oh, dear, yes. There is my purse, sir, if you please. Will you be so good as to let me go now?"

"Who are you?"

"Augustus, sir, if you please."

"Augustus who? You have some other name than that, I presume."

"Yes, sir. Augustus Croke, and that's the old man, I mean my father, who is coming in the carriage, sir, if you please."

"Indeed? What is he?"

"A lawyer, good sir, and he's got his cash-box from the office with him."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Augustus, you reside just over the hill?"

"We do, sir," said the trembling Augustus.

"Then I can inform you that there are no less than twenty of us, and all well armed, and we have made a determination to cut the throats of the whole family, if we don't get the cash-box that your father has with him. If we do, no one will be in the slightest degree hurt. Now, with that knowledge, you see, that your best way is to prevent bloodshed, and to ride home and say nothing."

"Yes, gentlemen—oh, dear yes. Besides, what's a cash-box to one's life? and father can easily swindle somebody out of as much again—dear me, I mean, put it into somebody's bill of costs in the regular way."

"Never mind, Mr. Augustus; you used the proper word at the first. Swindle will do. Now go on."

"I heartily thank you, sir."

Augustus, finding himself at liberty to proceed, did so at once, leaving the old man, as he called him, to take the consequences of a collision with the highwaymen, and only regardful of his own safety in the matter. If fathers show to their sons that quile and roguery are the mere characteristics of their proceedings, what kind of feeling can they expect their sons to have?

"Will that fellow really ride home and say nothing?" said Jack.

"To be sure. Selfishness is the badge of all the tribe, Jack. But here comes the carriage of this Mr. Croke, and it may be that in the cash-box which has been so kindly mentioned by the young gentleman, we may find enough to make this little expedition quite worth our while. Is it lighter, Jack?"

"In good truth it is. The mist is going, and the morning is coming. We shall have a fine night upon the old heath yet."

"We shall, indeed. Why, the fog grows whiter, and even now I can see the trees on the other side of the road quite plainly. Look, too, how the white mist rolls away in huge clouds. Ah, there is the morn."

"The beautiful morn," said Jack.

At the moment that they spoke, the bright sparkling silver edge of the moon—it was nearly a full one, too—peeped up from the horizon, and cast a long streak of light over the heath. The night mists, like a routed army, began to dissipate quickly, and particles of blue sky, with twinkling stars in them, began to peep down upon the earth.

"This is not exactly a highwayman's night," said Dick.

"No, but it is a beautiful one; and there comes the carriage—you can now see it quite plainly—it will be here in three or four minutes now. It is to be hoped that this Mr. Croke, the lawyer, will have something worth the taking in the cash box, that his son Augustus has spoken of."

"Yes, enough I hope to let us pay our friend the inn watchman, who will be waiting for us at twelve o'clock by the park gate yonder, and enough after that to spare for the exigencies of poor Claude."

"If not, Dick, we must still take toll here, upon the side of Shooter's Hill, until we do get enough."

It was astonishing to notice now how rapidly the moon rose, and what an effect it produced upon the whole landscape, as it showed its bright silver face to this half of the great world. The air became purer and clearer. A few floating white-tipped clouds alone remained of all the thick vapours that had hidden the face of nature, and the trees, and the heath, and the hill showed sharply and clearly in the light.

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## CHAPTER CCXCI.

### THE INN-PORTER WANTS TO MAKE A FORTUNE RATHER TOO SOON.

It was with a heavy heart that Jack now listened to the sound of the rapidly approaching carriage wheels which announced that the lawyer was nearly on the spot where he and Dick were in waiting for him. Poor Jack was beginning to feel that his day was past, and that his career on the road was really over.

And yet, who had been more daring than he in the time gone past? Who had, with the wild and reckless generosity of an unselfish heart, done more good and less harm than he had, at a time when an adventure was only the more acceptable to him, the more perilous it proved to be?

But all that had been in the time before poor Jack had gone through the

sea of horrors that had encompassed him, before his execution, the awful pro-  
tractions of which, and his resuscitation, the reader is well acquainted with,  
since they have been narrated in the veritable pages of this narrative some time  
since. Those events had broken the spirit of the man, and had induced a  
nervousness that would stay by him until the grave should close over his hopes,  
his affections, and his fears.

After all, Jack was to be pitied, much as we, of course, must condemn his  
mole of life.

The spot upon which the confederates had chosen to wait for the coming of the  
lawyers carriage, was, as we have before intimated, a little upon the rise of the  
hill, so that the vehicle came but slowly towards them, owing to the necessity  
of slackening the speed of the horses up that steep ascent.

This was a great advantage to both Dick and Jack, and they were too old  
stagers on the road not to see it in that light, and to take every advantage of it.

The plan of operation of stopping a carriage when there were two men to do  
it was very simple, but very effective ; one would go to the horses' heads, and  
threaten the coachman with death if he did not keep the animals quiet, while  
the other would pay his polite attentions to the occupants of the beleaguered  
vehicle.

"Now, Jack, you keep the coachman in check," said Dick, "and I will speak  
to the lawyer."

"Very good, Dick."

The bright moonlight shot through an opening between a chestnut tree and a  
tall poplar, making a complete path of light across the road, and just as the  
carriage came upon that spot, Jack dashed out from his hiding place and seized  
the horse next to him by the rein, while, pointing a pistol at the coachman, he  
cried out—

"Another step, and you are a dead man!"

The coachman dropped his whip in a moment, and sat looking as if the eyes  
of the highwayman, by their steady glare at him, had turned him at once to  
stone.

Now was Dick's turn, and he was at the door of the carriage on the near side  
in an instant. The glass was up, but with a touch Dick let it down, and resting  
the barrel of a large pistol upon the ledge of the little casement, he said—

"Now, Mr. Croke, it is not your money or your life, but it is your money,  
without your life or with it, whichever you choose."

"Thieves!" cried the lawyer.

"Oh, no, Mr. Croke. There is but one thief here, and that is sure to be you,  
for you are a lawyer. I am the toll keeper."

"The—the toll! What toll?"

"One that is levied by me upon rich rogues. So, be quick, or I will put half  
an ounce of lead into your brains."

"Oh, spare him!" said a female voice.

"Nonsense!" said Dick. "Spare a lawyer? Ha! That is a good idea.  
But as I never take even the life of a reptile without the necessity for so doing,  
why, I can afford to let you off this once."

"I won't be robbed," said the lawyer. "I never was robbed, and I won't be  
robbed by any man. This proceeding is contrary to all law, and I don't intend  
to put up with it."

"Oh, you don't?"

"No, sir, I don't; and rather than be robbed, I will wait here until assistance  
comes up, and I will have you apprehended, and appear against you at the Old  
Bailey. I can identify you, I am certain."

"Very good," said Dick, quite calmly. "It is the cash-box I want, that is  
all."

"The devil!" said the lawyer. "Who told you of that?"

"Augustus."

"My Augustus?"

“ I presume so. I am only too happy in the consciousness that he is not rear; so, Mr. Croke, I give you now about half a minute to decide whether you will trouble me to rifle your dead body, or give me up freely from your living one what I want.”

“ You will come to the gallows.”

“ Very likely; and you to a worse place than that, although you may die in a feather bed. You are pretty well known here, Mr. Croke, and as the half-minute is past, why —” Here Dick cocked the pistol, and before he could say another word, the lawyer handed him out a small canvas bag, saying—

“ This is the whole of the money I have about me. It is a good sum, and I think you ought to feel satisfied with it.”

“ Perhaps I may; but, by the light of the moon, I can see some papers there upon the carriage seat. What are they?”

“ Only some bonds, and bills, and promissory notes of no use to any one in the way of money, I assure you.”

“ Never mind,” said Dick, as he reached his hand into the coach and took out the bundle of papers, “ I will look them over at my leisure, and if they are no use, I will return them to you.”

“ Oh, no—no. Don't take them.”

“ I have them.”

Something fell on to the road at Dick's feet from the papers, and upon looking down he saw that it was a watch, which the lawyer had slipped in there for safety.

“ Is it a good one?” said Dick.

“ No better,” groaned Croke.

Dick sprang off his horse to pick up the watch, but just as he was rising with it in his hand, he heard the lawyer say—

“ Take that,” and at the same moment the report of a pocket pistol struck upon his ears, and his hat was struck from his head.

The first suspicion of Dick was, that he must be shot, considering the very small distance he was from Mr. Croke; and, indeed, if the lawyer had aimed at him anywhere but on the head he could not possibly have avoided hitting him; but, as it was, he missed him by a hair's breadth, and the bullet merely blew his hat off his head.

“ Thank you,” said Dick.

“ Murder! help!” shouted the attorney, now, for having fired at the highway-man and missed him, he made quite certain that his own death would follow, as a matter of revenge. Dick fancied that these shouts would bring some one to the spot, so he opened the coach-door hurriedly, and seized the lawyer by the throat and dragged him into the road. Some female who was in the carriage was lying fainting at the bottom of it, so that the clamour she would have, no doubt, added to the scene was, very happily, so far as Dick Turpin was concerned, spared, and he only had to deal with Mr. Croke.

“ Hilloa!” cried Jack. “ How do you get on, Dick?”

“ All right.”

“ I heard a shot.”

“ Yes, it was at me; but I have had my old luck, and it has missed me.”

“ Thank the fates for that,” said Jack.

Mr. Croke was held by far too tightly by the throat by Dick to be able to do anything but make an odd gurgling kind of noise, more indicative of the difficulty of breathing than anything else; but he did manage to get upon his knees, for he thought that his last hour was surely come.

It was at this moment, when Dick hardly knew what to do with the man whom he did not wish to kill, that, Jack again spoke.

“ Philistines, Dick,” he said. “ Down the hill they come.”

This was quite a sufficient signal to Turpin of approaching danger; and upon the impulse of the moment, he flung the lawyer to the side of the road

under the trees, and hearing a loud splash, he felt quite satisfied that he was in a ditch.

"Off and away," he then cried. "Come on, Jack."

Dick was mounted again in a moment, and, indeed, it was quite a beautiful thing to see how his horse had stood, amid all the confusion, as firm and quiet as a rock, waiting for him, and watching him as though the creature had a knowledge of what was going on, and felt a warm interest in the result.

They both now, although the time had so nearly arrived for them to meet the inn-porter at the gate of the park, made their way towards Eltham across the heath, intending to make a round to get to their destination.

They had, no doubt, but the lawyer would not be so bad but that he would be able to tell those who were approaching down the hill which way the highway-men had gone.

"Jack," he said, "who is coming, do you know?"

"About half a dozen mounted men, I should say," replied Jack, "judging from the sound of the horses' feet."

"Ah, indeed! Then it was time to go."

"Why, yes; a general fight is not the thing exactly that suits us, you know, Dick. But what success did you have with the lawyer?"

"As good as could possibly be expected. I have a small bag of gold, I think, and I have taken a mass of papers from him."

"Of what use are they?"

"They may be of use to some poor devil or another. At our leisure, Jack, we will look over them, and possibly we may be doing the greatest favour to some one by destroying them. He said in his terror—and when a lawyer is thoroughly frightened, he speaks sometimes the truth—that they were bills and bonds, and such like documents."

"Then, let us destroy them all."

"No, we will hide them somewhere. What trees are those before us, Jack?"

"They belong to what is called the Manor House Estate, and they show us that we have crossed the heath. If you want to hide the packet of papers, it is easy enough to do so in one of these trees."

"A good thought. It shall be done."

The trees of which Jack had spoken belonged to a kind of wilderness that shielded an estate called the Manor House, that was upon the skirts of the heath. The wilderness was not at all enclosed in any way; so that our adventurers had no difficulty in darting in among them, and then they dismounted, and Dick climbed up a tree some short distance, with the packet of papers belonging to the lawyer in his hand, and safely lodged them in a corner formed by several branches, so that they could not fall.

"That will do," he said; "and now, I think, as there are no signs of pursuit, that we may as well get round to the park gate, for I should not at all like to break faith with the inn-porter."

"Heaven send that he keeps faith with us," said Jack.

"Don't doubt it. He would be a fool and a villain both not to do so. What could he gain by acting otherwise?"

"I don't know," said Jack. "He might think it was more to his interest to take the reward offered to him by the authorities for putting them in the way of our capture, than to keep faith with us, Dick. Mind you, I don't say that I have any special reason to doubt the fellow; but, still, he might do so."

"Then, Jack, we will be doubly cautious. Have you any of your phosphorous matches with you? I want to see what is in the bag that the lawyer handed to me from the coach."

"Oh, yes, Dick, I can throw a light upon the subject."

In a minute or two Jack had one of the little matches alight, and then Dick, rapidly counting the contents of the bag, found about one hundred and twenty



guineas, besides some half-guineas wrapped up in paper, and separate in that manner from the whole ones.

"This will do," he said. "I will pay our friend, the inn-porter, and then, Jack, our whole energies must be directed to poor Claude."

"Alas! you may well call him poor Claude. Now, I am afraid, Dick, that he will never look upon the moonlight again."

"Don't despair, Jack. If you do, it will paralyse our efforts to aid him. Come at once to the park-gate, and let us settle that little business, and then all our thoughts belong to Claude."

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## CHAPTER CCXCII.

### THE PERIL OF JACK AND DICK IS VERY GREAT INDEED.

It was quite impossible that any night could be more possibly lovely than that which now showed itself upon Blackheath upon the occasion of the visit of Jack and Dick. The few fleecy clouds that had been at intervals sweeping over the face of the moon had entirely disappeared, and there was the beautiful calm-looking luminary of the night sailing in a sea of azure of such a hue as is seldom seen in our climate.

It was a night upon which to dream of the past—upon which we might look with the radiance of hope upon the future—a night upon which the evil passions of human nature one would expect would cower from the presence of the soft and innocent-looking beauties of nature, and not show themselves till darker influences pervaded the material world.

Jack was very much affected, as he always was by such nights, and as he looked up at the moon, and the pale ray that fell upon his face robbed it of the little colour he had, he said—

"Dick, do you think you would like to go there?"

"Go where?"

Jack pointed to the moon.

"Are you mad, Jack? What the deuce do you mean by asking a fellow if he would like to go to the moon, eh?"

"I don't know; but it looks so quiet—so peaceful—and so serene, that it seems as if it would be a great privilege after death for the immortal part of us to wing its flight just through such a sky as this to-night, to yonder far wondrous world, if it be one, and there rest in peace."

"Come, come, Jack, you will make yourself melancholy, as you know you always do, if you begin talking in that kind of way. Recollect how much we have to do in this world yet. Recollect Claude."

"Oh, yes, yes, we have him to cling to."

"And recollect poor Cicely."

"Alas! alas! Why did I not die long—long ago!"

"Because you are wanted now, Jack. That's the only reason I can think of, so don't talk of dying, I beg of you."

"I won't, Dick, till I have seen how Claude fares. I should not like to die and to leave him to suffer."

"No, Jack, come what may, we will get him out of the power of the Philistines, and so keep a good heart on it; and here we are close to the place of our destination. I have been thinking, Jack, that—that —"

"That what, Dick? Ah, you too are beginning to think that our friend the inn-porter may not be to be trusted exactly."

"Well, perhaps, I have; but yet I think it is wrong to do so. Heaven knows that in the course of my career I have met with much good faith; although, at times, when and where I least expected it, I own that I have been betrayed;

and, therefore, Jack, without doing any injustice to this man, whom we are called upon, by having pledged our words, to meet, we ought to be very cautious how we do meet him."

"You speak my sentiments, Dick, to the letter. What is the course that you advise?"

"Nay, Jack, I was going to ask you that, you know, because I know that the affair has been upon your mind some time, and that you have been giving it some consideration, and I should not wonder at all if you have thought of some plan of operations that would enable us to make a little sure of what we are about before we run any very serious risk."

"You are right, Dick," said Jack, with a faint smile. "I was going to propose something to you with that object, only as you had professed to have confidence in the man, I did not know very well how to begin it; but now I have no sort of difficulty, and this is what I would advise that we do. I would go to a part of the wall of the park over which we can easily get—for it is so damaged in places that there are plenty of footholds, and there I would leave the horses on the outside, fastened to a stake, which we can run into the ground; and when we are in the park, and on foot, there will be no difficulty in making our way through the trees to the inner side of the gate, and so seeing, at all events, if any one is on the watch."

"Good," said Dick.

"If," continued Jack, "there is any ambuscade, and we are to be betrayed in any way, of course, it will be from within the park, where any one might be hidden, and not on the heath-side of the door."

"Certainly not. There might be any force they chose to bring against us in the park, and we no further off it than the thickness of the doors opening to the heath, and not know it. Come on, Jack, I approve of the plan, and am desirous to put it into instant execution."

Having thus wisely determined upon what to do, they both dismounted, so that they should not be seen against the clear night sky, and they led the horses by a round-about route to a spot evidently to the left of the gate or door which, no doubt, is well known to all our readers as that which opens directly upon the heath from the beautiful old park.

They reached the wall in safety, and there, sure enough, they found several parts of it which were in a considerable state of decay. The difficulty now was to find a stake to which to picket the horses; but after a time they did find one, and they gave the creatures just liberty enough to move about a little, but not sufficient to leave the spot.

"Now for it," said Jack. "I will climb over first, as this is my plan, you know, Dick, and if the place is all clear, you can follow me."

"As you please Jack."

Jack, with great care, so as not to displace any of the old bricks, and so give an alarm, climbed to the top of the old park wall; and then crouching down, so low that he might be said to be almost lying along the top of it, he shaded his eyes with his hands, and took a long look into the park.

How sweetly the moonbeams broke among the quiet and leafy glades of that lovely spot at such an hour, and how calm and beautiful the green sward looked, tinted with its strange metallic-looking, spectral colour, from the full beams of the moon!

All was still. The place looked as if it were dedicated to the very geni of solitude, one could hardly imagine it possible that by any circumstances such a place could be the scene of crime, of frivolity, to say nothing of riot and disorder.

"Is it all right?" whispered Dick.

"I think so," said Jack, in a very low tone. There was something about the solitude of the place and the moonlight which would have made speaking loud seem like a piece of profanity. It is strange how such spots of nature in their

solitary beauty, affect the imagination much in the same way that the dim majesty of some cathedral does.

"Come on," said Jack, "come on. This way that I have entered by is good. It is as easy as getting up a staircase."

Dick was by his side in a moment, and then he took a long look into the park.



TURPIN AND JACK STARTLED BY THE DEER IN GREENWICH PARK.

"How beautiful," he said. "Ah, what is that?"

"What—what?"

"There, moving among the trees. Don't you see something? There again now."

"Yes, a deer."

"Are you sure it was only a deer, Jack? Oh, yes, to be sure, there the creature comes out into the moonlight. It is one of the deer. How fair and beautiful it looks, now. Don't you admire it, Jack?"

"It don't seem like anything but the spectre of a deer in the moonlight," said Jack. "I wonder, now, if that creature's fine senses are cognisant of our presence? Look how its head is turned now, and how it listens. Ah! there it goes."

With a bound, the graceful creature was off in a moment, and disappeared among the trees.

"I think we may safely descend," said Jack. "Solitude and ourselves seem to hold possession of the old park."

They both cautiously now descended the wall, and after taking careful note of the spot, so that they should be sure to find it again, they began to creep along close to the wall, where there was a well-defined shadow cast by it, in the direction of the little gate.

Up to this time, everything had conspired to make both Jack and Dick think that they were suspecting the inn-porter wrongfully, and that nothing in the shape of an enemy was within either sight or hearing; but they had not proceeded very far, before they found some cause to come to a different opinion.

It was Jack who suddenly touched Dick upon the arm, and whispered to him—

"Stoop, and listen."

They both crouched quite close to the ground, and, indeed, Jack laid his ear to it, and then they heard a regular tramping of feet, that could not possibly be mistaken, and as they listened, they felt quite conscious that it was coming nearer and nearer each minute.

"What's that?" said Dick.

"Military," replied Jack. "They are coming this way, too. Ah, now they pause, and all is still—no, they come again, but they are straggling, and each man is making as little noise as he can. Dick, it is you and I that they are so obliging as to come to meet."

"Not a doubt of it."

Notwithstanding both Dick and Jack had taken all the precaution that we have seen they had taken, for the purpose of providing against such a contingency as this, it was quite evident that they had neither of them looked forward to it as very likely to happen, for there they were, now that they saw it had occurred, quite unable to think of what would be best to do. To be sure, flight was the most obvious thing, but their rage against the inn-porter was so great, it did not seem to them that anything was at all feasible but some plan of operation that would suffice to visit him with the retribution that he deserved.

At least, such was their first thought in the matter.

They drew back still further into the shade, and Dick was upon the point of saying something, when a low "Hush!" from Jack detained him, and then he heard a footstep upon the decayed leaves under some trees close at hand, and a voice said—

"It is time they came, surely, now."

"I should think it was," replied another one, "and once or twice I fancied I heard 'em. Well, they may come, but I don't see why half a dozen of us mightn't have done the job quite as well."

"That's my own idea, too. I don't like this mixing up of the soldiers with our affairs. We are officers, and we ought to be left to take the thieves, or not take 'em, as we think proper; but of late, it's nothing but—'Oh, let us have a guard of soldiers,' and then there's sure to be a mess made of the whole affair, for they don't like the job, and we feel put out of sorts, and no good is done."

"That's it," said the other. "But do you think, after all, that Turpin will be so green as to come?"

"I do. He is just the sort of fellow to come, if he said he would, and now

that it's all up with Claude Duval, he and the other will like to make all the friends they can?"

"And that other?"

"I tell you again that it's Sixteen-string Jack."

"Yes, you tell me."

"It's true. He was hanged, but brought to life again. The story is well enough known, now, to the beaks; and if he would get out of way, and not go upon the road again, it's my idea they would leave him alone."

"Oh, would they, though?—Don't you think it?"

"They wouldn't?"

"Not they. Of all men they want to catch him, I tell you. Don't you know that he robbed the Bishop of London near Fulham once, and that ever since then, the great folks have determined to make an end of him?"

"Oh—ah! That is decided."

"Well, come on; I suppose all our set is in the park by this time, along with that fellow from the Old Bailey, bother him, who will pocket, I suppose, all, if not the greater part of the rewards."

"The ina-porter you mean?"

"Yes, confound him! Don't forget our private signal, though. It's 'Keys and locks,' so we shall all know each other among the trees. Come this way. I suppose those red coats from Tilbury are now not far off the gate."

The two officers passed on, and after they had gone both Jack and Dick felt that they had so much to think about that they were silent for some few minutes, although they might have spoken in an under tone to each other without any danger.

It was Dick who broke that silence.

"Jack," he said, "are you there?"

"I am, Dick. Did you hear one of them fellows say it was all up with poor Claude Duval? Oh, Dick, did you hear that, or have my ears as well as my fears deceived me?"

"I did hear it, Jack, but it goes for nothing, or ought to go for nothing, with us. What does it come to, after all, but just to this, that the officers think they have him safe. You know that as soon as they get a fellow into Newgate they all think that his career is over; but there's lots of chances after that, when there is courage within the walls and friends without."

"Heaven help him!" said Jack.

"Well, as to that, Jack, I suppose we are not the sort of fellows to call upon Heaven for help, although there are worse than we who often do so."

## CHAPTER CCXCIII.

### EVIL FORTUNE THICKENS ABOUT CLAUDE DUVAL.

It is time now that we turn our attention to the condition of Claude Duval himself, after that frightful strugg'e in the Old Bailey that had so very unexpectedly had the effect of placing him in the hands of his foes. We shall soon, however, take up again the proceedings of Jack and Dick in the endeavours they made to do something for their much esteemed associate.

The horror that came over poor Claude Duval when he found that it was Cicely who had fallen a victim to the scuffle that had taken place in the Old Bailey, was such that it completely confused his intellect for a time, and the first return to anything like positive consciousness that he had, was finding himself in a cell in Newgate.

"Hilloa!" cried a voice. "What do you bring it in now, Master Duval, eh? How are you? Better, I suppose?"



"Who are you?" said Claude, faintly.

"Timothy Maggs."

"Oh," said Claude, "I don't know you."

"Why, no, I don't know how you should, seeing that we never was properly introduced; but you know as you are in the stone-jug?"

Duval nodded.

"Well, I'm a watching of you."

"Oh, indeed," said Claude again. "You are a turnkey, I suppose?"

"No, I'm a *hextra*."

"A what?"

"A *hextra* they calls me. I hangs about the stone-jug, you see, and if any of the regular chaps is ill and can't come and do duty, they gets me to do it, and the governor, he says, 'Where's Maggs?' he says; 'he's the man—where's Maggs?' he says."

Mr. Timothy Maggs seemed to be so delighted at the recollection of what the governor said, that he laughed until the tears came into his eyes, and then starting up, he cried out—

"There's the doctor, I hear him a coming. You wouldn't go for to say that I spoke to you, for my order was to wasn't, you see."

"Oh, no—no," said Claude faintly, "I will say nothing, you may depend; but, implore you to tell me if—"

"Hush! here they is."

The door of the cell was opened, and three or four people appeared upon the threshold of it. The cell was so situated, that in daytime it was not quite dark, inasmuch as through the thickness of the wall there came, close to the ceiling, from one of the inner courts of Newgate, a faint reflected light, which, when the eye got used to it, was quite sufficient to enable any one to see any object in the ceil. No doubt, though, to any one coming directly from the open air the place would have been positively dark for a considerable time,

Claude looked at the people who came into the cell rather listlessly, and he saw that one was the governor of Newgate, he knew him very well by sight another of them he supposed to be one of the sheriffs, and by the manner of a third he soon found that he was the surgeon of the prison.

"Well, how is the patient?" said the latter.

"He's been a looking about him," said Mr. Timothy Maggs.

"Oh, indeed. Well, Duval, how are you to-day?"

Claude shook his head.

"Come—come," added the surgeon, "you are not much hurt, and you will soon recover from your present state."

"And go comfortably out and be hung," said the governor.

Duval looked him keenly in the face, as he said—

"I want an answer but to one question. I beg that some one of these who are here present, will have the charity to answer it truly for me."

"What is it?" said the sheriff.

"Is—is—*she*"——Poor Claude could get no further for a moment or two, and then gathering all his strength, he managed to say in a hoarse voice—"Is Cicely dead? That is my question."

There was a rapid glance passed between the governor and the surgeon, and then the former said—

"Yes, she is dead!"

Claude Duval closed his eyes, as if from that moment he would gladly shut out the world from all converse with him. They heard something like a low gasping sob, and then all was still.

"Gammon," said Mr. Maggs.

"How dare you!" cried the governor. "You scoundrel, how dare you say that?"

"Oh, dear me, sir. I only meant as it was all gammon of Claude Duval to go for to pretend as he was a crying, that's all I meant."

"Leave the cell!"

"Yes, Mr. Governor, if you like, in course I shall leave the cell. Good-day to you all, gentlemen. I only said gammon—gammon."

Timothy left the cell, and then the sheriff, turning to the surgeon, said—

"Sir, can you say that this prisoner may be left with safety alone in his cell?"

"Yes, if frequently visited."

"Very well. You hear that, governor? That will be much better than leaving a man with him, and you will probably be so good as to send a different man upon each visit that is made to him."

"I will, sir," said the governor. "I know what you mean, sir. Lord bless you, these sort of fellows would offer a man five hundred pounds, as soon as look at him, if they thought he could help them out of here, but I think we shall be one too many for Claude Duval this time. Do you hear, Duval? You are to be left alone now, but you will be often visited, for all that, so that you had better keep quiet."

Duval made no reply whatever to this, and then they all left the cell, and he heard the lock shot into the socket, and the bolts and bars put up into their places, and he heard the retiring footsteps as they all left the cell door, and then he felt, indeed, that he was alone.

"Now," said Duval, "if I could only die—if I could only at the wish to do so bid a last adieu to this world, I might be happy. Death! Is it not, after all, within the grasp of all those who choose to clutch at it? Why should I not die? The power to leave this mortal life is one which has evidently been freely left to human nature. In a thousand different ways any one may shake off all the troubles and the griefs of this state. It is great and beneficent of Providence to have given man such a power. Shall I not embrace it?"

This was the first time during all his eventful career that suicide had ever occurred to Claude Duval, and now it never would, but that he felt all the agony of spirit which the fate of poor Cicely, who had loved him so truly and so devotedly, was calculated to produce.

What had he now, he asked himself, to live for, now that that gentle spirit had gone from him?

With the inclination growing upon him each moment to take his own life, Claude Duval rose from the pallet bed which he had been laid upon, but he felt so weak and ill that the very effort to get to his feet brought on a death-like sickness, and he sunk back, fully believing that without raising his hand against himself, nature herself would soon relieve him of the ills that he seemed born to.

While Claude Duval is in this desperate condition we will follow Mr. Timothy Maggs from the cell, and take a brief glance at that rather eccentric gentleman's proceedings.

Mr. Maggs was, as he himself had intimated, a kind of supernumerary at Newgate, a "hextra" as he said in his peculiar vernacular. He was a man who had made himself singularly useful to the turnkeys of Newgate, and, indeed, to all the officials of the stone-jug, as it was facetiously called. His imperturbable good humour—his disregard of any fatigue, and the fidelity of his actions, all recommended him very much to the notice of the authorities.

If a turnkey were ill, or drunk, Maggs was the man who supplied his place. If ever the governor wanted any one for extra duty of any sort, he sent for Maggs. The Lord Mayor had, at the request of the Governor of Newgate, sworn him in as a constable, and he would have had a permanent situation in Newgate, but for his extreme usefulness as an extra. What would they do for the want of such a man, if Maggs had regular duties to perform? They would have to look out for another Maggs forthwith.

Upon one occasion, too, Maggs found out that half a dozen of the most desperate prisoners that Newgate ever held within its iron bounds, had planned

an escape, and he took the information direct to the governor, and the whole affair was blown.

After that circumstance, all doubts, if there were any, regarding the fidelity of Maggs to the administration of the law, vanished, and the most unbounded confidence was reposed in him.

And yet, strange to say, in spite of all this, will it be believed that Maggs was playing a part? Yes, Maggs's sympathies were with the prisoners, and not with the jailers, and his mission to Newgate was to comfort, console, aid, and abet felons, which, according to act of parliament, is a high crime and misdemeanour.

But the sagacious reader will say—"Why, then, did Maggs go to the governor with information of the plot to escape of the half dozen desperate characters?" We will tell the sagacious reader. One of the party had already betrayed his comrades, and sent a letter to the sheriff containing the full particulars of the plot, so that Maggs having found out as much, not only disappointed that rascal of the reward he expected to get, but raised his own character above suspicion, by going to the governor with the particulars, so that when the sheriff came post-haste, and cried out to the governor—"Here is a plot to escape, hatching, sir, under your very nose," the governor rubbed his hands coolly together, and replied—"I know it."

By this little scheme, Maggs, therefore, did no harm whatever to the cause in which he really was enlisted, but raised his usefulness wonderfully by increasing his reputation.

True, that time the authorities chuckled over the idea, that in Maggs they had a cunning and efficient spy, while the "family," as the thieves called themselves, knew that in him they had an able and daring assistant and friend in Newgate.

Several of those apparently perfectly inscrutable escapes from the prison had been managed by Maggs; and, indeed, with his facilities of going in and out of the stone-jug, it was comparatively easy for him to render what aid he chose to those there confined, for there was a general order to let him go about the building at pleasure.

Such, then, was the man who had been appointed by the governor to stay in the cell with Claude Duval, and to endeavour to get, if that were possible, some sort of information out of him regarding his associates.

When Maggs left the cell to the occupancy of the governor, the sheriff, and the surgeon, he took his way to the vestibule of Newgate, and was passing out through the wicker, when the man who was on the lock said—

"Well, Tim, do you think Duval will swing?"

"Rather."

"You do—do you? Well, he is rather an out-and-outer, ain't he, now? I did begin to think a little time ago, that we should never have him here at eight o'clock of a Monday morning."

"By-the-by," said Maggs, "have you heard anything more of what has been so much talked about. I mean about the hanging the fellows here in the Old Bailey, instead of at Tyburn."

"Why, yes, they do speak of it; but it won't do, Mr. Maggs. Oh, dear, no."

"You think not?"

"I know it won't do. Lor bless you, it's agin all custom and rule. Why, the fellows have been hung at Tyburn times out of miad, and the idea of hanging 'em here is outrageous."

"But, why?"

"Oh, you want to know why?"

"Yes, I do. For my part, I don't see, Mr. Wilks, what difference it makes to a family cove, whether he is tucked up and has to dance upon nothing here, or at Tyburn-tree. I should just as soon say good-by to this here world from one place as another."

The turnkey drew himself up, and giving his head a slight motion from side

to side, he said in quite an oracular tone of voice, as he looked in the face of Maggs most steadfastly—

“I tell you what it is, Maggs. I don't mean for to go for to say as it really, mind you, makes much difference to a fellow whether, as you say, he is tucked up here or at Tyburn-tree; but what I look at is this—this here, Mr. Maggs, is what I look at.”

“Well?”

“It's an innovation!”

“Ah, to be sure it is that.”

“I rather think it is; and when I say that, I rather think as well that it's a clincher.”

“So it is” said Maggs. “Good day.”

The turnkey continued shaking his head some time after Maggs had left, for he really did consider within his politic brain, that what he had said was, in his own phraseology, a clincher. How many people now-a-days fancy they get over difficulties with just such clinchers as Maggs received from the turnkey!

A dubious smile played upon the lips of Maggs as he left Newgate, and he strolled very leisurely up the Old Bailey towards Holborn, and then took his route across Smithfield. Maggs never once looked behind him, but now and then there came that side-long glance which a man who thinks it just within the limits of human possibility that he may be followed, darts from his eyes, and once he made a full stop, and seemed quite absorbed in contemplation of the sheep pens in Smithfield.

It was quite evident Maggs was in no hurry, for it was a good half hour after he had left Newgate before he reached Barbican, and then turning down a narrow turning, he approached a little, mean looking public-house, and after one hasty glance around, entered it.

There was really nothing in the appearance of the public-house to indicate anything but rather straitened circumstances. One would have supposed it to be one of those little out of the way old fashioned houses that are cut out completely by the more modern blazing establishments of the day.

A ruddp faced, simple looking man was behind the bar, who just gave a nod to Maggs, as a couple of people were indulging in a pint of ale there.

“A nice day,” said Maggs.

“Very,” said the landlord. “What is it to be?”

“A glass of the old October.”

“Ah, that's the drink. You know what to order, I rather take it.”

“Why, yes, I ought by this time. Is the slate there?”

“Yes, here it is.”

The landlord, from a high hock upon which it was hanging, took down a slate, to which by a piece of string was appended a pencil; upon this slate Mr. Maggs did not write anything, but he rudely scratched a compass, such as is placed at the corner of maps, with N. E. S. W. at its different points. Close to the W. Maggs scratched a hand with the finger extended, something after the fashion of a finger-post on a country road, and then he placed under that the figure 12.

“Hang it up again,” said Maggs.

The landlord took a glance at it, and said—

“Rather particular?”

“A little.”

With a nod, the landlord hung the slate up again, and then, after drinking his glass of old October, Mr. Maggs left the public-house, and went his way oack to the Old Bailey.

Now, if any one had been very curious all that day at that little old fashioned public-house, they would have seen the landlord show that slate to at least twenty people, who only each gave a sort of nod when they saw it, and then it was hung up again.

We shall soon find that it had a significance of a peculiar kind.

## CHAPTER CCXCIV.

THE THIEVES HAUNT AT WEST END, HAMPSTEAD.—MAGGS'S ADVICE.

THE mystery of the slate at the little public-house, near to Barbican, is one that will soon be made apparent to the reader. By the communication that Maggs had made to the "family," it was clearly understood that he meant as many of that fraternity as thought proper to do so, to meet him somewhere in the West.

Now, as there was but one place of rendezvous in that quarter of the environs of London, it was not possible to make a mistake upon the subject, and, therefore, it was well known where at the hour of twelve that night they were to meet.

We will now, therefore, at once conduct the reader to the place of meeting of the thieves at West End, Hampstead.

To those unacquainted with the district, we may state that there are two routes from London by which West End, Hampstead, may be easily reached. The one is a long narrow tortuous lane from Kilburn, and the other is by a road westward from the old church at Hampstead, and which, after crossing the several lanes that go northward, conducts the traveller to the little red looking village called West End.

At the period of our tale, West End consisted of a little cluster of cottages that stood in a hollow, and in the neighbourhood of them there were some mansions with very portentous iron gates and extensive lawns, past which the road went right on to the Edgware-road.

Some daring robberies and one murder about the spot had, however, had the effect of making the neighbourhood not at all popular, and some of the largest of the mansions wanted tenants. One of them in particular had been for a long time deserted. It belonged to one of the aldermen of the City of London, and it was in the keeping of a highly respectable man, recommended by Maggs!

Yes; Maggs had sufficient influence to give such a recommendation, and, therefore, was it that Hawthorn House, West End, Hampstead, became one of the stations for the most active of the "family."

The worthy alderman, who, by the bye, amassed his money in the manufacture of candles, was much astonished that nobody gave him an offer for Hawthorn House; but if any one seeing the board up signifying that "This Family Mansion" was to be let, entered to look over it, something like the following conversation would take place between the projected tenant and the respectable man and his wife who took care of the premises:—

"Well," the visitor would say, "I think the place will suit me."

"I am so glad to hear that," the respectable man and his wife would both say in a breath; "for then we shall get somewhere else."

"Indeed? Why, why—What is your objection to this place?"

Upon this, they would both put on quite an air of confusion, and the wife would say,—"John, I think you ought to tell this gentleman, for he is a real gentleman as any one may see in a moment by his looks."

This was so highly flattering to the intending tenant, that he commonly proffered half-a-crown for the expected intelligence, and then John would say—

"It would be a very cruel and impious thing to let you and your amiable family come here without your knowing that you would never get a night's rest."

"Never get a night's rest? Why not?"

"On account of the shrieks, sir."

"The shrieks?"

"Yes, sir; they do say as the place is haunted, sir; but I can't bring my mind to believe it, and if any body was strong-minded enough to go on sleeping and never minding horrid screams and shrieks in their very ears till their heads seem ready to burst, they might like the place well enough."



"God bless my soul," the intending tenant would then say. "I—J, that is I shouldn't mind myself, but my wife is rather delicate. Dear me, it won't suit at all; good-day. I am very much obliged to you, my man, for mentioning it at all. Oh, dear—oh, dear, what a place to be in."

With some such expressions as the above the party walk off, and thus



DICK TURPIN STOPS AUGUSTUS CROKE NEAR SHOOTER'S HILL.

Hawthorn House will probably, to the great despair of its owner, who little suspects the sort of reputation his property is acquiring, remain without an offer or even a visitor.

It was to this place, then, as half-past eleven was pealed out by the old church clock of Hampstead, that several people might have been seen wending

their way, both from Hampstead and from the lane leading to the spot by the way of Kilburn.

These people were part of the "family;" but they took good care to make their approaches to the house in such a manner, as not to attract much attention from the neighbourhood.

There was a door in the oaken paling at some distance from the regular entrance to the avenue leading to the front of the house, and it was by that door that these members of the fraternity who went there, who had resolved to respond to the summons of Maggs, entered the premises.

At that door it was that the man who took care of the house, rather too well for the worthy alderman who owned it, stationed himself, to see that none but the properly entitled persons gained admittance.

The first who arrived wore a cloak and a hat that entirely concealed all the upper part of his face. He tapped at the little oaken door, and Charley Lang, as the man was named who was within, opened a little square orifice in it, and said in a low tone—

"What's o'clock?"

"You can't see for the clouds," was the reply.

"Oh, all right—Can you walk in?"

"Yes; with a jemmy or picklock,"

"All's right," said Charley, as he flung open the door; "you are one of the right sort, at all events."

In this manner, and with the same amount of questioning, and getting the same answers, he, within the half-hour from half-past eleven to twelve o'clock, admitted to the garden about twenty persons.

The night was dark and lowering, although no rain was falling. Great masses of dark clouds seemed to have stooped from the sky to rest upon the tops of the tall old trees, and where there was the least additional shadow, the night was so intensely dark that it was impossible to see even dimly the ground at your feet.

"Has Maggs come?" said one of the last, who made an appearance at the oaken door in the wall.

"Why, no," said Charley. "and I wonder at it."

"So do I. He is generally punctual enough, and there goes twelve o'clock."

"Ah, there it goes, sure enough; and if he were here, I should not feel that it was any good staying at this gate."

"He is here."

"Is he? How do you make that out? Go and tell that to some one else. I have kept too good a watch here for that. No—no, he has not passed me."

"You are mistaken, Charley."

"Ah! that voice—"

"Is the voice of Maggs. Do you know me now?"

"The devil! Why, it is you, and I didn't know you a bit?"

"Of course not. Don't you remember now the last time I was here, we were talking about disguises, and you said that you would know anybody, through any disguise, that you had once seen sufficient of to say that you had had a good look at them?"

"I did—I did."

"Well, you know, old fellow, that I differed from you, and held to the contrary, and now I hope you are convinced, for you didn't know me."

"It was your voice that deceived me; I don't know how you could alter that so well."

"That's a secret; but I can do it."

"I know you can, Mr. Maggs; but don't say anything about my not knowing you to the 'family,' or else they will have a laugh at me, and I don't want that."

"Not a word," replied Maggs. "I only did it for a friendly joke between you and me, that was all, old chap, and I don't let it go any further; so, now you

may fasten the door, for none of our sort will be here to-night, now, except those who have already come."

"No, it's all right," said Charley Lang, as he bolted and locked the door. "There's a pretty good muster of 'em, I can tell you, Mr. Maggs."

"Is there? How many?"

"Twenty-one with you."

"That will do. We don't like to go on without you, Charley; so you can let little Bill keep on the watch, while you come to the hall with the rest of us."

"Ay, ay," said Charley Lang. "Little Bill, though he is a chick of my own, and only a matter of nine years old, is a regular rum 'un, he is. Why, Mr. Maggs, I'd back that boy to keep watch, when a man couldn't do it. I'd wager he'd be on the look-out, and never wink once for twelve hours at a stretch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, to be sure; and I do think he'd smell an officer half a mile off."

"He is invaluable."

"He is. Come this way, and I will rout him out. I daresay he is in the kitchen, as before, like a dog on the watch."

"No, I ain't, father," said a little squeaking voice. "Here I is."

"Lor bless us!" ejaculated Charley. "Here he is. There now, who would have thought it? I don't see you, Bill, though."

"No, father," squeaked the voice again. "'Cos it is so jolly dark, that is the reason you don't see me, father; but here I is."

"Murder!" said Charley, as he fell flat upon the grass in consequence of his son and heir making a bolt between his legs, to make his presence visible.

"Oh, murder! I'm jolted to death almost. What the deuce did you do that for?"

"It's only me, father."

"Only you! Curse you, what do you mean by upsetting your father in this way, you little vagabond? Is this what you call honouring your parents? You will come to a bad end, that you will, Bill—you will come to a bad end."

"Perhaps, he didn't mean it," suggested Maggs.

"I don't suppose he did," said Charley, "or else, uncomfortable as such a thing would be to the feelings of a parent, I should have to skin him."

"Ha—ha!" laughed Bill.

"Hold your row!" said Charley. "Now mind, Bill, you keep watch all along o' this side of the garden, and let us know if there's any danger. Keep your ears and your eyes open, and your mouth shut, Bill, that's the way to keep a look out. Ain't it, Mr. Maggs?"

"Yes, I believe it is; but on such a night as this your eyes are not much good to you, I rather think, are they, Bill?"

"Oh, but he's like a cat," suggested Charley, "he can see in the dark."

"Can you, Bill?"

"A little," replied Bill. "Howsomdever, I'll keep a good look out, father, and if anybody comes here as shouldn't, I'll settle 'em."

"Oh—oh!" said Charley, as he walked to the house with Maggs. "He says he'll settle 'em. Did you ever hear such a rum 'un. But I'm glad to see you, Mr. Maggs, because, you see, I have a respect for your opinion, and I want to ask your advice."

"What about?"

"About Bill. I don't know what to bring him up to. I shouldn't like it to be anything low, you know, 'cos why, the boy has a kind of genius; and it mustn't be anything that wants bigness and strength. 'cos why, he's little and ain't got much. What do you think, Mr. Maggs, would be the best thing in life for Bill?"

"Upon my word, I hardly know."

"Well, but you does know a something of him, Mr. Maggs. Just think it over, now, in your quick way, and let us hear your opinion about him."

"Well, but, Charley, you are the best judge ; you have thought the matter over in your own mind, no doubt. What is your idea upon the affair, eh?"

"Well, in course I have thought it over, and I'm divided, you see, in my opinion whether it's best to make a cracksman of him, a swell fogle-hunter and a snap-dragon, which you know means the grabbing of tickers and all them sort o' things, or to let him go on the road with some of the old hands."

"You mean, then, to bring him up to the old business?"

"In course."

"Well, I will turn it over in my mind, and let you know what I think about it when I see you again, Charley ; but I don't think he'll do for the road. It strikes me as he is cut out for the smoking swindle."

"Well, perhaps he is. You think he'd be good at getting into houses when the people ain't at home, Mr. Maggs?"

"I do, if you can teach him the use of the tools well."

"Oh," said Charley, with a voice of conscious pride, "I tell you what, Mr. Maggs, I wouldn't say it before him on any account, 'cos why, it's a bad thing to make the young 'uns conceited afore their time—they will pick up that fast enough—but I'll say it to you, that that boy can pick a lock as well as you or I."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do—I do. It was only the other day that I wolloped him and locked him up in one of the old kitchens, and I thought he'd be a crying, so I got down close to the door and listened, and I heard a little kind o' rattling noise, and in a moment or two something fell on my back."

"Was it Bill?"

"No, it was the key that I had left sticking in the lock of the door, and he had first of all pushed it through, and when I found that, I began to guess what he was about. He was picking the lock, and in half a minute he did it too, and coming out right head over heels over me, he cried out—'Done the old 'un at last.'"

"Did he, though?"

"Yes. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he. Oh, lor! You can imagine the feelings of a father. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he, meaning me, you know. I was the old 'un. There's a boy for you, and only nine! What do you think o' that? There's a genius for you, Mr. Maggs. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he. Oh, dear—oh, dear, I always laugh till the tears come into my eyes when I think on it. Oh, he'll be a rum 'un, he will. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he. Oh, dear—oh, dear. 'Done the old 'un at last,'"

## CHAPTER CCXCV.

### THE FAMILY COMES TO A RESOLUTION TO BEFRIEND CLAUDE DUVAL.

By the time Charley had concluded his choice little anecdote about the genius of Bill, a genius which promised as fairly as possible to conduct that precious young gentleman to the gallows, he and Maggs had reached the house ; and passing through two rooms upon the ground floor, and then along a passage paved with stone, they reached a spacious apartment, which was called the hall.

This hall had at one time been a sort of great kitchen or servants' hall, but its size and the altitude of its roof had pointed it out to some modern improvers of the mansion as fit to be converted into the principal apartment upon the ground floor. With rather a questionable taste, since the rest of the building was not at all of that style, this hall had been fitted up according to the gothic notions of the Elizabethan era, and certainly very old fashioned and cosey it looked.

At one end there was an immense fireplace, with a tremendous carved

chimney-piece above it, and at the other there was a kind of gallery, with huge carved oak balustrades, capable of holding some twenty people. The roof was supported by massive transverse beams of wood, and the walls were of oaken panelling. There was not much in the way of furniture to the room, but the thick and massive draperies of the windows still remained, and were to be sold with the house, and a large oaken table in the centre, about twelve feet in length and some six or eight in width, together with a number of old oaken seats, constituted the whole of the furniture of the place.

There was but one light burning in the immense room, which was forty feet in length and about twenty-five feet in width, and that solitary light was stuck between the outline of a stag's head that graced one of the panels.

The whole of the thieves who had responded to the call of Maggs were assembled in this hall. One of the oaken seats was placed upon the table, and was intended for the chairman, he who had called the meeting being usually placed in that seat of honour and office.

It was a strange thing to see the faces of the little throng of persons there assembled by the faint light of that one candle, and mark the different physiognomies, and yet see that there was throughout the whole, one prevailing expression of suspicion and cunning. There was an uneasy look, too, and a quick shifting glance about the greater number of them, that sufficiently betokened the unquiet life that they led, and the constantly present feeling that was in their minds, of not knowing but that some hand might be stretched out to capture them, and some one say in the customary phrase of the officers, "You are wanted."

And to hear these men speak, one would think they were all fascinated with the career of crime they had chosen, and that if they could they would not earn their bread by any of the ordinary channels of industry.

Perhaps, though, they all had a shrinking fear at their hearts—perhaps they all had their solitaray moments when they gave way to the horrors of remorse and all the fears of the untimely end they might well look forward to. Perhaps it was only when other eyes were upon them that they played the part of the bold, daring, reckless villain who would not be shackled in his notions of right and wrong by the laws of society.

Well, at all events, they gave Maggs a cheering welcome when he made his appearance in the hall, and he had to hold up his hand and say "Hush!" to stop the tumult of applause that they were inclined to bestow upon him, and it was quite a study now to see what a different man the Maggs of the thieves' meeting at West End, Hamstead, was to the Maggs of Newgate.

Here, amid his fellows, and away from those who thought not only that they were his masters, but he was their humble servant—he stood a good six inches high—his voice had a different tone, and he spoke, too, the English language with a tolerable amount of correctness; but at Newgate he played a part, and shuffled about half lost, and when he spoke he frequently made the most common and ridiculous grammatical errors, so that the turnkeys thought themselves just a little educated above poor Maggs, although they respected him for his very useful qualities.

What a strange life it was for that man to lead! Surely he had some secret motive for it, which will become apparent. We shall see.

"Bravo, Maggs!" cried one. "Here we are, old fellow, and I don't think there's one who saw the slate at the King's Head but is here now."

"Not one!" cried several together.

"Hush," said Maggs. "Caution. I do believe that we are about as safe here as it is very possible for us to be, but still, caution should ever be the word with us, comrades, and above all things, we should never presume upon our safety. We should always act, and speak, and think, as though the Philistines were about us."

This little speech acted as a kind of damper upon the spirits of the party. Several of them looked as if they could have said—"That is very true, but we



would rather not hear it." However, after a pause, during which they looked about them with all the suspicions and uneasiness that the words of Maggs suggested, one said—

"Well, Maggs, get into the chair, and let's hear all about it."

"Ay—ay!" cried the others, but in subdued tones, "that's it."

Maggs, with more lightness and agility than any one, to look at him, would have been induced to give him credit for, vaulted on to the table and took his seat in the chair. It was quite evident that he gave himself something of the air of a captain over the others, for his first words were—

"Gentlemen all, I thank you for responding to my notice so readily. You all know that I am not a man to bring you here for nothing."

"No—no," said several,

"Very well, then. I may as well tell you at once that it is about Duval."

There was an ominous silence at this moment, but Maggs did not appear to be in the smallest degree disconcerted, for he continued quite calmly—

"I have thought over the matter in every shape and way, comrades, and I think it will be a great shame if we leave Claude Duval to the hangman. You all know him well—you all know that he never cared to keep a guinea if one among you wanted it. You know that he ever held his life as nothing when any of you were in danger. I don't mean to say that he came among you much, for he could not do so—his life was spent upon the road; but many is the guinea he has sent to the different cribs where he thought it was wanted; and when it happened that any one was hustled out of the world at Tyburn, didn't Duval ask the first family man he met if there was a wife or kids?"

"He did!" cried a voice.

"And if he heard there was, didn't he send all he had to them?"

"He did," said the voice again. "He sent fifty pounds to Jemmy Noakes's widow, and her two little girls."

"Is that Noakes as swung for the bank robbery?" said another.

"Yes."

"Oh, then, he didn't do it?"

"We all know that," said Maggs; "and we know that the man that did do it came forward at the Old Bailey and said as much, but they wouldn't believe him, cos they had another charge ready against him, and they hung them both."

There was a chilling silence of some few moments' duration now, and at length Maggs continued—

"What I want to know is, what sort of feeling you have in the matter? Are you, or are you not, inclined to strike a blow for Duval? If you are not, it's no use me saying any more, and the meeting is over; but if you are, hold up a hand each man."

Every hand was held up in silence.

"Good," said Maggs. "Does any one know where Dick Turpin is?"

"With the blackbirds," said one.

"No," said another; "if so, he's as dead as mutton. There's twenty nine dead bodies lying in a chalk-pit at Gravesend, now, for an inquest."

"He went off from that place," said another, "and there was one with him that none of the family don't seem to know how to tackle."

"How do you mean?" said Maggs.

"Why they say it's a ghost."

"And so it is," said one. "I was close to the cart when Sixteen-string Jack was turned off at Tyburn, and now they want some of them to make out that he is alive, and rides about with Duval and Turpin."

"It's true, too," said Maggs. "Mind you, I never said much about it, because I didn't know from Jack himself whether he would like to have the thing spoken of; but I know it's true that Sixteen-string Jack is in life. He was recovered after the hanging."

"Is that possible, Maggs?"

"Yes. It has been done in some three or four cases at the outside, but not more; I fancy, if it were tried in all, one in a thousand might come to life again; but certainly not more; but Sixteen-string Jack lives, I can assure you."

"He's been deuced, quiet, then."

"He has. He walked again; but when he did so, he was not the same man he was before. He lives, but he is the shadow of the bold highwayman that he had been. In that hour that he shut his eyes upon the world, he seemed to live twenty years, and Jack rose up again an old man."

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes, and he would have lain himself down and died again, but for one affection that he still clung to. It was his affection for Claude Duval, to whom he has clung, as the only thing left in this world to care for; and he has gone about with Claude, and at times, some speak of the old spirit that has blazed out in him; but, take him for all in all, he is wrecked, and I should say that it only wants the death of Duval to break his heart."

There was a murmur of conversation through the assemblage, and then one said, in a clear, distinct voice—

"Only say, Maggs, what's to be done, and I take my solemn oath, by my right hand and my left, and by my faith to the family, that I will do my best to do it."

"And I—and I—and I!" cried all those present.

"I am abundantly satisfied," said Maggs. "What I want to do is something that may be done by cool, determined, resolute men, without danger to life or limb to any one—I want to get Claude Duval out of the stone-jug."

"Hear! hear! We will have him out."

"I think we shall; but the first thing to do is to find Turpin, and if you find him, you will find Sixteen-string Jack with him. Now, what I ask of you all to set about is, to find them, for you know I am situated so that I can't go upon the hunt for them myself. I think, I am doing as much good to the family in Newgate, and more, too, than I could possibly out of it; so, you see, my hands are full."

"They are, Maggs. You are doing more good to us all being what you are, than any dozen of us beside can do," said one.

"Of course, he is," said the others, "and he knows it."

"Well, I do know it," said Maggs; "and so it is that I don't want to be detected in what I'm about, you see; and now, will you find Turpin and Jack, and bring them here as soon as you do?—If you are successful in so doing, you can leave word for me at the King's Head, and we will all meet here to-morrow night at the same hour that we have met to-night."

"Agreed—agreed, Maggs, that will do."

A shrill whistle at this moment burst upon the ears of the assemblage from without, and in a moment every man was in an attitude of alarm.

"Quiet—quiet!" said Maggs—"quiet! Charley, what's that?"

"Bill."

"Then, something is amiss?"

"A few.—Stay here, all of you, while I go out and see. It isn't anything very bad, or else he'd whistle twice, and if it was more than bad, he'd whistle three times; but as he has only come the whistle dodge once, you see, it's a kind of a warning that's all. Keep quiet, till I come back to you."

"Yes, that is it," said Maggs. "Keep quiet till Charley comes back. Who has arms?"

"All."

It had an odd sound that "All," uttered as if it was by twenty men, each in a whisper. It was like a sudden rush of wind, and then all was still again.

Charley left the hall at once to proceed upon a reconnoitring expedition as to the cause of the clamour, and while he was gone the most intense stillness reigned in the place, for every one was most eager to catch the first sounds of

his return with information concerning the warning that the sagacious and precocious Bill had thought it to be his duty to give.

Minute after minute, though, passed, and no appearance of the return of Charley took place. At last Maggs said, in a low tone—

“I don’t much like this.”

“Nor I—nor I,” said some half dozen others.

“Mind you,” said Muggs, “understand me. I don’t mean for half a moment anything against Bill and Charley; but I can’t help thinking that something may have happened to them, and in that case, you know, this isn’t the nicest place in the world for us to stay in just now.”

It was at this moment, when a general echo of the sentiments of Maggs came from the lips of the assembled throng, that the door of the hall through which Charley had passed opened, and he appeared.

The light was too dim and indifferent to permit of their seeing very well the expression of his face; but his manner was hurried and anxious, and before any questions could be put to him, he said—

“Their’s only two of them, and they are getting over the wall.”

“Who? Who?” cried everybody.

“Hush! Caution!” said Maggs.

In a moment all were still, and Charley was permitted to proceed with what he had to say to the assemblage.

“Two of the Bow-street lot,” he added. “Bill heard ’em speaking on t’other side of the wall, and in course come and gave us an idea that something was up, you see; so that I soon got to where I heard ’em, too. By some means or another they have got upon the scent, and they fancy they have nothing to do but to walk in here and take everybody.”

“Indeed?” said Maggs.

“Yes, that’s their idea, I know it, for I heard them say as much.”

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## CHAPTER CCXCVI.

### THE DEATH AND THE BURIAL OF THE TWO POLICE SPIES.

It may appear at first sight strange, that two officers could be found who would be so apparently absurd as to say such a thing concerning an unknown number of men, that they would take them all into custody; but the history of police proceedings shows us, that, after all, it was by no means out of concurrence with ordinary practice.

It was a common thing for an officer to go alone into a thieves-house, as the public-houses they frequented were called, and from amid some thirty or forty of the profession, pull out one and inform him that he was wanted.

One would fancy it quite an incredible thing that the others, being in such force, would permit that one to be taken from amongst them all; but they did. A pair of handcuffs would be clapped upon the wrists of the wanted gentleman, and away he would go; and the mirth and jollity of the company, in the course of the next five minutes, would suffer no diminution on account of the little incident that had just taken place.

Such a proceeding, though, only took place among the ordinary depredators, and the officers had a much harder task when they fell in with such men as Claude Duval and his associates.

Upon the present occasion, too, there were some of the most determined spirits belonging to the family present, and as regarded Maggs, were he to be taken in such company, it would be as good as death to him.

Hence the information that Charley had brought caused a considerable sensation. It was a great thing, too, upon the part of the thieves, that their

particular haunts, such as the one they were now in, should not be discovered by the officers; therefore, this unexpected visit from the enemy was doubly vexatious.

Maggs spoke clearly and distinctly.

"Family men," he said. "There are too many of us to find hiding places



A MID-NIGHT CAROUSE OF THE "FAMILY" MEN.

here, and, if not, the officers are as good at that sort of fun as we are, so it's hopeless nonsense to attempt it. I can tell you for one, though, that I don't intend to be taken."

"Douce the glim, and we're then off," said one.

"Yes; but they know of the crib here, and it's all up with Charley," said another.

"Never mind me," said Charley. "Do the best you can for all, and never mind me."

"That is very kind of you, Charley," said Maggs; "but, after all, we can't very well do without you or the crib either. I hardly know what to advise, my men, for the best. I am rather in a fix about it."

"They have got scent of this place as a place of meeting," said one; "and, therefore, it's all up as regards coming here any more."

It was quite evident, now, that there was a great deal of indecision about the party to know what they could be at; but at length Maggs spoke with a tone of decision, saying,

"Charley, where is Bill? Will he give us any other notice?"

"Yes; when you hear him whistle twice, you may be sure that the officers are upon the premises. They were coming over the wall."

"Very well, there is but one chance, and that is, for us all to try and get away. It is quite possible, then, that Charley may bamboozle them into an idea that they have been mistaken after all, and if so, why, the place may be good for us yet."

Charley shook his head, and Maggs saw the action. "You don't think that will do?" he said.

"No, I don't; but—"

"Well, go on."

"There's one thing to consider, and that is, that these two fellows have most likely made the discovery themselves, and kept it to themselves, for they don't tell each other, fool-like, from a kind of jealousy that's always raging among 'em."

"That is true," said Maggs.

"And so," added Charley, "if anything should happen, you see, to these two—any little accident, you see, family coves—why, then, here we are all right again."

There was not a soul present who did not fully understand what the proposal of Charley amounted to. It was neither more nor less than a hint to murder the two officers. A blank silence ensued, and no one seemed to like to take the responsibility of making a remark upon the subject.

Then, before Maggs, who at length opened his mouth to speak, could say a word, there came one clear distinct whistle from the outside, and then, before its echoes had died away, there came another.

"There they are," said Charley.

"No doubt of it," said Maggs. "Now, comrades, don't do anything in a hasty way, but keep quiet, and let us find out who they are before we speak. Out with that light."

A hat was thrown at the candle, that burnt dimly between the horns of the stag's head, and away it went. One could hardly have supposed that the extinguishing of that little light could have made such a difference to the hall, but the sudden darkness was truly profound and black, and the difference between no light and a small light was found to be immense indeed.

"Hush," said Maggs, as some faint murmur of voices came upon his ears. "Hush. Let us all listen, not speak."

All was still, and so continued for the space of nearly five minutes, and then a voice from the garden called out most startlingly—

"Halloa! halloa! If there is any family man here, let him have the goodness to give a shelter to a couple of the right sort, 'We have had the grabs at our heels, and happened to see Joe the Kiddy go in here, so we thought it might be a family crib."

"What's the meaning o' that?" said Charley.

"A death warrant," said Maggs.

"A what?"

There was a commotion among the thieves at these words, pronounced clearly



and distinctly in the darkness, and then one said—"Listen to Maggs; he's going to explicate that ere to us."

"Go on, Maggs—go on."

"Comrades, I said, those words were a death warrant. I shouldn't like to shoot a man who came and said like a man, 'I'm an officer and must do my duty;' but when a fellow comes as a sneak"——

"Hear! Hear!"

"And a spy, and pretends to come among us——"

"Yes, yes, all's right."

"Then, I say, comrades, woe be to him, for by the laws of all nations he dies. Where is Joe the Kiddy?"

"Here, Mr. Maggs."

"Do you know anything of the fellow who just now spoke of you, Joe?"

"Not a jot. My idea is, that they have been on the watch, and have seen me come in here, and that they want to see all the faces present, and then they will take our measures nicely, and be down upon us next time we come here. I'm only a humble individual, and they call me Joe the Kiddy cos I wears a pair o' kid gloves in a crowd at the Opera, and nobody thinks as how I can pick a pocket with them on; but I have practised the dodge, and can come it famous, so, you see, Mr. Maggs, that's why the fellows call me Joe the Kiddy."

"Exactly," said Maggs. "Now my advice is, that we let these two fellows in, but in the dark mind you, and hear what they have to say."

"Agreed, agreed."

"Well, Charley, will you go and speak to them? Don't let them think for a moment but that we are quite as green as they can possibly wish us to be, and bring them into this room, and let them say their say. I'll speak to them."

"They will know your voice, Maggs, by seeing and hearing you so often at the stone-jug," said one.

"No thank you, I've got another voice always ready for such gentlemen," said Maggs, "as Charley knows well, don't you, Charley?"

"I do, and it got the better of me, I can tell you; and after that, if it don't do for a pair of the grabs, I'm a Dutchman, that's all."

At this moment the officers who were in the garden got impatient, and called out again—"Hilloa! it's all right, my coves, if there is any of the family here. We are of the right sort, and no mistake."

Charley hurried out to them, and so still did the thieves in the hall keep themselves that they heard quite distinctly every word that passed between Charley and the officers. The former, indeed, rather raised his voice, so that Maggs and his friends should have no difficulty in hearing what he said, and the officers, as people will do, took the tone of their voices from his, and spoke quite as loud.

"Who are you?" said Charley. "Where do you come from?"

"We are country hands," said the officer who was spokesman of the two; "we don't know much of the London family, but we are all right."

"Didn't you say you knew Joe the Kiddy?"

"Only by sight."

"Well, it's rather awkward. I don't know what to say to you. What are you in?"

"A little of all sorts, but we do the footpad dodge when we can, although at times we crack a crib; and if nothing else turns up, we don't mind a little area sneaking, or we fumble with the fives, you see."

"Well, you seem to be the right sort, so come in, if you will; but I advise you both now, as I hear by the voices there's two on you, to be a little careful what you are about, for we will stand anything but nonsense here."

"We wouldn't deceive you for the world. If there's any one thing that we don't like more than another, it's a sneak."

"It's the same with us. Come this way. Can you see?"

"Not over well, but we can make our way by the sound of your voice, if you

will say a word or two now and then. It a precious rum unfortunate sort of night, and the rain is a coming down above a bit now."

"Yes, it is. This way, mind the step—it's just before you."

"D—n it!"

The step that Charley had alluded to, was a step down, but the officer naturally enough thought that it was a step up, and he lifted his foot, fully expecting to find it, but as it was not there, down he went as though some deep hole were before him. His first impression was that such was the fact, but he quickly recovered himself, and only got as far as "d—n it," in his rage. The other officer cried out—

"Stand off—stand off! I am armed!"

"Of course you are," said Charley; "you would make but a poor hand at your business, if you wasn't, old fellow; but what is the matter?"

"Oh, I thought—that is, I had an idea that my comrade had fallen down some place or another, that was all."

"It's no matter," said the other; "confound it, I thought you meant a step up instead of a step down. But I haven't broken any bones."

"Only a little shaken, I suppose?" said Charley. "Lor, bless you, these sort of things do a man more good than harm in the long run. Come on, there's no other step either up or down."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the officer.

Charley led the way direct to the hall, where there was a death-like stillness, and at once opening the door, he said in a loud voice—

"Family men, here are two from the country, they say. They don't call themselves any one thing more than another, in particular; but they turns their hands to any little thing that comes uppermost."

"Yes, it's all right," said one of the officers. "We are the true sort."

"That's a comfort," said a voice—it was the voice of Maggs, but so completely different from any voice the thieves present had ever heard him speak in, that a rather anxious whisper passed among them of "Who is that?"

"It's very dark here," said the officer.

"Very," added his companion.

"Well, it's likely to continue so," said Charley, "for all I know to the contrary."

"How so? What do you mean when you say that?"

"I just mean what I do say; that it's dark now and likely to continue so. It's our way, you see, to meet in the dark, and so we say our say to each other without any sort of trouble; but if you don't like it, you can be off again, you know."

"Oh, no—no; only, you see, as we are strangers and from the country, it would have been a great thing for us to have had the pleasure of looking at some of the London coves of the right sort. But of course it is all right enough, and as we are only visitors, we ought to be the last to make any complaints, so we are quite content, gentlemen."

"If," said Maggs, in his peculiar voice. "the strangers are anxious for a light, why, of course, they can have one. I suppose they know our custom?"

"What custom?"

"The search warrant, we call it. Whenever any one comes to us and says he is a family man, we don't doubt him for a moment, but four of us search him."

"Oh, indeed; but you said something about a light."

"I did. Charley, my boy, get us a light if these gentlemen wish it."

"Directly," said Charley, and he left the room. He was not gone above three minutes when they all saw the flash of a light, and there he stood in the entrance of the hall, holding a torch that blazed away at a good rate above his head. The scene in the great old hall was now strange and picturesque. The thieves were grouped about the place in such a way that scarcely one of their faces was

visible, and Maggs still sat upon the chair that was on top of the table, but a half mask covered the whole of the upper part of his face.

"Well, now, are you satisfied?" said Maggs, in the same tone that had so puzzled the thieves. "Now you have a light."

"Yes; but—but——"

"But what?"

"We can see nobody."

"Why, what unreasonable men you must be. I thought you wanted to look at each other to make quite sure that neither of you was a spy and an officer of Bow Street in disguise. That was my idea."

These words were quite sufficient to convince the two officers that they were known, and in a moment they drew back to the door of the hall, and one of them took a short thick holster pistol from his breast-pocket, as he said—

"I am an officer, and I warn all here present that I am one who will stand no sort of nonsense. It was my duty to come here, and here I am. The man who makes the least question of resistance to me, that minute breathes his last!"

The positive boldness of such words as these from one man to no less than twenty, for a few moments had all the effect that the officers were accustomed to find resulted from the daring spirit in which they usually carried on their somewhat perilous profession.

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## CHAPTER CCXCVII.

### DICK AND JACK GET NOTICE OF THE THIEVES' INTENTIONS REGARDING DUVAL.

UNDER ordinary circumstances, no doubt, the two officers would have managed to awe the assemblage of thieves sufficiently, at all even's, to enable them to effect their own escape; but the circumstances then present were very far from ordinary, and those who were at the mansion felt that the very existence of one of their most secret and important places of meeting was at stake.

It was no uncommon thing for a Bow Street officer to go into a public-house, and with a pistol in his hand, pick out his man from amid thirty or forty of his companions; but that dodge, as Mr. Maggs called it, would not do there on any account.

It was Maggs who replied to the officer who had spoken so boldly to the assemblage.

"Well," he said, still speaking in that feigned voice which completely set at naught all ideas of detection—"well, what next?"

The others maintained a profound silence, and the officers thought that they really had it all their own way.

"We don't want any one in particular," said he who held the pistol in his hand; "but we know where to light upon a snug party of the family when we do want any one. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" echoed the other officer. "Come along, Bill."

"Yes, that's all very funny," said Maggs; "but what if we say No to your going?"

"Do you say it?"

"Well, I'm thinking of it."

"Who are you, then? Only tell me that, and I'll pop a pair of darbies on you like a flash of lightning, and take you to the nearest cage."

"You are a bold speaker," said Maggs.

"You are a bold performer, too. My name is Godfrey."

"Oh, I know that. I have often met you in Newgate. My name is Maggs."

As he spoke, Maggs took off his mask and sat quite composedly upon his chair upon the table, fully revealed to the sight of the two officers, who were as much astonished as if some apparition of some one whom they knew to be with the dead had risen up before their eyes.

A suppressed kind of murmur, like the drawing of a long breath among the thieves, might now be heard, for they all felt how completely Maggs was committing himself by this bold act, and they knew that he was not the likely man to do so without an object.

The officers glanced at each other, and then at Maggs again, in whose identity they seemed hardly able to believe.

"Is it possible?" said one.

"Quite possible," replied Maggs, in his natural tone, which startled them still more.

"Are you Maggs, the trusted odd man of Newgate?"

"Just so—the trusted odd man of Newgate—the extra——"

"The confidential supernumerary of the sheriff?"

"The confidential supernumerary of the sheriff!" repeated Maggs, with all the calmness in the world, as though nothing particular were amiss.

"And yet you are here?"

"And yet I am here."

"The companion—nay, the leader and the captain of this gang of the family of London."

"The companion—nay, the leader and the captain of this gang of the family of London," responded Maggs, with an imitation of the voice of the officer that produced a laugh among the thieves.

"Then may I be—Well, never mind that. There's no occasion to swear about it; but I'll have you in Newgate to-night, or I will know some better reason why than I do at present. Come along, Jenkins. We will take this fellow with us, at all events."

"Beware!" said Maggs, drawing his right hand from his breast, where it had been hidden, and showing that in it he held a double-barrelled pistol. "Beware I say, Mr. Godfrey; you are a bold man, but it won't go down here."

"Won't it? I summon you to surrender, Maggs."

"I decline."

"Take that, then"

Bang went the officer's pistol at the head of Maggs. Through the smoke the shot was returned, and with a shriek Godfrey, the officer, sprang up into the air, and then fell a corpse with a bullet in his brain.

The other officer made an ineffectual attempt to escape; but the sound of the shots seemed to have awakened any slumbering wild or angry passion in the breasts of the thieves. With a yell and a rush they threw themselves upon him, before he could take aim with the pistol that he had hastily produced, and he fell with his skull broken in, and his face covered with blood, by the side of his companion, to the floor of the room.

"Hold!" cried Maggs, as he stood up to his full height upon the top of the table. "Hush!—hush!"

The shout of triumph that had been half raised by the thieves, died away to a strange moaning sound, and then all was still.

"Hold, I say," added Maggs. "Are they dead?"

"Dead enough," said a voice.

"Dead as dust," said Charley.

There was, now, a pause of a moment or two's duration, and then Maggs proceeded, in a clear, distinct voice, to speak.

"Comrades," he said, "the world and the law will call this murder! Let us understand that quite clearly; but, thank God, they fired the first shot. They might or they might not have got else off, if they had behaved a little differently, but they tried to carry off the thing with a high hand, and it wouldn't do."

"No, it wouldn't do."

“Of course it wouldn't. The fellow fired at me. He had his chance, and I didn't flinch from the shot. It was my turn then, and there he is. Do you call this murder?”

“No—no—no!”

“Nor do I. They were spies, too, and, by all the laws that ever were, they deserved the death they have come by. But we did not kill them on that account. They were mad enough to suppose that they could come here and just, at the mere suggestion of their business, shoot whom they pleased. Are we brute beasts that we are to put up with that sort of thing? What sort of men did they suppose we were that from our fellow-men, just because they are called constables, we should put up with slaughter or imprisonment at their discretion?”

“Down with them, and all like them!”

“They are down enough, now,” said Charley. “But, I say, Maggs, old boy, you have not come off scot-free, after all; you are covered with blood, and here it is running down you on to the table.”

“That is nothing,” said Maggs. “Godfrey was a pretty fair shot, and the only chance I had was that I was above his aim, rather; so, you see, the bullet just passed through my cheek, and a wound in the face is sure to bleed well. Give us a drop of cold water, Charley.”

“Ay, that I will, Maggs. Never mind, old fellow, if you have got a scratch you went in and won, you know.”

“He did!—he did!” cried the others. “A cheer for Maggs.”

“No—no,” said Maggs, “silence. We have still something to do. This is a bad and awkward job, to say the best of it, and it ain't over yet.”

“Ain't it?” said one, as he touched the dead body of Godfrey with his foot. “It's over with this one, I rather think.”

“And the t'other one, too,” growled a herculean man, who had dealt with a small crow-bar the blow to Godfrey's companion that had stretched him dead by the side of his comrade. “I heard his noddle go scrunch!”

“I don't mean with them,” said Maggs; “but I mean that we have something yet to do. We must put them under ground, and that quickly too; and everything that belongs to them must go in the grave with them. We have then our secret in our own keeping, and if we blab it is our own look out.”

“Yes—yes; bury them,” said several. “We will soon manage that—Here's Charley with the water, Maggs.”

Without another word, now, Maggs descended from the table and well washed the wound in his cheek, and then he wrapped a towel round it as well as he could so as to leave his mouth free, for the wound was in a very awkward place for bandaging at all.

The thieves watched him in silence until he had, with the assistance of Charley, completed the bandaging of his wounded face. It was quite evident that they looked entirely to him for directions what to do under the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed, and no one made the least movement to interfere with the dead bodies of the officers till he gave the word. It was in an odd muffled voice then that Maggs addressed his companions, for he found that if he spoke freely, the wound in his cheek bled sympathetically, and he already felt rather weakened by the excessive hemorrhage that had taken place.

They all listened to his words as though they were uttered by some oracle whose behests there was no such thing as gainsaying, and who was certain to advise its disciples to the best.

“I don't think,” began Maggs—“I may, of course, be wrong; but, I say, I don't think it at all likely that anybody but ourselves has the least idea that these two men are here. It isn't the fashion of your regular Bow Street men to say much about the expeditions. If one hits upon what he thinks may turn out a good thing, he may tell another for the sake of having strength with him and companionship; but they will neither of them let it go any further; therefore, my idea is, that these two fellows will be just missed, and that's all.”



The thieves nodded their acquiescence in this opinion.

"All we have to do, then," added Maggs, "is to put them out of sight as soon as we can, and then this old crib remains as good as ever to us, and, perhaps, better, for it may be a good while before there's another hand as keen as Godfrey to come prying about it."

"True, true enough that," said several.

"Charley, my boy, you know the garden well."

"Rather," said Charley; "and I can tell you of a nice place to put 'em. I wonder now if Bow Street officers is good manure for gooseberry-bushes?"

"For what?"

"Gooseberry-bushes, Mr. Maggs, 'cos the very best thing to do is to pop 'em both in the kitchen-garden, and rake 'em nice and smooth over, and pop in some slips of gooseberry-bushes over 'em, you see, and then the whole affair will look as natural as blazes."

What Charley meant precisely by a place looking as natural as blazes, it is rather hard to say, except that it was his mode of expressing the very height and acme of the natural, and so we must take it.

"Come on, then," said Maggs. "Let us set to work. I'm afraid I can only look on, for if I exert myself much I shall bleed to death. I am weakened enough as it is, but I will stay here, my lads, and see all snug."

"No—no," said one, "you go to town, Maggs, and see to your wound. We will take care that everything is right here."

"I couldn't do it," said Maggs. "I must see and know that nothing is left amiss, or I should feel too anxious for rest. It won't be a long job, though. Come on! There is not a window in the parish that looks into the garden of this house, that I know for a fact, so we can use lanterns to the work. Come on, Charley. There are four spades and a pick-axe or two, which will get through the work quickly."

"That's your sort," said Charley, "it's all right. Come this way!"

"One thing let me beg of you all to recollect," said Maggs, "and that is, silence. We may be free from eye, but we don't know how near some ear may be to us."

They now, with almost noiseless steps, and only making now and then a few short observations to each other in a whisper, proceeded to the garden after Charley. The rain was still coming down, but it came nearly straight, and had subsided into one of those small misty kinds of rain, which, when once set in, seem as if they would last for ever.

The thieves waited upon the grass-plot while Charley went to the kitchen for a couple of stable lanterns, with which he soon re-appeared. He then spread the tools that Maggs had mentioned, and in silence he led the way to the kitchen-garden.

"There," he said, "the ground is loose enough already, and there won't be much trouble about the job."

He proceeded to a large, and apparently well dug up bed, and placed the lanterns about six feet apart from each other.

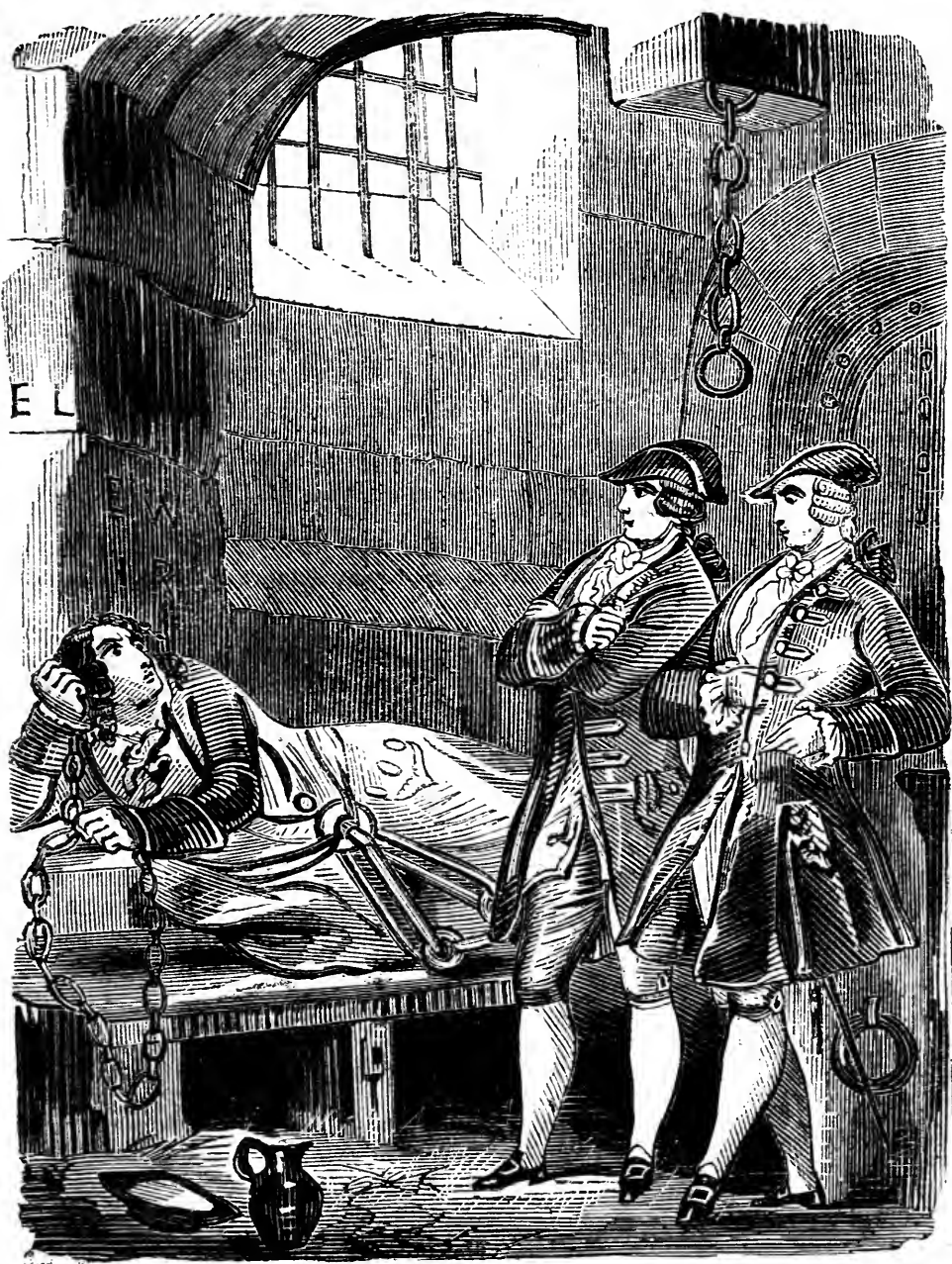
"There," he said, "that will be the spot, and the best thing to do is to carry every shovelful of earth away for some time, and scatter it over the garden, for there will be lots to cover them up with."

"Yes, Charley, that's it."

It was a strange and awful-looking scene now that was being enacted in that garden amid the pattering of the rain. The space of ground did not admit of more than three persons working on it at once, one with the pick-axe, with which the soil was loosened in masses, and the other two with spades, by the aid of which they quickly moved it; but by turns, every one present, except Maggs, had a share of the labour, for they relieved each other at it.

In this way a grave, somewhat over six feet in length, and about three in width, began rapidly to appear, and by the constant fresh hands that were brought to bear upon it, they soon got it to about five feet in depth. They

began then to find that each shovelful of earth they took out was replaced by an equal volume of water from some spring that they had touched upon, or from mere ground drainage.



CLAUDE HAS TWO UNEXPECTED VISITORS TO HIM IN NEWGATE.

"This will do," said Charley, as he threw down his spade. "We are deep enough. And now for the bodies."

"Yes," said Maggs, as he lifted one of the lanterns. "Now for the bodies. Who will go and get them? Don't speak all at once."

## CHAPTER CCXCVIII.

SHOWS HOW TURPIN AND JACK PROCEEDED TO DO SOMETHING FOR CLAUDE DUVAL.

THIS was a part of the business from which the thieves shrunk back rather, and the tone of irony in which Maggs spoke was a result of his conviction that they would so shrink from that part of the job.

Nobody moved or spoke.

"Come, old friends," added Maggs, "I can answer myself for it that you are not at all afraid of a live officer. Don't let me think that you are afraid of a dead one."

"It's an ugly job," said one now, in a low tone, "but still, we all know that it must be done, so I won't shrink from it, for one."

"Nor I," said another.

"I will go with you," said Maggs, "so let us come on at once, old friends, and we shall soon have this part of the business over."

After it was found that Maggs intended to be of the party that was going for the bodies, there was no lack of volunteers, but Maggs said, with a good-tempered smile—

"No—no. Two will do, or four, at the outside—perhaps four will be better, as then they can be brought both at once, and that will save some trouble, certainly, so come on, four of you."

Maggs and Charley led the way. The latter carried one of the lanterns, and so they proceeded to the large hall, where the strife had taken place that had ended in the tragical death of the two officers who had thought proper to run the fearful risk of coming in the character of spies to the thieves' haunt.

Charley held up the light, and its rays fell upon the sickening spectacle below. The thieves again shrunk back with shudders; but Maggs, who saw this hesitation, and who knew how valuable time was in such a case, cried out—

"Up with them at once, my lads. It's like taking physic, this is. The sooner you get it over the better. Up with them."

Thus urged, the members of the "family," who would not at all have been particular about what they did in vice or daring, but who by no means liked to have anything to do with the dead, picked up the two bodies, and in silence followed Charley, while Maggs brought up the rear.

Those who were around the grave soon saw the others approaching with their ghastly burthens, and they moved aside as they came near.

"Pitch 'em in," said Charley.

With a heavy fall, the first body was cast into the grave.

"Now, the other."

Dash went the second; but they lay rather awkwardly, occupying much more room than as if they had been more carefully placed in that narrow and last home of theirs. Maggs pointed this out, saying—

"Will nobody go down and put them straight? I am afraid to jump it for fear of my wound breaking out afresh; but if nobody else will, why, I must."

"No," said Charley, "you be quiet, Maggs, or you will bleed to death. I'll do it."

They all looked at Charley with interest as he sprang down into the grave upon the bodies, and began to kick them straight. A few seconds completed that part of the job, and then he scrambled out.

"All's right. Fill in."

The thieves showed no lack of diligence, truly, in setting about that part of the work. The idea that they were once and for ever getting rid of a spectacle they none of them liked to look upon, inspired them with strength, and in the course of three minutes the grave was nearly level.

"Stamp it down," said Maggs. "Stamp it down, or upon the first rains that get through it you will have it all settling and sinking."

"Yes," said Charley, "and that wouldn't be so pleasant for me, as I stay here, if any one should choose to take any notice of it."

Some six or eight of them now stamped upon the fresh placed earth in the grave, and naturally reduced its height. More mould was then thrown upon the top of that, and then they stamped again, until even Charley was tolerably satisfied, and he said—

"Don't trouble yourselves any further. I'll plant the gooseberry bushes in the morning, and then the place will look as natural as possible."

"Then the job is over," said Maggs.

"Over quite," said the others; and then they stood in a throng by the side of the grave of the two officers. It was by no means the policy of Maggs, who had taken the initiative in this business, to allow the thieves just then any time for reflection; so he spoke at once about yet what was to be done.

"Attend to me, now, family men," he said. "What we want all of us is to find out where Dick Turpin and Sixteen string Jack are to be found, for if anything is to be done of much good for Claude Duval, they are the fellows to help us. Now I do think that if some half-dozen of you were to set about looking for them in earnest, they would surely be found."

"Oh, yes," said one. "If you, Maggs, will provide the horses, we will set off; but you know it would be a twelvemonth's job at the least to try it on foot."

"It would be more than that, friends, for I don't think you would ever come up with either of them in that way. I will give you every one to the extent of six a note to old Peter at the Bull Inn near Smithfield, and he will provide a horse for the love of it."

"I will go, Maggs," cried one. "And I—and I—I, too."

"Stop! Don't any of you try it that ain't a good horseman, for if you do you will just get into a scrape, and perhaps spoil old Peter's nags."

Several shrunk back upon this statement; but Maggs knew them all well, and had soon picked out six upon whom he knew he could depend quite well, and to them he gave the necessary order for horses.

"And now," he said, "I, for one, must bid you good-by, Charley, and the sooner you be off the better, I think, for it ain't very far off morning."

"Yes—yes, let us go."

"Go easy, though, and not all at once. You know where we meet again, and let me beg of you all to be something more than cautious now about this place, for after what has happened, we don't know what may happen. Good luck to you all, and good night."

The thieves were all soon gone, but Maggs managed to remain behind till the last, and then, placing his great rough hand upon the shoulder of Charley, he said—

"I say, old fellow, you won't like this crib now?"

Charley did not reply for a few moments, and when he did, it was rather in a confused tone that he said—

"I don't know, Maggs, that I should care to say as much to any one but you; but the truth is, I shouldn't like it."

"It is not natural that you should, old fellow; but all I ask of you is, to stay till this affair of Claude Duval is put into some sort of tune, and then I should say, 'pack up and be off at once;' but do stay till then, Charley."

"I will stay as long as you like. I daresay it's likely enough that at times, at night, mind you, when the wind is a howling, and the rain is pattering down, I may think of them two poor devils as lays yonder, so still and quiet now; but if I do, Maggs, I know better all the while, and when the sunshine comes again in the morning, and I see that it shines all the same on their graves as anywhere else, I shall laugh at myself for a fool for thinking anything of it."

"Never you mind that, Charley. It's natural you shouldn't like it, so depend

upon me, old fellow, and I'll find you another crib before long. I tell you, Charley, I shouldn't like it myself, so how can I expect anyone else to do so?"

"You are a good fellow, Maggs, and I am obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. Good-night, now."

Charley held open the door in the garden-wall, and watched the retreating figure of Maggs, as it went through the darkness, until it was completely lost to him, and then, as he closed the door, he shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked round him as he never before had looked in that place.

He paused, and blew a shrill whistle by the aid of his fingers. It was soon answered, and then Bill stood before him.

"Well, father, it's all right, I suppose?" said Bill.

"Oh, very likely. Go to roost, Bill."

"Yes, I'm a going. Did they cook the goose of them nabs, father?"

"What?"

"I say, did they settle the hash of them fellows—eh?"

"Go to bed and don't ask such questions. Hark you, Bill. There's some things that the less you happen to know about the better for you, so don't you be too inquisitive now, old fellow."

"Well, but I only——"

"Be off, will you?"

Bill made a precipitate retreat, and then Charley, as he took his way to the kitchen, muttered to himself—

"Confound it, I shall be pestered by his curiosity now, I suppose, night and day. No, Maggs is right, I shall never like it. No—never."

Leaving Mr. Charley, now, to his own reflections, we will follow Maggs to London, whither he intended to walk on foot; for it was one of his maxims, whenever he was upon any secret expedition, to trust much rather to his own speed, than to make evidence of his having been upon any particular road, of the drivers of vehicles, whether public or private.

To be sure, in the Edgeward-road, for Maggs went home by Kilburn, he got a lift at the back of a carriage for a mile or two, before he was observed by the footman, in the rumble, and that saved him considerably.

It was about five o'clock in the morning when Maggs, looking as calm and cool as possible, and wearing rather a stolid, stupid look upon his face, ascended the steps of Newgate, and tapped at the wicket.

"Hilloa!" cried the half-asleep turnkey, who was "on the look." "Hilloa! who's there? Mind, no tobacco or spirits to be brought into the prison."

"It's only me," said Maggs, in a mild tone.

"Oh, Maggs?"

"Yes, Mr. Moss, it's only me; but I'll come again if you thinks it's too soon, sir, only I thought I might be wanted, you see, so I thought I would tap at the wicket."

"Oh, ah, it's all right. Come in."

"Thank you."

"Oh, don't mention it; we are always glad to see you, you know, 'cos, arter all, you are a good-tempered chap."

"I tries to do my best," said Maggs, as he slipped through to wicket, which the turnkey just held open wide enough to an inch to let him in. "I always does all I can to oblige the authorities, Mr. Moss."

"So you do, Maggs. So you do. I say, old fellow."

"Yes, Mr. Moss?"

"Just step over the way and get a pot of half-and-half. I'm as thirsty as a coalheaver, I am, and there's nobody, you know, that one can trust to get it but you."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Moss. I'm only too happy to be of any service to a gentleman like you, you know. I'll go at once."

"Thank you. Don't hurry, now I know what a fellow you are when you



are going an errand for anybody. You are so glad to do it, you are half ready to break your neck."

"Oh, no—no. I will take care. You like it with old ale?"

"I do—I do."

Maggs went over the way for the beer, and the turnkey shaking his head as he looked after him through the spikes at the top of the wicket-gate, said—

"He's the best tempered fellow as ever I came near, though he is a little soft. Lor, I don't know what he'd do if it wasn't for old Newgate. I do think he's attached to the very stones at the door, and if he isn't so bright as some folks, why, he's as faithful as an old mastiff dog, is Maggs, that he is; and here he comes with the half-and-half, a carrying of it as steady, so as there should be as good a head on it as ever was. Come in."

"All right, Mr. Moss. It's the oldest ale."

"Drink, Maggs."

"No, Mr. Moss, arter you, sir, is manners."

"Well, here's luck."

The turnkey did leave about a wine glass of half-and-half at the bottom of the pot for his worthy and esteemed friend, Maggs; but the latter drank it with quite a look of satisfied humility, and the turnkey stamped upon the stone pavement as though he would prettly the liquor in his stomach properly by so doing, as he said—

"By gosh, it's prime, that."

"Very good, sir."

"I say, Maggs, old boy—why—what's the matter with your face? You have got it tied up, old fellow."

"Ah, I do think as it was some of those horrid family coves, as they call themselves, that did that. I was just passing the end of Field Lane, when out came a couple of fellows, and one of 'em made a cut at me with something, and laid my cheek open, as you see it. I daresay, Mr. Moss, now, they knew as I came to the prison here, and did all I could for such gentlemen as you."

"I shouldn't wonder. It's a confounded shame, though; but my mind has been a little bit disturbed or so, Maggs, by a something that has happened here only about half an hour ago."

"Indeed, Mr. Moss, it would need to be something particular to disturb such a mind as you have, sir."

"Well, my good fellow, perhaps you are right there, and I will say, Maggs, that for real downright good judgment, at times, you beat any one that I ever heard of; but I'll just tell you."

"Do, Mr. Moss—oh do, sir."

"Well, I was sitting on this here chair a thinking of nothing at all, but I wasn't asleep—mind you, I never go to sleep while I am on the lock."

"You couldn't, Mr. Moss, cos it's contrary to the rules."

"Just so," said Moss, with a slight smile of pity for the simplicity of his friend Maggs. "Just so, as you say, I couldn't, for it's contrary to the rules. Well, here I was, wide awake, when some one came bang up the steps as if he owned all Newgate, and giving such a rattle at the wicket, that it was nigh enough to have it down, he cried out—

"'Hilloa, turnkey!—You fellow, th ere!'

"'Yes, sir,' says I, a running up to the wicket, for I thought, to be sure, it was some great man or another. 'Yes, sir,' says I.

"'How is Claude Duval?' he cried.

"'Better, sir,' says I.

"'Oh, very well, d—n you!' says he, and away he went, leaving me a staring like a stuck pig, and afore I could think of sending anybody to nab him, he was off, and out of all sight and hearing. Now, what do you think of that, Maggs?"

"I don't know what to think. If you can't think what it was, Mr. Moss, it ain't at all likely that I should."

"Well, there's something in that ; but I'm regularly bothered by it, it was so cool. Well, it's no use plaguing oneself. Just step over the way, and get another pot, Maggs."

## CHAPTER CCXCIX.

### RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN THE PARK AT GREENWICH.

WHILE all these things were going on in London, Claude Duval being in his gloomy cell in Newgate, and Mr. Maggs doing all that was in his power to work out his release, Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack were by no means idle.

It will be recollected that we left them in no very enviable position in the old park at Greenwich, where, if they had not in so strange and unexpected a manner overheard sufficient to convince them that they where in great danger from the treachery of the inn-porter, they would in all likelihood have fallen into the snare laid for them by that foolish individual.

Foolish he was, in every sense of the word, for in the first place, it is foolish to break faith with any one ; and in the second place, he was foolish, even viewing the affair solely as regarded what he might get by it, and throwing all common feeling and honour overboard, for he would have got double and treble from Turpin and Jack, than ever he could hope to wrest from the cupidity of the officers, who would, of course, grudge him every penny-piece that he might take from them, even if the plan to apprehend Jack and Dick had been successful, of which the officers themselves could not help entertaining the gravest doubts.

When the fortunate discovery that the two adventurers made, assured them that they were all but caught in a trap, their first idea was not to leave the spot until they had taken some revenge upon the inn-porter.

"Jack," said Dick Turpin in a whisper. "Let us get back again the way we came, and be off at once."

"But that rascal?"

"Yes, we know that he is a rascal, but what can we do? You see, or rather you know without seeing, that the Philistines are in force about this spot, and you know that we have no chance with such a mob of them."

"No ; and yet——"

"Yes, I know what you would say, it is a hard thing to let that rascal off, and I admit that it is ; but of all things that keep well, Jack, command me to revenge, which, as long as you like to take care of it, never turns mouldy or sour."

"There is truth in that. Come on."

They surmounted the wall again, and were well pleased when they found their horses quite safe under its shadow. To tighten the girths, and to mount, was the work of a few moments, and then they lingered a little, and listened, for they could now hear plainly the tramp of horses feet upon the heath.

"By George! they have got some mounted men from Woolwich, I'd lay any money," said Dick.

"Then come—we have no time to lose."

"Not a moment. This way, Jack."

Dick was well enough acquainted with the heath, and he struck off to the right, keeping well under the shadow of the park wall. That is to say, supposing their foes to be to the wall, they went then to the right, which took them through the valley at the base of Shooter's Hill.

A quarter of an hour's riding brought them out by the river side, at some distance below Greenwich, but it was a very wild and desolate-looking spot of ground that they debouched upon. The river lay glistening before them, lazily heaving to and fro, looking thick and slimy, as it was just beginning only to feel

the influence of the rising tide. On the opposite shore they could see a few dim lights, that seemed as vapours flitting there, and as they varied in intensity to be going out and in each passing moment. A keen whistling wind was blowing.

"Not a very comfortable prospect this, Jack," said Turpin.

"Far from it. Do you know the route by the river side?"

"Why, yes, I do, but I am thinking, as it leads direct into Greenwich, that it won't be the best for us to take. Oh! if we could only get across the water now, Jack."

"Impossible."

"Nay, nothing is impossible of that kind. The only difficulty will be to get a craft that will hold the cattle."

"That is what I mean Dick, when, I say it is impossible. You don't think that a wherry would answer the purpose, do you, and you don't think of swimming the river, I suppose?"

"Neither, Jack; and yet I think there is a chance. You see, it is high water, and, in fact, it is only just on the turn. There then lies my hope of getting across; and now tell me if you see anything black about half-way between here and the middle of the stream?"

"Yes, a barge of some sort."

"Very good. There is generally but one man on board the Thames barges, or a man and a boy at most, so there will not be many people to pay, you see, and I don't think there will be any great difficulty in getting the horses on board."

"Well, if it can be done—"

"We will see.—Hilloa—boat here—boat!"

"Here you are, sir," said a waterman springing up from Heaven only knows where in a moment.

Dick dismounted, and whispered to Jack to hold his horse, and then turning to the man, he said,

"Can you row me to that barge out yonder?"

"Yes, sir, surely."

"Very well, do so; I will pay you as if it were for a large job."

Jack said nothing, but he could not think it possible that Dick Turpin should succeed in getting across the river with two horses. He did not fully estimate the magic power of gold, though, for in the course of five or six minutes Dick came back to him, and said, laughingly—

"He will do it. The waterman will help him, and he will pull the barge in, as it is high water, close enough for us to jump on board with the horses. If we had not the command of our cattle as we have, I don't mean to say it would be possible, but we can do it."

"Well done, Dick; it will be no bad thing, certainly, to place the Thames between us and certain parties."

"A capital thing. But here they are."

The barge lazily made its way by the aid of its long sweeps close enough to the bank, and then the man on board lit a lantern, as he called out—

"All's right, gentlemen. I suppose it's a lark or a wager of some sort; but I'll put you on shore, if your horses will do it."

"Put out the light, then," said Dick, "they won't jump towards the light."

"Very good, sir."

The lantern was at once extinguished, and then Dick said—

"It's loaded with potatoes, the barge, Jack, and there will be a good foothold for the cattle on the sacks. Don't jump till I tell you."

"No, I will manage all right."

The leap was nothing, but Dick turned his horse and took the whole breadth of the road-way first, and then just lifting him by the bridle, and giving a touch with the spur, the creature cleared the space easily and lit upon the potato sacks.

"Bravo!" cried the bargeman.

"Bray-vo!" sung out a little boy of about six years old, who was on board.  
"Bray——"

"Hold your row, will you?" said the man, throwing a potato at him.

"Now, Jack," cried Dick, "all's clear."

In another moment Jack was on board. His horse stumbled a little upon the potatoes, but quickly recovered, and both he and Dick then dismounted, and held the creatures by the head, and patted them into high good humour.

"Now off with you," said Dick to the bargeman, as he slipped a guinea into the hands of the waterman, who was highly delighted with his remuneration for such a little job, which altogether had not taken up ten minutes.

The barge lazily swept out into the river again, and the man in a voice of great deference, said—

"Land you where you likes, gentlemen; opposite or further on; it's just as you likes to say, gentlemen."

"All we want is to get across," said Dick, "so you can land us at any spot that is most convenient to yourself."

"Very good, sir."

The barge made a diagonal progress across the stream, and it must be recollected that the Thames was in a very different condition then to what it is now. There were no steamers to render the river-highway troublesome and intricate, nor were the banks so lined with buildings for the purposes of trade as they are now; therefore, it was much easier to perform such a feat as that performed by Dick Turpin and Jack upon the night in question, than it would be to do so at the present time.

There was a little wooden quay that jutted out into the water a short distance, and the bargeman pointing it out, observed, that if he just put his barge alongside of it, it would be the easiest thing in the world for the gentlemen to walk their horses on shore.

"That will do, my good fellow," said Dick; "pull into there, and as we shall soon be on shore, there is your five guineas for the job."

"Many thanks to your honours. This here mouey will make me and my wife and little 'un a deal more comfortable this winter as is coming, than we should have been; so long life and good luck to you."

"Thank you."

The barge shot very gently alongside the old quay, and in a minute both Dick and Jack were on shore.

"This is well done," said Jack, "I admit. Good night to you, Mr. Bargeman, and it will be just as well that you say nothing about this little affair to any one."

"Not a word, sir. Lord bless you, sir, my master would set to abusing a fellow like a maniac if he know'd it. Good night to you both for a couple of real gents as you is."

Dick laughed.

"Oh, gold—gold," he said, "is it any wonder that men cheat, and swindle and cringe, and lie, and rob for you, when you are such an enchanter that a few bright pieces of your precious substance wins all hearts!"

"And creates a couple of highwaymen," said Jack, laughing "into two real gents."

"Just so. But how the deuce are we to get out of this?"

Jack whistled and then laughed again, for a brief glance at their position now showed them that they were in a sort of yard, enclosed on the two sides, with the river one way and a pair of great gates the other, so that they were completely shut in.

"Here's a fix," said Dick.

"A regular man-trap," said Jack. "You don't think this is a regular sell of our friend the bargeman?"

"Oh, no—no; and yet—"

"Yet, you don't know what to think?"

"No, I was not going to say that; I was going to add, that surely there could



JACK AND DICK'S DESPERATE ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE OFFICERS.

not be much difficulty in getting out. Let us try it. There is a way in here, and, consequently, there must be a way out, for everybody don't come here by the Thames, you may depend."

"No, but there may be some chance against letting us out. This is a timber-yard, Dick, don't you see?"

They both rode forward through the yard, which was about a hundred feet in length, till they came to the two great gates, and then, through the chink left by their point of closing, they could plainly see a light shining. What that light meant, or whether it was in a street or leading to some private dwelling, they had no possible means of knowing. Dick here dismounted, and tried the gates, but they were evidently fast on the other side.



"Be careful, Dick," said Jack.

"Oh, yes, but we can't stay here, you know."

As he spoke, Dick gave the gate a couple of kicks, that made it shake again, and then a terrified voice called out from the other side—

"Murder and turf! what's that I see? Oh, bedad, I see nothing, but I mean hear it? Murder, what is it?"

"Open the gate."

"Is it the gate?"

"Open the gate, fellow."

"Oh, then, by the holy poker, it's a ghost of somebody ye is, surely!"

"No, it's all right; open the gate at once, or it will be worse for you."

"Worse for me, is it? I will, then; it can't be much worse for me than being a private watchman here, and only getting seven shillings a week and no perquisites from that same, any way."

"Well, here's a guinea for you; but you seem as if you didn't care about it by your keeping the gate between you."

"Is it a guinea? Then, murder! the gate shall not stand in the way, any how; and here it goes, bedad."

The gate swung on its heavy hinges, and the Irish watchman lifted up his lantern, and when he saw two mounted men, his mouth and eyes opened to such alarming widths, that it seemed very unlikely that they would ever close again.

"Well, what's the matter now?" said Dick. "Do you take us for a couple of ghosts?"

"Ghosts, is it, sir, you said?"

"Yes, stupid. What do you take us for?"

"Oh, bedad; then, did you come out of the river? or did you drop from the moon?"

Dick placed a guinea in the hand of the watchman, and said to him, with great solemnity of manner—

"A silent tongue shows a wise head. Good night."

"Eh?"

"Good night."

"A Y Z, did you say? A silent tongue and A Y Z? But murder and turf, where did you come from?"

Dick laughed, and put his horse to a trot, and Jack followed him. They heard a large bell begin to ring, and then they quickened their pace, and were soon a couple of miles from the wharf by the river side. It was Jack who drew rein just as they heard a clock strike four, and said—

"Dick, I have a fancy to call at Newgate."

"Call at Newgate? You are joking, Jack?"

"No. I think I should like to call and see how Claude Duval is. I am weary, and want some rest. We can put up our horses after that, you know, at the old place, where we shall be quite safe, in Barbican. But I feel as if I couldn't sleep a wink till I know that Claude is better."

"But, Jack, when you talk of visiting Newgate—Really, now——"

"I know what you would say. You think it a mad-headed plan, and that I must be out of my mind to dream of it; but nothing is easier. There will be only one man on the lock at the wicket gate, and if any one goes up to him suddenly with a bounce, he will be as civil as possible. You can wait for me at the corner of Newgate Street; for, of course, I will go on foot. I assure you, Dick, there is no danger in it whatever, and it may easily be done."

"If there were danger, Jack, you know, I am not exactly the fellow to shrink from any little enterprise on that account; but as you put it, I don't suppose there is any danger. The safety of these kind of things lies all in the way they are done."

"Just so, Dick. To hesitate, is to be lost."

"I know it. Will you let me do it?"

"Don't ask me, Dick, old fellow. I feel pretty sure that I can manage it, because my whole heart and soul are wrapt up in Claude's safety. I admit that my nerves are shaken, and that, under ordinary circumstances, you could do such a thing much better than I; but now the strong motive gives me power."

"Very good, Jack. Be it so."

They now rode on at a slashing pace to London, and it was in reality Jack who had so audaciously mounted the steps of Newgate, and asked the turnkey who was on duty, how Duval was.

It will be remembered that the turnkey had informed Maggs of the encounter, and Maggs, who at once guessed that it was either Jack or Turpin, felt very much vexed that he had not reached the prison a little sooner, for in that case he would have been able to tell which of them it was, and what was doing for Claude Duval.

## CHAPTER CCC.

### DICK AND JACK PUT UP AT THE OLD PUNCH BOWL IN BARBICAN.

SOMEWHAT encouraged by the answer that the turnkey at the gate of Newgate had given to the inquiry concerning Claude Duval, Jack had joined Turpin at the corner of Newgate Street at once, and they both trotted towards Smithfield at a smart pace.

"He is better," said Jack.

"Glad to hear it," replied Dick. "You feel all the better, in consequence, don't you, Jack?"

"Indeed, I do."

"I thought you would; and now what you want, old fellow, is rest. I know that you will be much more efficient after a good ten or twelve hours' sleep than you can possibly be now, and although I know that I can do without rest as well as most men, yet I feel as if a good snooze would be rather a glorious thing."

"There is truth in what you say, Dick. I am quite willing to put up at the old quarters, in Barbican. I feel that nothing can be done for Claude just now, and with the conviction that he is better, which I suppose, after all, means that he is not dead, I will try to be content for a little time, at least; so let us push on."

A very few minutes sufficed now to take them across Smithfield, and then rapidly crossing Aldersgate Street, they made their way to Barbican, and drew rein at the low doorway of a public-house, adjoining to which was a livery stable.

"We both of us know this old crib well enough," said Dick, as he dismounted.

"You have been here too often, I suppose?"

"Yes, Dick, often enough before you were thought of on the road."

"Like enough—like enough, Jack. Where the deuce is the bell? Oh, it is here. All's right! It is so covered with mud that I began to think it had gone, and that the old shop had got into other hands."

Dick Turpin had been feeling under the ledge made by the front of the old wooden step of the ancient doorway, and there at last he found a square piece of metal let into the wood-work, which, upon being smartly pressed, he knew rang a private bell that was in the bed-room of the landlord.

The bell, and the mode of ringing it, was only known to those who were in the thorough confidence of the landlord, and it was an understood thing there when it was rang he should attend to it immediately.

Three minutes had not elapsed when a voice, through a little wicket in the great door, that was about six inches wide, said—

"What is the caper?"

"Turpin," said Dick. "That's you, Ben, ain't it?"

"Rather. Come in, old fellow. Ha! who is with you?"

"Look at him."

"How can I look by this twixt and between sort of light? But it don't matter. Come in, both of you."

"What, on horseback?" said Jack.

"Bother take my head," said the landlord, "what am I thinking of? Wait half a minute, and I'll open one of the gates next door for you."

The name over the gate of the livery stables was not the same that appeared over the door of the public-house, but the whole concern was under one management, and in a few seconds one of the gates was opened, and Dick and Jack led in their horses to a very tidy kept and comfortable stable-yard. The gate was bolted and barred again, and then the landlord, as he speedily lighted a stable-lantern, turned sharply and said—

"Now then, Dick Turpin, who is your friend?"

"You don't mean to say that you don't know me?" said Jack.

"Why, Jack?"

"The same. It is true that I have not seen you for a couple of years now, but as you have seen me since that awful day when all the world believed me dead, you are not surprised that I still linger."

"Still linger? What do you mean by talking of still lingering, Jack? We expect to see you, and hear of you, for many a long day to come. But I can guess what has brought you both up to London: it is about Claude."

"Yes, to be sure."

"Well, poor fellow, I am afraid he is booked at last."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, that they will keep him till he is of no use, now that they once have him safely."

"You mean that they will hang him," said Dick Turpin; "but there are two words to that bargain. We are going to try what can be done, and it is not a trifle that will stop us, either as to money or danger."

"Well, I can give you some news, too, and that is, that the 'family' have made up their minds to try their best."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. You have heard of Maggs?"

Both Dick and Jack shook their heads, and the landlord smiled as he added—

"You have heard of Colonel Blue?"

"To be sure; the dashing chap that used to be on the western road, some years ago; but there was a report that he was shot."

"So he was, but it did not kill him, though it laid him up, poor fellow, for nearly two years, and there I kept him in a little room in the top of this very house. I don't mean to say that there was much trouble in so keeping him, because nobody was after him. They all thought—that is, the nobs and the beaks—that he had been shot dead, and so they might well, for a bullet was in his chest for a fortnight, till a young fellow, a doctor that came to attend upon him for nothing, and was as kind to him as he could be, got it out."

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes, the getting of it out nearly killed him, for it was by only making a hole in his back that it was done, and he fainted away, and lay like a log for eighteen hours; but the young doctor chap—oh, he was a trump!—he sat by him all the while, and brought him through it at last."

"And what became, then, of Colonel Blue?"

"Why, when he got up again he was so altered, that nobody would have known him, and he was spoilt for the road quite."

"No doubt."

"Well, then, the family made a what-do-you-call-it—a subscription for him, and it came to three hundred pounds and more; but he would not have it, and he made a kind of a speech to 'em in this very house, in which he told 'em that

though he would not take the money, cos, you see, he thought he could manage to keep himself, he thought as much of it as though he had, and as he could not go on the road, he would see, while he yet had to live, what he could do for them all."

"That was capital."

"Well, he took the name of Maggs, and what do you think he did?"

Dick and Jack both shook their heads.

"I'll tell you: he got acquainted with all the officers and turnkeys of the old stone-jug, and at last they thought so much of him that they let him go in and out just as often as he liked. The sheriffs place such a confidence in him, that they can't do without him, and in that kind of way he keeps his eyes open, you see, and does no end of good to the poor fellows of the family."

"No doubt of it."

While the landlord was giving this brief but interesting biography of poor Maggs, both Dick and Jack had placed their horses in stalls, and removed the saddles, and then Ben, the landlord, gave them an ample feed, after which he conducted his guests through a secret door in the hay-loft into the public-house.

"Now, my tulips," he said, "what's to be the first caper? Only say."

"Something to eat, and something to drink," said Dick.

"And then six or seven hours' sleep," said Jack.

"All's right, I thought as much. You don't look as if you have had much of that last article of late."

"Indeed we have not, Ben."

"Well, you may have a dose of it here, if you like, you know, and nobody will grudge it to you, I know. Come this way, and I will put as good a bottle of old wine before you as you would wish to see, and a couple of cold fowls."

"That will do," said Dick; "it is a feed fit for an emperor."

"Well, he might do worse, I think."

Ben was as good as his word. A little table was soon spread with the viands he had suggested, and both Dick and Jack made a hearty meal, after which Ben said to them—

"Now, tell me, 'cos, you see, upon that will depend where I put you: Do the beaks or the nobbs know of your being hereabouts?"

"No, certainly not, so far as we are aware of it."

"Very good; then there's no need for cramming you both into the little room near the tiles, and you may as well have a comfortable sleep in a good bed-room. Come this way."

Ben took them to a large double-bedded room, and having shown them how the door could be fastened, so that it would be next to impossible for any force to break it open, and explained the use of a little bell that they could ring if they wanted him, and promising to call them in about six hours, he bade them good evening, and left them to themselves.

"Not bad quarters these, Jack," said Dick, as he flung off his coat and boots, and threw himself upon one of the beds.

"Far from it, Dick. My mind is full of poor Colonel Blue's fate."

"Yes, it is a sad one; but why was he called Colonel Blue for? I was going to be told several times, but something always happened to stop it."

"Oh, just because he wore, while on the road, a suit of light blue, that is all. Why he was called colonel by the family was, I suppose, just because they thought him a clever fellow, and chose to abide by his orders."

"Ah! just so. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dick. You have forgotten all about fastening the door."

"Dear me! so I have. Oh, dear, how precious sleepy—sleep—I—you——"

Dick Turpin was fast asleep. Jack fastened the door according to the directions that had been given by the landlord; and then, after looking to his pistols, and being satisfied that they were all right for immediate action, he laid them handily upon a chair by the bedside, and composed himself to rest. The sad story of Colonel Blue, however, gave a tone and colour to his dreams, and

more than once he thought that he felt in his own breast the bullet that had been so nearly fatal to the highwayman.

How long they slept they had not the most distant idea of; but they thought the time was surely short, when they were awakened by a steady scratching at the door of their room.

"Who's there?" said Dick.

"Ben it is," said the voice of the landlord.

Dick sprang out of bed and let him in, and Jack laid his hand upon his pistols, for he thought that there might be some alarm. The landlord, when he made his appearance, said—

"A visitor for you both is below."

"You don't mean it?" said Dick.

"I will give him a warm reception," said Jack, as he took up one of his pistols.

"You mistake me," said the landlord; "it's a friend."

"We have not many of that sort," said Dick.

"Probably not; but this is one—it is Maggs."

"Ah, indeed?—Let him come up; but it would have been just as well if he had let us have another hour's sleep as well as the one we have had."

"Another hour's sleep, do you say? Why, goodness gracious! it's half-past eleven o'clock, and it wasn't six anything like when you came here."

"The deuce it is!"

"To be sure. Let me see. Twenty minutes to twelve. But still, I'm sorry I have disturbed you, at all events, and Maggs will come again."

"Oh, no—no!" said Jack; "it is time we should be up and stirring, Ben. I am very anxious to see him, for in its result his fate ain't far unlike my own. I am something like an old hulk that's past service; and if it had not been for him who now lies in a cell in Newgate, I don't think I should have encumbered the earth quite so long as I have."

"Don't say that, Jack," cried the landlord jocularly; "but I'll bring Maggs to you at once, and breakfast, too; for I suppose that will be as acceptable as any visitor, just now?"

"True, Ben," said Dick—"most true. Jack, I know, is always hungry, ain't you, Jack? Young blood, you know—eh?"

Jack shook his head rather mournfully, and the landlord left the room to bring up Maggs, who in a few minutes made his appearance, and was warmly welcomed by both Dick and Jack.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "of course, my duty to the Sheriffs of London is now to run over to Newgate, and give notice that you are both here, so that they may send a posse of constables to take you."

"Not a doubt of it," smiled Dick, "that is your duty, Mr. Maggs; but your inclination is quite a different thing."

"We are delighted to see you, Colonel Blue," said Jack.

"Hush—oh, hush!"

Maggs sunk into a chair, and appeared to be taken suddenly ill, so that both Dick and Jack were rather alarmed, and would have gone for aid, but he raised his hand to them to remain, and spoke in a low voice—

"Don't call me by that name. It recalls too much of the past to me. I want to forget it. You don't know all my story. Nobody does, and I don't think that anybody ever will; but if you would spare me a pang such as this, never call me that."

"I deeply regret that, unknowingly, I have done so now," said Jack. "Accept my apologies, Mr. Maggs."

"Say no more about it. How could you possibly know? Ben forgot to tell you, no doubt; but it is passed now, and forgotten. Come, let us talk of something else."

"Of poor Claude, then—how is he?"

"Better, and hopeful."



"That is well. It gives me new strength to hear those words."

"Which of you was it who called at Newgate to inquire for him?"

"It was I," said Jack.

"Well, they are all furious about that. The governor was ready to tear his hair out by the roots when he heard of it, for he guessed at once that it was one of you, and he would, I know, have given a hundred pounds out of his own pocket to have nabbed you. It was rather a dangerous thing to do."

"Only in one way," said Jack. "If any of the officers who had been out had happened to come home just at that moment, there might have been danger; but as I went to ask a civil question only, I rather think if the turnkey had tried his chances, it would have been at his own risk."

"I understand you, Jack. The turnkey was a little in danger, then, I take it?"

"He was, but as the fellow was quite civil, it all ended well, as I thought it would."

"It has; but don't try it again. I can bring you better news of Duval than you can get at the gate of Newgate, and now listen to me, and while Ben is getting the breakfast, I shall be able to tell you what the family think of doing."

With this, Maggs, without concealing anything, related at length to Dick and Jack all that had happened at the thieves' haunt, at West End, Hampstead, and concluded by advising them both to attend the next meeting that was to take place there, which would be at the midnight that was coming.

"I will turn the matter over in my mind during the day," said Maggs, "and I hope and expect to be prepared with a distinct proposition to make some of the particulars of which must depend upon what happens in Newgate to-day. I would recommend you both to stay here and to keep close. If there should be any suspicion that you are so near at hand, I shall be pretty sure to hear of it, and will take some means of letting Ben know."

"A thousand thanks," said Dick. "Cannot you breakfast with us?"

"No. I shall be wanted at the stone-jug, I am so very useful."

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## CHAPTER CCCI.

### DICK AND JACK ATTEND THE MEETING AT WEST END, HAMPSTEAD.

Maggs shook hands with them both, and then left the public-house to attend to his duties at Newgate.

Jack and Dick were very much pleased with this visit of Maggs to them, and they really began to entertain a confident hope that something would result in Duval's favour from the meeting of the thieves that was to take place on that evening at the mansion by West End, Hampstead.

Of course, they decided to be present, and they thought it very desirable, indeed, to remain where they were until nightfall, when they intended to ride to the northern part of the metropolis at as early an hour after sunset as possible, and see if there was anything to be done upon the road before the meeting at the mansion at West End.

"We shall want, of course, as much money as we can possibly get together, Dick," said Jack, "for who knows but it may be necessary to pay everybody who may happen to stand in the way of our poor friend, Duval's, liberation."

"True enough; money does wonders, and as society has thought proper to put him into the stone-jug, we will levy what taxes we can upon society for the purpose of getting him out of it again."

"That's the proper philosophy of the thing."

The day passed rather gloomily to both Dick and Jack in the public-house, for

they were anything but accustomed to such a life of inaction, and they were much pleased to see Maggs about half an hour before sunset.

"Well. How is Duval?" said Dick.

"He is much better. He won't believe that Cicely is killed. Alas, poor fellow!"

"But she is no more," said Jack.

"She is buried," said Maggs.

"That's conclusive enough. But why will not Duval give credence to the fact of her death?"

"He says that she has passed through so many dangers with him that he will not believe it, and he states that once at Winchester she was severely wounded."

"Ah, yes," said Jack, with a sigh. "Well do I remember that awful scene in the old cathedral. But, Maggs, will it not be better not entirely to dissuade Duval of such an idea? If he really thought her no more, it might have such an effect upon him that he would feel completely prostrated, and would not even second any attempt that we might make for his rescue."

"That is well thought of," said Dick.

"I did think of it," said Maggs, "so I left him in such a state of doubt that he may cherish what notions he pleases upon the subject, and yet he cannot say that he was led astray by any one. Of course, what the prison authorities say to him, he sets no account by at all."

"He knows, then, that you are a friend?"

"He does. I could not keep that knowledge from him any longer, so I told him all that had happened, and it made quite a change in him to hear it, though it touched me a little to hear him say—"I shall yet be happy with Cicely."

"Poor fellow!" said Jack, "he had better though awaken to a knowledge of the truth when he is with us, if we can but rescue him, than when surrounded by those who will have but little, if any, sympathy with his grief."

Maggs assented to this, and promised that he would not say anything to destroy all hope upon the part of Claude that Cicely still lived, and then he left Dick and Jack again, and they began to prepare themselves for the road.

The horses had had a capital rest, and they had been tended with so much care at the stables next door to the public-house, that they might be fairly expected to be in the very best condition, so that the two friends were anxious to mount, and be off at once.

The landlord went out himself and got them some powder, for they were nearly out of it, and by the aid of a tobacco pipe they cast themselves about a dozen bullets, each, to fit their pistols, and then they were quite ready.

"You will come back here, I suppose?" said the landlord.

"Why, yes," said Dick, gaily, "if the Philistines let us; of course, it will be all the better, whatever is done for Claude, that Jack and I should be near at hand, and I suppose something will be at least settled to-night; so now good-bye."

"Don't say, good-bye," said Jack; "it sounds too ominous. Good evening is better, as that looks as if we were sure to come again, you know, Dick."

"Well, then, good evening be it."

They had before starting determined upon which way they would go, and the route that Dick had suggested, and which they had adopted, was to proceed up St. John-street Road, and past the Angel at Islington, and up the Holloway Road to Highgate, from which place they could get down Swain's Lane to Hampstead Heath, past the estate of Lord Mansfield.

This course they thought better than going through Smithfield and up Holborn, which would have been the most direct way to Hampstead, but yet, perhaps, in reality, the longest, as they would have been much more liable to interruption from a number of the official persons connected with Newgate, who were always hanging about Fleet Market and Holborn Hill.

The evening was rather fresh and gusty, for a south west wind was blowing and threatening rain, although none had absolutely fallen yet, and not a star was

to be seen. There would be a nearly full moon as the night advanced, but it would not rise until some half hour or so past midnight, so that there were some hours of gloom and darkness yet to look forward to upon that eventful night.

After the long confinement in the public-house, it was quite a treat to Dick and Jack to be in the open air again. They merely put their cattle to a



gentle trot and soon got to I-lington, and then passing the High-street they turned into the Holloway Road, which was then very little built upon, and they began to feel that they were in the country.

"Ah, Dick," said Jack, "I think if I were to be compelled to remain for very long in London, it would be the death of me after being accustomed to the open country so much."

"It's all habit, Jack."

"Well, it may be; and yet, of course, there can be no comparison in the quality even of the air and that which we have been breathing in the city. You admit that, Dick?"

"Yes, Jack; and I admit that ever since we left the Angel at Islington, we have been followed by a man with a cart."

"Eh? You don't say so?"

"Yes, I do, though. Don't look round; I have had my eyes about me, Jack, I assure you, and I have noticed that a covered cart, driven by a man dressed in a smock-frock, has accommodated itself to our pace, Jack. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think; but I did think that for the last minute or so you were very wayward as regarded your peace, but now I understand it. You were experimenting upon our friend in the cart?"

"I was, Jack, and I did not like to say anything to you of it until I felt quite sure about it, but now there is no mistake. We are dogged by some one, but what for, I cannot take upon myself to say."

They both listened now intently for some time, with the hope of gathering some further information concerning the man, and the cart that was pursuing them, and they brought their horses to a walk, in order to see if the vehicle would pass them, which, indeed, it did in a few moments.

The cart was a covered one, such as might be used by a tradesman in the conveyance of goods of a perishable nature to his customers, and if the man who drove it was, indeed, a spy of the police, he certainly played his part very well, for he went on without paying the smallest apparent attention to Dick or Jack.

"Are we mistaken?" said Jack.

"Not a bit of it, my friend. He thinks that we are on our guard now, that is all."

"Well, we will continue so. Let us go on, but let us, till we come to some turning, keep the cart in advance of us, and then if we go down that turning a little way, we shall soon see if it follows us."

"Very good. There is the Seven Sisters' Lane just a little further on upon our right hand. Suppose we go down that, Jack, as though we intended to get to Tottenham."

"Agreed."

The man who was driving the cart did not pay the least attention to them, but went plodding on, apparently intent upon getting up to Highgate, and Dick and Jack turned down the Seven Sisters' Lane, and put their horses to a gallop for about half a mile, and then Dick said—

"Jack—Jack. Pull up."

"Yes, all's right."

"Here is a very low fence at this side of the road. Do you think your horse will take it?"

"To be sure he will, Dick."

"Then let us get over at once. You see, we are quite close to the corner of Hornsey Lane. I think if we stay in the meadow over yonder for a few minutes we shall see if our friend, the covered cart, approaches."

"Yes, but our horses' heads will be seen."

"Not a bit of it. There is a hay-stack yonder. Don't you see it? We will get over the other side of that, and dismount. The horses won't leave it while we creep back to the hedge and reconnoitre."

"That will do."

In another moment they were both over the hedge, for the cattle did the leap beautifully. The haystack was not twenty yards from the spot, and the horses were pulling hay out of it, and Dick and Jack were crouched down under the hedge, in the space of half a minute.

"This is what I call, diamond cut diamond," whispered Dick, "if that cart should be after us."

"Yes, but——"

"Hush, Jack—hush! What do you hear?"

"Wheels, by Jove!"

"I could have sworn it. Keep snug now, Jack, whatever you do. I know the sound of those wheels. It is the covered cart. Hush—hush!"

The cart was evidently coming on at good speed down the road, for they could hear the patter of the horse's feet above the sound of the wheels, which would not have been the case if it had been coming slowly. Besides, one fact was quite certain, and that was, that the cart must have been turned back to get down the lane at all, for it had passed the end of it before Dick Turpin and Jack went in that direction.

In about another minute and a half the cart stopped close to where they were, and a rough voice called out—

"I say, this won't do—I don't hear them."

"Nor I either," said another.

"Well, what would you have me do?" said the driver. "I advised you to nab them both at the turnpike, but you wouldn't, and you see now what has come of it."

"Oh, you don't know anything about it. The object was not to nab them till we knew where they were going; and here am I almost cramped to death in this infernal little cart, where you can't stretch your legs, and we have missed them after all."

"So it seems. What's to be done?"

"Oh, go on," cried another.

"No, what's the use? Where are we?"

"Close to the corner of Hornsey Lane."

"Then who is to know whether they have gone to the right, or to the left, or straight on?"

"To the left, I'll be bound," said the driver. "You see they only turned down here to get out of our way, that was quite clear, for I saw they had their suspicions, and that they were going north there is no doubt; my opinion is that they will take the Hornsey Road, and turn up to the left as soon as they can into Highgate."

"Well, that is likely, so let us get on as fast as we can. Put the horse to his speed, Andrews."

"All's right! But, you know, four of you in the cart make up no light weight, and he isn't used to it."

"Oh, get on—get on!"

The man laid the whip across the horse rather severely, and the animal went on at a kind of canter that must have been very distressing to those in the cart; but as speed was now their object, they put up with all contingent inconveniences philosophically enough, and the cart, with its freight of four officers, was speedily out of sight, and then out of hearing.

"Pleasant this," said Dick.

"Oh, very," said Jack. "But what does it all mean?"

"I cannot say for a certainty, but I hope that it only means we have been recognised in Islington or in St. John-street-road, by some of the traps, and that this is an expedition planned and drawn out by them on the spur of the moment, merely to see where we are going to."

"That would be a thousand times better than for them to have had a watch upon the public-house, and to have dogged us all the way from there; but, I suppose, now we cannot do better than be off."

"Yes, and as quickly as possible."

The horses were eating away at the loose hay, which each moment they tugged out of the stack, so that they had no inclination to stray from that spot, and Jack and Dick were soon mounted again. A leap similar to the one that had taken them from the road, now took them back to it, and then they galloped into Holloway again.



"Now," said Dick, "it won't do for us to go on any further this way, for if we do they will meet us, as safe as possible, just on the rise of the hill."

"No—no," said Jack. "Let us push on. They will be behind us if we lose no time. I know every inch of the road, and that distressing gallop they went at it is quite impossible they can keep up, while our cattle are fresh enough to trot even up the hill, steep as it is in some places."

## CHAPTER CCCII.

### DICK AND JACK ROB THE BARNET NIGHT-FLY.

DICK was not the one to shrink from anything that only required speed and courage to carry it out, and without making further reply to Jack than merely, "All's right," off he went at a gallop that got over the ground at quite an alarming rate.

Jack was not quite so well mounted, to tell the truth, as Turpin, but still his horse had great power and endurance, and carried him up the hill probably with less distress than the smaller animal which Dick bestrode.

They both reached the summit of the rise together, and Dick, turning in his saddle, cried out—

"Bravo, Jack! I don't know now but that for real service you are as well mounted as I am."

"I'll change with you, Dick."

"Why, no, thank you. The fact is, I am attached, as you know, to the creature, and should be loth indeed to part with her."

"I know it, Dick, and only jested when I made the proposal. But we are passing the end of Swain's-lane, are we not?"

"By George, yes—so we are. Come on. This is capital. I do think we have distanced our pursuers fairly. Hilloa! what's that in the hollow yonder?"

Swain's-lane, as is well known, no doubt, to many of our readers, commences on the high ground on the level of the High-street of Highgate, and gradually slopes down to a valley, after which it rises again to the height of the level of Hampstead-heath. The declivity is, however, but slight, although viewed from the top of the lane it looks, by the slanting of the road, rather considerable.

It was while pausing for a moment at the top of the lane, where there was a farrier's shop, that Dick Turpin and Jack saw, right down in the hollow, a light moving along the centre of the road-way, and swaying from side to side as some vehicle moved along with it.

"Is that our friend with the cart?" said Dick.

"Why, hardly. They surely would not hoist a light."

"I don't know that. They might do it to deceive us, you know; but suppose we inquire at the farrier's shop here? I can hear some one at work in it."

"Do so."

The half-door of the farrier's place had blown shut, but Dick pushed it open, leaning from his horse for the purpose of doing so, and called out to the man, saying—

"Have you seen a cart go by here a little time ago?"

"No, sir," said the man. "There's nothing been by but the Barnet night-fly, and it's in the lane now."

"Well; but how is it in the lane? That is not the route, is it?"

"No, sir. But they say there's highwaymen in the Holloway-road, so it was thought safer to go the round through Hampstead to-night. That's the reason, sir."

"And a very good one too. Come on, Mr. Trevellian, we shall be late at Lord Mansfield's, I am afraid."

"I am afraid so too, my lord," said Jack; and then they both went at a trot down the lane, having thoroughly mystified the farrier, who said to his boy, when the clatter of their horses' feet had died away—

"Ah! there's a couple of the nobs, I take it, a-going to Mansfield Park."

"Jack," said Dick, thoughtfully, "don't you think, old friend, that the Barnet night-fly, as the old rickety coach is called, that travels between Barnet and the Old Bull in Holborn, has some very particular reason for going out of the way to-night?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"Ah, well, I think so, too. Perhaps there is something rather more than usual to-night among its luggage."

Jack laughed.

"I know what you mean, Dick," he said. "You want to stop the night-fly. I stopped it once five years ago, and I don't think I have clapped eyes upon the old rumbling vehicle since; but if you have any fancy for the fun, let us try our luck with it, for the sake of poor Claude."

"We will."

Now, the fact was, that the Barnet night-fly had been induced to change its route upon this occasion, owing to a report that a couple of highwaymen, named respectively Captain Hawk and Crow, were waiting for it in Holloway, at a very unfrequented part of the road; but those who travelled by it little suspected that they were, in a manner of speaking, getting out of the frying-pan into the fire, and that in escaping two men, who, perhaps, were really far enough off, they were coming right into the way of the two others; who, probably, were much more determined than the others.

To the modern reader it probably often appears astonishing how a number of people in a stage-coach allowed themselves in old times to be stopped and robbed by one or two highwaymen; but, upon a little consideration, the wonder vanishes.

In the first place, people who travelled in those days never carried money or valuables with them, unless they were obliged to do so from special circumstances; and then, again, there was no certainty of being stopped, so there was no unity of design upon the part of the passengers in adopting a system of defence, and no one liked to be the victim for the sake of others who would not assist him.

Thus it was that some preferred to give a few pounds to getting into a broil, and others even who had more to lose, and more courage, felt that they would have single-handed to fight a bold, reckless man, who made a trade of risking his life, and who was much more likely to get the advantage in the encounter, and so very prudently declined it.

But then, it will be said, that most of the coaches even for short distances had guards. Granted they had; but the guard was generally some idle, drunken fellow, whose fire-arms were out of order always when they should be in order, and in some cases there is very little doubt but that he was bought over by the thieves and by the landlords of the inns that were on the road frequented by the highwaymen, so that only the shadow of a resistance was made when the passengers wanted the real substance of it.

In fact, highway robbery was then a complete business, and was then carried on upon such a system that when a coach was stopped, and the affrighted passengers heard the ominous sounds of "Stand and deliver!" they had no means of knowing the real extent of the attack upon their property.

The reader is well aware, though, that under the present circumstances, Jack and Dick have no accomplices, and simply run this risk of stopping the Barnet night-fly for what they can get, and at the chance of whatever kind of contest it might lead them into; but the passengers could not know that.

"Now," said Jack, "I hope that there will be no fool who will show fight

for the sake of saving his few pounds ; but if there be, Dick, don't be hasty, whatever you do."

"I never am hasty, Jack. I have taken many a shot without a thought of returning it ; for, you see, in some sort, I cannot blame people for doing their best ; but still, it won't do to stand too much nonsense, you know."

"Certainly not. Come on, then. I will go to the horse's heads, if you like, Dick, while you see to the passengers, or *vice versa*, just as you please."

"You stop the machine then, Jack, and I will see after the swag, if there is any to be got."

"Very good. The sooner, then, we get the affair over the better, for we don't know, now, but our friends in the cart may take it into their wise heads to come this way."

The old vehicle continued its lumbering course along Swains-lane, and those who were within it were congratulating themselves upon having played such a trick upon the highwaymen, whom they supposed were waiting for them in Holloway.

"I tell you what it is, ma'am," said a man who sat with his back to the horses, and who had been very much alarmed at coming through Highgate, because the coach had stopped there to take upon a passenger. "I tell you what it is, ma'am. For my own part, I would not let the whole fraternity of highwaymen rob me ; but it's the duty of a gentleman, when there are ladies present, to be as quiet as possible."

"Oh, but, sir," said the lady, to whom he had addressed this speech, "I'm sure no lady would mind a gentleman making a little noise in beating off a robber."

"Oh, dear, no, certainly not—eugh! eugh!" caughed and wheezed an old man. "I hope, sir, as you will be so good as to kill all the robbers, not but that I, so help me Abraham! am so poor that they cannot rob me."

As he spoke, this old man, who was of the Jewish persuasion as it is called, clutched tighter a square mahogany box that he had with him.

"Why, sir," said the first speaker, "I heard you promise the coachman a guinea for coming this way."

"Did I, sir?"

"To be sure, you did," said the lady, "and I heard you likewise. Lucy, my dear, didn't you hear it too?"

"Yes, aunt," said a young girl, "but I wish you wouldn't speak about highwaymen and robbers, for it makes me feel quite cold to listen to you all, that it does."

"You need be under no apprehension," said the first speaker. "If the ladies wish it, of course, I should feel myself quite justified in shooting, or otherwise slaying and disposing of any one who had the unparalleled audacity to stop the Barnet night-fly."

"Well," said the lady, "it's a great comfort to me, and has been so ever since I read it in the St. James's Chronicle this morning, to find that that dreadful Claude Duval is in Newgate, and hanged at last. That is something."

"But he is not hanged, aunt, yet," said the young lady.

"No, my dear, but he will be, so it's much the same thing. The monster, they do say, that if any young lady gave him a kiss, he would let her keep her rings, and watch, and money, and, in fact, never rob her at all."

"Oh, how nice—no, I don't mean that—"

"Lucy! How dare you?"

"Oh, aunt, indeed! I didn't mean it, and, of course, I would rather be robbed twenty times than kissed by a highwayman ; and if I did kiss him, it would only be to preserve the property of others, you know, aunt, for don't I look upon all I have as yours?"

"Hold your tongue, will you, Lucy. How dare you talk of kissing in that way, and men present too?"

"But, my dear young lady," said the Jew, in an insinuating tone of voice, "my dear young lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"If we should now—oh, dear, I hope it is not at all likely!—but if we should be stopped by a highwayman, and he should offer to let you keep all your things if you will give him a kiss, will you be so good as to say this box is yours?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, dear, she won't do it!"

"No, sir; I would scorn to tell a falsehood even to a highwayman."

"Oh, dear, I was never so particular."

"Have you anything, then, valuable in the box?" said the man.

"Oh, no—no—no! Not at all. Nothing but some bits of woollen stuffs, you understand, with the prices of the wholesale manufacturers marked to them, that is all. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that I have only half a guinea and one shilling with me, for I never carry about money, and, indeed, I am rather a poor man than otherwise."

"Oh, indeed."

"But you will, my dear young lady—you will promise me that if we are stopped, you will take my box on your lap, and say it is yours?"

"I will do no such thing."

"Sir," said the aunt, "when you expect my niece to put a box on her lap you insult me, sir."

"Oh, well, I don't much care; so help me, Abraham, we are half way down the lane now, and I don't think there is any likelihood of being robbed; but I would have given you a little ring for your finger, miss, if you had promised what I asked you. I have just a few in the box."

"Oh," she said, "then, in fact, the box is full of valuable jewellery?"

"Oh, no—oh, no—Oh, don't say that—gracious me, oh—oh!"

In his anxiety to make the passengers believe that the box contained nothing of value, the Jew dropped it off his lap on to the floor of the coach, and it made such a musical jingle of gold, that everybody burst out laughing, and then the man said—

"Woollen cloth makes a funny noise, don't it?"

"Oh, very," said the lady.

"Ah!" said the young lady, "I thought as much; but I won't be kissing highwaymen to save all your money."

"Is it all gold?" added the man.

"Oh, oh," groaned the Jew, "you will drive me mad! Don't speak in that way—don't mention gold—you don't know who may hear you, and we may all get our throats cut, because I have some—some brass medals, you understand, in this box."

"Brass medals?—Oh, oh! What are they worth?"

"About thirty shillings, upon my soul."

"Then, I will give you two pounds for them at once."

"Oh, no—no"

Everybody laughed again at this, and the Jew was terribly disconcerted; but still he had one comfort and that was that the Barnet night-fly was getting over the ground at the rate of five miles an hour, and that, under such circumstances, another hour or so must bring it into London.

"Ha!—ha!" said the Jew after a time, allowing his anger to get the better of his judgment. "I have no doubt, miss, but you would have been kind enough to have offered to save my box for me, but for one little reason? Ha!—ha"

"And what may that be?" said the young lady.

"Why, highwaymen take a good look at those they ask a kiss from, and they don't care about it when they see red hair and a squint, so that you would not be put to the trouble of kissing him at all. Ha!—ha!"

"You odious wretch!" screamed the young lady. "Me squint?"

"Ha!—ha!"

"Well, I do hope now that some highwaymen may stop the Barnet fly, just to give me an opportunity of saying—"

What the young lady meant to say was put abruptly to an end, by the sudden stoppage of the Barnet fly, and then a loud voice—it was the voice of Jack, aggravated to a high pitch—cried—

"Move your cattle on another foot, and you are a dead man!"

### CHAPTER CCCIII.

DICK AND JACK REACH THE THIEVES' MEETING HOUSE WITH A GOOD BOOTY.

THESE words, addressed to the driver of the Barnet fly, were quite conclusive to the passengers of the fact, that the coach was stopped by highwaymen.

The effect produced was various. The valorous person who would be so ready, but for the presence of females, almost to kill and eat a highwayman, slid down at once among the straw at the bottom of the coach, calling out—

"Good Lord, deliver us!"

The Jew uttered a cry of terror, and clung to his box as though he were in a ship at sea, which was expected each moment to go down, and that was the only loose plank that could be got hold of as offering the smallest chance of safety.

The two ladies were alarmed, but certainly not nearly so much so as their male companions, and, probably, the younger of the two felt anything but sorry that she had an opportunity of repaying the Jew for the very ungallant manner in which he had spoken of her personal attractions only a few moments before.

They heard the driver speak.

"Oh, don't shoot a poor fellow, good sir. I won't move on; but if the 'osses should go 'or to come to get rather restive, don't say it was me, sir."

"Hold hard, on your life," said Jack.

Then Dick Turpin rode to the side of the coach, and let down the windows, as he cried out—

"Hilloa! Who have we here?"

"Nobody, good sir," said the valorous person in the straw, "nobody, my dear sir, if you please."

"So help me Abraham, only two poor men, I declares," said the Jew.

"Don't murder innocent people," said the old lady, "but go along at once, do."

"I shall not detain you long, madam," said Dick. "Has any one spoken?"

"No, sir," said the young lady.

"Oh, a young lady, and a pretty one, I'll be bound, by the tone of her voice. I hope you are not frightened, my dear?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Well, that's right. We won't trouble you for your money, but as there are two gentlemen here, why, I will just politely ask them for their money, watches, and valuables."

"Oh—oh—oh!" groaned the man in the straw.

"My excellent shir," said the Jew, "I assure you as we are poor peoples—oh, excellent shir, I assure you that three and sixpence is all I have, my dear shir. I wish it was more, but here it is, quite at your service."

"Three and sixpence, Moses?"

"Oh, sir, my name ish Aaron."

"I don't care whether it be Aaron or Moses, but if you want to persuade me that all you have is three and sixpence, you are very much mistaken indeed, for that won't do at any price."



'There was now a strange clicking noise at the door of the carriage, and the Jew said—

"So help me, what ish he a doing?"

"Only hammering the flint of one of my pistols," said Dick, "that's all, as I



THE FEARFUL LEAP OF TURPIN'S BLACK BESS.

see that nothing will bring you to your senses but a bullet. I suspected as much from the first."

"Oh, no—no. Good gracious, no, I have found a guinea in one pocket that I forgot."

"Indeed."

"Noble sir," returned the man in the straw. "Noble, and most merciful

individual, I hope that you will have the extreme goodness to accept of the eighteen and threepence that I have about me, and I promise that the next time I pass this way to take care to have more money, for it is quite a pleasure to be even robbed by so great and gentlemanly a man."

This voice sounded so odd and smothered to Turpin, that he cried out—

"Where is that Methodist parson, who keeps on preaching in such a ridiculous strain?"

"He's among our feet," said the young lady, "and it's exceedingly inconvenient, I declare."

"Confound his impudence," said Dick, as he swung open the carriage-door, and put in his hand. "Where the d—l are you, sir? Oh, here's somebody's leg, at all events."

"Murder! dear sir—it's mine."

"All's right, then."

With one pull, Dick got him out on to his back in the road, where he lay as if dead.

"You be quiet now for a few moments, will you?" said Dick, "or I will request my horse to stand upon you. Now, Mr. Abraham, be quick."

"Oh—oh, so help me, here ish the guinea."

"What, you still keep at that tune, do you? Ladies, be so good as to keep your heads as far back out of range as you conveniently can, for I am about to shoot this Jew."

"Murder—murder! I will give up twenty pounds."

"Give up your box at once, with all the money in it," said the young lady, "and don't be getting us all shot just because you don't care for your life, you ugly wretch!"

"No—no, I have got no box."

Bang fell the box on to the old lady's toes.

"Drat it," she cried, "it has lamed me almost. Mr. Highwayman, it is a mahogany box, full of money, I do believe, and here it is on the floor of the coach."

The Jew got desperate, and flung himself down upon the box, but Dick Turpin got hold of him by one arm and pulled him out of the coach, box and all.

"Jack?" he called out.

"Yes, Dick?"

"Come here, and take possession of a box. It is not too big to strap behind you with the vallise. Tell the coachman that if he moves on we will overtake him in a minute and put half-a-dozen s'ugs into him."

"Oh, lor! I'll get down," said the coachman.

"No," said Jack, "stay where you are, but hold hard"

The Jew's box was wrested from him, and Jack strapped it to the back of his horse, and then the Jew, turning round, fled towards Highgate again, calling out with all his might—

"Thieves!—thieves! Murder! Robbery! Fire!"

"Confound the fellow, he will raise the country," said Jack.

"It can't be helped; hold my horse a moment; here's a sneaking rascal on his back in the road."

"No—no," said the man, rising to a sitting posture and holding out both his hands, in one of which was a watch and in the other a purse of money. "No—no! Take all I have, and spare my life."

"Bother your life," said Dick, as he took the purse and money, "what is it to us?"

"Oh, thank you, gentlemen—thank you!"

Jack now got one of the carriage lamps out of the proper place, and looked into the coach by its aid. The two females were there, trembling.

"Don't be alarmed," he said.

"Oh, but we are," said the old lady.

"We can't help it," said the young one. "Here is all the money aunt and I have got."

"Never mind, keep it," said Jack, as he shut the door. "You need not be at all frightened, ladies. We have the honour and the pleasure of bidding you good-night."

"You are not Claude Duval?" said the young lady to Dick Turpin.

"No, my dear, poor Claude's in Newgate."

"But I thought he might have escaped, only I know that you are not him."

"Why do you know that?"

"Oh, because he—he—they do say that he always kisses any young lady he meets in a coach that he stops."

"Well, my dear, Dick Turpin often does the same," said Dick, as he saluted her.

"Oh, gracious," said the aunt, "are you Richard Thingummy?"

"Turpin, madam. Good-night."

"He's rather a nice man," said the young lady.

"Hold your tongue, do," said the aunt. "I'm petrified at you."

"Forward, Jack," said Dick.

They were off in a moment, leaving the Barnet fly to get on the best way it could, for the driver was too much terrified to use his skill in guiding the cattle, and they were so old that they felt quite delighted at the rest they were getting, and one of them had fairly dropped asleep.

Dick and Jack felt all the awkwardness of the fact that the coach would be, when it did start again, travelling in the same direction with themselves, nor did they doubt but that the Jew would soon, from Highgate, procure an armed and mounted force to follow them down the lane; but still, they relied upon the speed of their horses, and with the fact that if they met with no interruption they would be stowed in the mansion at West-end within the next twenty minutes at the very outside.

"Come on, Jack; let us make speed," said Dick.

"What the deuce made you take this box?" said Jack. "Do you think there is anything in it worth the having?"

"Yes, I do, or I would not trouble you with it, Jack. It belonged to one who was far too anxious to retain it for it to be worthless. I make no doubt in the world, but that it contains a rich booty, and that it will be about the best piece of swag that we have picked up upon the road."

"Very good," said Jack, "then I have all the less objection to the corner of it sticking into my back in the way that it does.—Hark! I think I hear horses feet."

"And I know I do."

"After us?"

"Yes, on the same road, and so after us; but whether accidentally merely or in pursuit of us, I can't say. It don't seem at all likely that the Jew could have got assistance so promptly."

"No, unless he met any mounted men on the road, and got them at once to aid him."

"Never mind. Here's the heath."

They had now got fairly on to Hampstead Heath, and, of course, their object was to get to the right towards West-end as soon as possible.

"Dare we cross the heath?" said Dick.

"No. By no means."

"Is there no path?"

"None that way, and if we were to try to cross it, there are so many holes made by the inhabitants of the parish to get sand, that we should go down horse and man to a certainty."

"That would be awkward."

"It would be destruction to us quite now. There is no resource upon this spot but to take the regular roads, Dick. I know ever one of them intimately."

"Then you go in advance, Jack, and push on as hard as you can; I will follow you easily, you may be assured. Time is everything with us now, for by the clatter those who are on the road are making, it seems to me as if they had a very special object."

"Not a doubt of it. This way."

Dick let Jack get about a dozen strides of the horse in advance of him, and then followed. Jack led the way right along the regular road until he got past the locality which is now called the Vale of Health, and then he turned to the right, taking a much narrower path, that led under the shadow of a row of trees.

At the rate they were travelling, they now made less noise than even if they had kept at a trot; and after going on about half a mile, Jack paused, and said, in a low tone—

"Let us listen a bit, Dick."

"With all my heart."

They both now drew up, and their horses stood as still as death, while they listened to any noises that might come upon the night air indicative of the fact of their being pursued by those who hunted them from the haunts of civilised men, and who would have shed their blood for gold.

We say this not in defence of Dick Turpin, or of Sixteen-string Jack, but just because we know that at that time the whole of the executive police was in the hands of men who only looked upon it as a business by which money might be made, and who cared nothing for the higher objects that should actuate them.

For example: they would avoid a highwayman who showed symptoms of great boldness and daring until he had committed some robbery of importance, which would induce the authorities to offer a higher reward for him, and then, and not till then, would they seek to apprehend him in earnest.

It is reported of a highwayman, named Robert the Highflyer, that once meeting on Clapham Common with three officers, he was stopped, and in the language of the profession was told that he was "Wanted."

"What!" he said; "you will not be such fools as to take me now, surely?"

"And why not?" said one of the officers.

"Why, there is only a reward of fifty pounds against me now, and if you wait three months longer, I shall do enough to make it three hundred."

"There is reason in that," said the officer. "Be off with you. You are not wanted just yet."

Now, whether or not such an anecdote, in all its details, is strictly true or not, hardly matters. It only shows that there was such a feeling abroad at the time, or it would never have got currency at all as an illustration of the way in which such matters were managed.

We do not mean to say that the police now are all immaculate—it is not in human nature that such should be the case; but certainly the system is to a great extent reformed, and what abuses there are now have no sort of comparison to those which existed in the days when such men as Turpin, Duval, and Sixteen-string Jack sought celebrity upon the road.

But this is a digression, although an *apropos* one, and we are keeping Dick and Jack upon the road while we make it; so we now return to them and their actions.

## CHAPTER CCCIV.

A BOLD PLAN FOR THE RESCUE OF DUVAL IS DETERMINED UPON.

"I THINK," said Jack, "that we have given them the go-by, Dick, for I can hear nothing."

"Listen again. Perhaps it is only fancy. But, do you know, I thought I heard a sound far over there upon the heath."

"Some stray donkey, perhaps."

"Possibly enough; but it seemed to me to be associated with voices."

"A current of air might bring a sound to your ears, Dick, and deny it to mine. I should hardly think it possible that they would venture out upon the open heath."

"There is no saying. The thirst for our capture is such that they might adventure anything in the shape of a rough road. Just lay a hand upon the bridle of my steed while I place my ear a little closer to the ground to listen."

Jack did so, and Dick Turpin flung himself right on to the ground, and placed his ear against it. It was astonishing how clearly then he could hear footsteps and voices upon the heath, that before came so very faintly, as hardly to be said to come at all to his senses.

"What is it, Dick?"

"I hear it, Jack. By some means or another it is quite clear to me that they guess the route we have taken, and they are crossing the heath, amid the furze-bushes, with the hope of getting ahead of us, and so interrupting us."

"But they will be down, to a certainty, in some of the holes with which the heath abounds."

"They are leading their cattle."

"Ah, they may do that."

"Yes, Jack, and so, you see, if they happen to have got a really good guide, which they may get from some of the blackguards who almost live upon the heath, passing their time in snaring the rabbits, they may get on very well, indeed."

"That is all true."

"Well, Jack, what do you propose then that we should do, in order to meet this new state of things?"

"Our course is easy, Dick."

"I am glad of it. It is not to go on, I take it."

"Certainly not. Let our foes take their road, and remain in ambush upon it as long as they like. I wish them no better luck than to do so. We will ride through the town, and take the route by the back of the church to the place of meeting with the family."

"Come on, then."

"Let us go as softly as foot can fall, Dick, for we don't know yet but that they may be on the listen."

"Then suppose we try their game, Jack, and dismount and lead our cattle a little way. It will stretch our limbs a little, and we can then keep the animals at such a foot pace that it will be next thing to impossible for them to be heard by any one."

"It is a good thought, Dick."

They now both dismounted and led their horses, and Jack, who was so well acquainted with the environs of Hampstead that it was quite out of the question for him to lose his way by day or by night, led Dick down a very narrow turning that led to Holly-bush Hill, from whence they proceeded right on towards the old church of Hampstead.

Without the least interrupt: on they got down the steep incline which in bad weather it was ever so perilous a thing to ride down, and turning sharply into



Church Row, they got past the churchyard, and so on down the narrow lane that would lead them as directly to West-end as need be.

"This is rather an intricate navigation," said Dick.

"It looks so at night," replied Jack, "but it is all clear enough when once you know it. Indeed, unless you were determined to go out of the way by turning to the right, it would be difficult to do so, and here we are getting on nicely, and I do think we may mount and trot it."

"So do I; and as for those fellows who are in ambush, it is to be hoped by this time, in the lane, the only thing I very sincerely wish them is, patience."

"Yes," laughed Jack, "that will suit us for them to possess for once in a way, although it is not always the quality that I would wish my foes to be possessed of."

They mounted, and rode on, and in the course of about seven or eight minutes more they emerged up West-end, quite close to the wall of the mansion which was their place of destination for the night.

"Here we are," said Jack. "Maggs promised to be upon the look out for us, but I expect that we are a little early."

"But not a bit too soon for all that," said a voice, as a dark figure stepped out from the shadow of the wall.

"Ah, is it you, Maggs?" said Dick.

"That same am I," said Maggs. "Follow me, both of you. Do you know, I have a little suspicion?"

"Of what?"

"Why, that there are some bad characters about the place to-night, so be cautious."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jack, with a slight laugh, "if there were a good many of that sort, friend Maggs."

"Nay," said Maggs, "I didn't mean it as a joke, in good truth; but I really think the house is watched."

"That is bad news."

"It is; but still there are too many of us to be in much danger; and as this is the last time any of the family will meet at this crib, why, I don't know that it matters very much."

"Is it going to be given up, then?"

"Yes. But come through the gate. That will do. Now, I should say, let your cattle take it easy here, for they can't get away, and there is some nice little fresh picking of young grass under the fruit trees. This is the orchard."

"Very good. But why is the old place to be deserted?"

"For a foolish reason enough. The man who keeps it says, that there have been all night long a couple of ghosts in the kitchen garden. He will have it that they stand upon one particular spot, linked arm in arm, and that their eyes glare like two stars in the darkness. He says they are as plain to be seen as possible, although you can see, at the same time, the trees and the bushes through them."

"How absurd," said Dick.

"If he thinks it," said Jack, "why, to him it is true, and so it must be a horrible truth."

"No doubt of that," said Maggs; "fancy or not fancy, it is all the same to him; so he goes with us to-night, for he says he wouldn't be an hour in the place when we are gone for a thousand pounds."

"Well—well; be it so."

"Follow me closely."

"Stop," said Jack. "I should like to go round by the kitchen garden, and see if there is really anything to lead to the delusion that the man speaks of. It will not delay us a minute."

"No—nor half a minute. Come this way, and I will take you to the spot where a certain grave holds two bodies that you wot of."

"Yes," said Dick, "and the least that any one says about that affair the better it may be for the family in the long run. He will be no friend to himself, or to his brethren, who first preaches about that little transaction."

Maggs led the way along a narrow path that was so much overgrown by wild plants, and so obstructed by the long shoots of ivy that spread out from the wall to the right hand, which was covered with that green mantle, that it was anything but an easy thing to get along.

That path was short, however, and they struggled through it in the course of two or three minutes.

"Stop!" said Maggs.

"Yes—yes. Is this the place?"

"Look right along by those palings. There is the spot. By Heavens! what is that?"

"I see something white," said Dick.

"And so do I," cried Jack. "Something moves, too."

"Hush! oh, hush!" said Maggs. "Don't speak in that tone, Jack. Why—why, what on earth can it be? It is exactly over the grave of the two officers, too. There is, or there was to be, a gooseberry bush or two planted there."

"Stay where you are, both of you," said Dick. "I am not going to stand any nonsense—I will advance up to it."

"Oh, no, Dick, don't."

"Why not?"

"If it were a mortal foe, Dick, I should be the last person to say, 'Hold,' to you."

"Oh, stuff."

"But it is not, you know, and you talk of advancing upon a creature, or an existence, of the powers of which you know nothing! Let me beg of you to pause."

"No, Jack, for my own sake, as well as for yours, I will test the unknown powers of the being who keeps such silent watch over that spot. I never yet gave way to terrors of this description, and I am not going to begin now."

"Stop him, Maggs."

"Not I," said Maggs. "Let him go. Those who have the courage to face these things are the proper persons to do so, and they should not be stopped."

"That's it," said Dick.

As he spoke he cocked one of his pistols, and while Jack looked after him with eyes of terror, and even Maggs, shading his vision with his hand, tried to keep him well in sight. Dick strode on at an even pace, neither very quick nor very slow, towards the white object.

"He has nerve," said Maggs.

"He has indeed," answered Jack. "He does not pause either, nor draw back as he nears it."

"True—true. There, he reaches the spot."

"Yes, he is there."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dick Turpin, "Come on. This is too good. Come on both of you, and be introduced to the ghost, if you will be so good as to allow me to have the honour of performing that ceremony."

These words from Dick were quite sufficient to convince both Maggs and Jack that there was nothing supernatural in the object to which he had advanced with so much real courage. If they were not sufficient for that object, they most certainly ought to have been so.

"I think," said Maggs, "that Turpin will have the laugh at us both, Jack. But come on."

"Are you coming?" said Dick.

"Yes—yes."

They both reached the spot in a moment or two, and then Dick said, with all the gravity imaginable—

"Allow me, gentlemen, to introduce to you a flannel petticoat, as the object of a supernatural character, upon the gooseberry bush, and to a pea-stick, with a piece of rag at the end of it, to frighten the birds from, I suppose, an onion plantation, as the supernatural face that kept moving about with such horrible and strange significance as we looked at it from yonder."

"Is that the fact?" said Maggs.

"You don't say so?" said Jack.

"Yes, it is a fact, and I am very happy to say so; and I may add, that I strongly suspect most supernatural appearances to be composed of about as simple elements."

"The deuce take it!" muttered Jack. "How glad I am, Dick, that you had more courage than I in this matter."

"And than I," said Maggs.

"Now," said Dick, "I know what you both suspect, and that is, that I am very far sighted, and saw that something of this sort composed the ghost."

"No—no!" they both said.

"Well, then," added Dick, with a laugh, "I say yes, for I am very long-sighted, indeed, and able to see extremely well in the dark, and the moment I looked upon the object here, I thought that it was something like what it turns out to be. Now, you see, how the merit and the chivalry of my courage fades away. The probability is, that if I really thought it had been anything supernatural, I might have been as loth as either of you to have thrown myself in the way of it so recklessly."

"Well," said Maggs, "that will do. Let us come now to the great room, for I think we shall find our friends there. My mission on the outside of the house, by the bridle road, was specially to look for you two."

They now made their way into the large apartment in which the thieves had met upon that eventful night, when the two officers had with such singular imprudence sacrificed their lives to the vengeance of the "family." There were assembled nearly every one who had been at the meeting on the former occasion.

The entrance of Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack was the signal for a cheer, which Maggs, however, as soon as possible, repressed, reminding them of the danger of any unusual noise, situated as they were in a house that, in all likelihood, was suspected by the police.

"I don't speak to delay business, or to give anything like an alarm to any one here," said Maggs; "but I say it honestly, that I do think the house is watched."

"It's more than likely," said a voice.

"Well, so say I. And now let us to business, and make up our minds what we mean to do, and then let us all get away as quickly as we possibly can."

"Yes—yes, that's it," said several.

"Allow me, then," said Jack, as he took off his hat, and stood upon a chair so as to make himself plainly visible to all present—"allow me to thank every one here for the kind interest shown in the fate of Claude Duval. I am his oldest and most constant friend, I believe I may say, and I thank you all from my heart, both in my own name and in his."

"Bravo, Jack!"

"And I, too," said Dick Turpin, lifting his hat, and exhibiting that nearly completely bald head, by which he was so well known, and which, when he took off his hat, made him look at the least fifteen years older than when he had it on—"I, too, have to thank you all; and I only hope that if anything is determined upon to-night in favour of Duval, that you will let me take the post of danger, be it what it may, in the enterprise."



CLAUDE DUVAL'S DREAM IN NEWGATE.

## CHAPTER CCCV.

THE DISPERSION OF THE THIEVES, AND THE DEATH OF THE SCOUT IN THE  
[LANE.

THIS declaration from 'Dick Turpin, spoken as it was with a sincerity of which here could be no possible doubt, was pleasing enough to those who were assembled in that large apartment.

A murmur of satisfaction arose from them at the statement of his wishes, and one then cried out—

"We will all do what we can for Duval; but Maggs is the man who will tell us what to do."

"Yes—yes!" cried the others, "Maggs is the man—Maggs is the man! He will say what must be done."

"Well," said Maggs, rising, "if you will have it so, all of you, I will say what I think it ought to be; but as regards the doing part of it or not, that will be for all you to decide, you know, not me."

"Go on, Maggs."

"We shall all," said Jack, "I am sure, listen to Maggs with that attention that any suggestion from him merits, and I, for one, have no doubt in the world but that what he recommends will be found to be the very best course we can all of us pursue."

"No doubt of that at all," said Dick.

Maggs was now hoisted up upon one of the tables, so that by a light that hung from a rusty chain fastened to the ceiling, he was plainly visible to all present. There was a bandage still round his face where he had been wounded by one of the officers, who now lay in the garden so calm and so still, and through the folds of that bandage a few drops of blood had oozed.

This gave him the appearance of ferocity, which was very far, indeed, from being in accordance with Maggs' real character, for he was anything but a man of violent passions.

"Hear him! Hear Maggs!" cried one.

"Won't you take a drop of ale before you begin?" said another.

"Silence!" cried a third.

"Thank you all," said Maggs, "I will take the ale when I have done; but not now."

"All's right. Go on."

"You all know," said Maggs, "that I speak nothing more than the truth when I say, that by the situation I have held in the old stone-jug in the Bailey, I have been able to do some good to the family."

"Lots of good!" cried half-a-dozen voices.

"Well, I don't mention that in any way to make a boast of it, mind you."

"We know that, Maggs."

"I only say it, you see, because it is a fact that there is no need to dispute, and because it brings me to the first part of what I am going to say to-night, and that first part is, that I rather think something may be done for Claude Duval; but that something will have the effect of preventing me showing my face in Newgate again; so I shall be of no more use."

The thieves were silent at this, and looked ruefully at each other.

"Mind you," added Maggs, "I don't mean to say that it will positively have that effect, but it may. I will try and manage that it shall not, if we carry out the plan at all; but still, you know what my opinion is; and that is, that it will."

"A bad job that for the family," said a voice.

"Very," said several others.

"Before our friend Maggs goes any further, then," said Jack, "allow me to say that, upon the part of Claude Duval, I should refuse to sanction any enterprise that brought Maggs into trouble, or injured so much as the hair of his head."

"And I," cried Dick.

"Bravo! Bravo!" shouted the others.

"Silence!" said Maggs. "Do you forget where you are? You are not in one of the old kens in the city underground, and so well shut in that you may make as much noise as you like, and no chance of any one hearing you."

"All's right, Maggs; go on."

"Well, there's no chance, as far as I can see, of any harm coming to me by the job. All I think is, that the sheriffs may be rather suspicious that I had sold them, and so they might think it would be just as well to dispense with my services as odd man at Newgate, you see."



"Let's know the plan, Maggs."

"It is a bold one."

"Of course," said Dick.

"That was to be expected," said Jack, "and in that lies the principal chance of its success."

"You are right," added Maggs. "What I know of the position of Claude Duval enables me to say that, by hook or by crook, the authorities have made up their minds to hang him, and he will be tried upon indictment after indictment, till they get a verdict of guilty, and then they will take good care to put him out of this world, you may depend."

"Shame—shame!"

"Well, it is a shame, when, in the name of justice, there is anything that looks like persecution, for, after all, there is many a worse fellow than Claude Duval who has escaped scot-free. But that's not our look out. We want to save him, right or wrong, I take it."

"Yes, Maggs, that's it."

"Then this is the plan. I expect to-morrow night to be on duty by Claude's cell, you see, and when that is the case, the regular turnkeys don't give themselves a great deal of trouble. Mind you, I shall be outside his cell, but that won't make any difficulty."

"But you don't mean to say, Maggs," said Dick, "that you can walk him out of Newgate?"

"No—not exactly; but if half a dozen courageous men will take possession of the lobby, I can bring him there, I rather think, and then the thing will be done."

"That is bold, indeed."

"Let me explain to you how the affair will stand. In the lobby you will find three men, one on the lock, as it is called, and two officers on night duty. Well, between Claude's cell and the lobby there are two turnkeys to pass, who are well armed, so that there are five men to conquer in all."

"That's easy," said a voice.

"Stop a bit—not so easy. First of all, it is necessary that they should be conquered without noise or the discharge of fire-arms of any kind. If an alarm is given, the whole force of the establishment will hasten to the spot, and we are lost."

"But still," said Jack, "I can conceive how it may be done."

"Yes," added Maggs. "In this wise I think it may. Exactly at half-past two o'clock I will come into the lobby, and then I would have some one of you two to the wicket-gate with a letter in your hand, and say in a voice as of one in authority—'A letter from the Under-Secretary of State to the Governor.' Well, upon that, the man on the lock will open the door and let you in, but the moment you get in, another of you must come and tap at the wicket, and say—'The Lord Mayor will be here in five minutes. He has sent me to request that the governor will rise at once.' Well, they will let him in, likewise, for nothing throws such men so much off their guard as the use of high names and dignities."

"I see," said Dick.

"Then there will be two of you in the lobby, and you must fall upon the officer who remains and the man on the lock, for one of them will be gone with the mock letter to the governor, you understand."

"Precisely."

"The moment you have gagged and bound them, and, of course, you will take care to have everything handy for such a purpose, you can open the wicket and let in half a dozen more, and then you will affect to have seized me, likewise, and to threaten me with instant death, if I do not show you the way to Claude Duval's cell."

"It will do, I think," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, "but it is a ticklish affair."

"I cannot conceal from myself that it is so," said Maggs, "but I have a pretty good idea that there will be success. Of course the two men in the passage must be treated the same as those in the lobby, and I will take you direct to Claude's cell, and open the door for you pretty quickly, and in two minutes, out he ought to be. His horse, or one as good, shall be in the Old Bailey, and off you all go."

"Hurrah!"

"Silence, for the love of safety. You, Jack, the old and kind friend and associate of Claude Duval, you tell us first what you think of this scheme for his preservation?"

All eyes were now turned upon Jack, who, without one moment's hesitation, replied in a firm, clear voice—

"I say, yes, to the plan, and I like it for its very boldness."

"You, Dick—what say you?"

"I echo Jack's sentiments, and he and I will disguise ourselves, and carry out the first part of the enterprise, if some half dozen of those here present will volunteer to aid us."

"I will—I will—I—I!" cried some dozen of voices.

"Six will be ample," said Maggs; "and I hope, that without any offence to those who would go and do the thing well, I may be permitted to pick out the six I should like to head it."

"To be sure, Maggs."

"Then may we," said Jack, in a voice full of hopefulness, "may we consider that as settled?"

"Quite settled," cried the thieves, "We will do it."

"There is now one thing to look to," said Maggs. "Money will be wanted. Every one must be well disguised, well armed, and well mounted, and the person who is supposed to come from the secretary of state must have a handsome private carriage, as that will materially help in the delusion."

"Make yourself easy upon that score," said Dick Turpin. "Jack and I have it in our power to furnish every guinea that will be wanted in the affair, and if you, Maggs, will superintend the arrangements, all will be well."

"It will be a five hundred pound job, if a bit," said Maggs; "for everything must be bought, you see, coach and all."

"I don't think," said Dick, "that we have made a bad night's work of it to-night, however, Jack."

"Well, we have a mahogany-box that feels heavy; but I don't know what's in it."

"Where is it, Jack?"

"Here, Dick. I brought it off the horse's back when we dismounted, and kept it in my hand till now. Shall we open it?"

"To be sure."

"Where did it come from?" said Maggs.

"I think they called the conveyance the Barnet fly," said Dick; "and this box we took from a Jew who was a passenger, and who seemed to set no small store by it."

The thieves gathered closely round Jack as he tried, for some few moments, in vain to open the desk.

"Let me try it," said a voice.

"Ah, let the game cracksman have a try at it," said the thieves. "He will open it."

"I will try," said a small, active-looking man, stepping forward, and taking a glance at the lock.

Rummaging, then, in his pocket for a moment or two, the cracksman took out a small pick-lock, and casting his eyes up to the ceiling as if in deep thought, he inserted it into the keyhole.

Click went the lock.

"It's a good one," he said, "and one of the newest patents ; but I know all about it."

"Can you open it, though?"

"It is open."

Jack placed his hand upon the lid of the Jew's box, and it opened in a moment. The practised hand of the cracksman had made short work of the last new patent lock, which was to defy all attempts to pick it.

The brief delay that had taken place in opening the Jew's box, had had the effect of wonderfully arousing the curiosity that actuated all the thieves concerning it, and there was some inconvenient pressure around Jack as it was at length fairly opened.

"Nothing," said Jack.

"Nothing?" replied everybody.

"No; only papers, as you all see."

Jack laughed as he spoke, and turned out a lot of letters and memoranda that reached apparently to the bottom of the mahogany-box, and then he said—

"I wonder if any one here has a chisel or a small jemmy?"

"Here," said the cracksman, "is the sort of thing you want. That box has a false bottom to it."

"Well, so I suppose, and here it goes."

There was a slight crash, and then the false bottom of the box came out, disclosing a space of about four inches in depth beneath it, in which there was a quantity of small packs of something.

"What is it?" said Dick.

"Money and jewellery, all done up closely so as not to rattle in the coach. Ah, I see how it has been managed: every article of jewellery that has been sold has left room for the price of it in the little box of wool that had contained it."

"Then we are all right."

"I hope so. We will see what there is here."

Jack counted the money and found somewhere about two hundred guineas in gold, and then there was some silver, and some jewellery that looked very good.

"I tell you what it is, Maggs," said Dick, "you had better take the box with its contents and do the best you can with it. It came from a Jew, and, no doubt, another of the children of Israel will buy it."

"Of course, there is no difficulty in that at all. But what's that? I heard a snot or something very like one."

## CHAPTER CCCVI.]

THE THIEVES ESCAPE, AND DICK AND JACK GET BACK TO THE PUBLIC-HOUSE.

THERE could be no possible mistake concerning the fact that a pistol shot had been fired somewhere outside the mansion, but no one could say whether it was a signal from the scout that they had in the lane, or some accidental shot from some one else, which might not in any way or manner concern them.

Not for long, however, were they left in suspense upon that part of the subject.

Suddenly there came into the room a man covered with blood, and fell half fainting to the floor, as he gasped out in frightful accents—

"The traps—the traps! They have done for me."

"Why, it's Downy Ned," said Maggs, "who was keeping watch in the lane."

"What has happened, Ned?" cried everybody.

"Don't you see, they have done my business for me."

"Yes, but who and what are they?"

"I'll tell you—if—I can—water—water!"

They hurriedly brought some water and placed it to his lips. It was as much as he could do, for a spasm that seized him, to drink any of it, but he did contrive to take a little, and it had evidently the effect of reviving him, so that in a few moments he could speak a little more easily.

"I was in the lane, when I saw a couple of dozen of them coming—coming—"

"A couple of dozen?"

"Quite—quite. They were mounted, and they came creeping on as though they knew the crib they meant to be at well enough, so I started to get into the garden through the small door in the wall, but one of them saw me and had a crack at me, and hit me."

"But not badly, I hope, Ned?" said Maggs.

"Badly—not badly!"

"Well, Ned, you don't seem to be bleeding."

"Inwards—inwards!" gasped the scout, and his head fell back.

"He is dead," said one.

"As mutton," said another. Poor Ned!"

A violent ring at the bell of the garden gate at this moment came upon the ears of the thieves.

"My horse?" said Dick, "I forgot him."

"And mine?" said Jack.

"All's right," said Maggs, "all's right. I have been over this place, and I know how to take you all out in such an emergency as this. Follow me."

"Won't we! Only you keep to that, Maggs, and we will follow you fast enough, old fellow."

"Listen first, and don't be in a state of trepidation any of you. The officers can't get in for some time, and if we have ten minutes to spare it is all right. This house, you know, has its back against West-end Lane, and there's nothing but a clear wall there, and no such thing as even a window, so that's where we must get out by."

"A queer way of getting out," said one.

"Not at all. Come on. You, Dick and Jack, will find your cattle as we go along, no doubt. It is a good thing, now, that Bill sent his wife and kids away from here before now."

"Yes," said Bill, "the place would have been a good deal too hot to hold me, I take it, if I hadn't."

"No doubt."

The thieves numbered about twenty two persons, but it was quite surprising how noiselessly they managed to follow Maggs into the garden. The officers were still ringing at the gate-bell, no doubt with the intention of shooting the first one who should make an appearance at it, or, perhaps, they rung there in order to cloak some attack of a more insidious character that they were intent upon making at another part of the building.

Be that how it might, however, one thing was quite evident, and that was, that the family, as they called themselves, had no time to lose.

By good luck, both Dick and Jack lit upon their cattle close to the door through which they had emerged into the garden, and they were about to mount, but Maggs advised that they should not, so they led the animals.

After going half round the house, Maggs paused at the door of a little out-house, and spoke.

"This is the tool-house," he said. "Who can use a pick-axe well among you?"

"I, and I," said several.

"Take, then, what you want out of them, for I believe it is pretty well stocked with rough tools."

They lit a match inside the tool-house for a few moments, so that they might see what they were about, and in the course of a few moments they were well enough provided with tools to work with.

"Now," said Maggs, "this is the way we must go into the house again."

The way he led them was through a little scullery, and then across a kitchen, and so on to a room, in which there had been a billiard-table, and in which there was only a borrowed light. The wall of that room was hung with fancy drapery, and Maggs, as he pointed to it, said—

"Now, my family men, that is the only road to the open air, that I should say it will be safe for any of us to take to-night. Through that wall is West-end Lane. There is a hedge just on the other side, and a water-course, but these are not impediments that will stop us, I daresay."

The thieves now perfectly understood, if they had only guessed before, what it was that they had to do, and those who were armed with the pick-axes at once began operations upon the wall with right good will.

"Work as silently as you can," said Maggs.

Dick and Jack had had some difficulty in getting their horses through the scullery and kitchen into the billiard-room, but they did at last succeed in so doing; and as the mortar began to fly about, they each tied a pocket-handkerchief over the eyes of his steed.

The door of the room was a strong one, and as a measure of precaution against a sudden rush of the officers at the last moment, Maggs locked it and bolted it, but they heard nothing more as yet of the strong force which had been by the scout reported as close at hand.

In the course of five minutes an opening was made in the wall, and when that was once the case, the rest of the work proceeded with much greater speed, so that a practicable breach through which a man might make his way was soon established.

"I will go and have a look out," said Maggs.

In a moment he pushed himself through the opening, and they heard him fall with a splash into the water course that was under the hedge. Dick Turpin looked anxiously through the opening, but all was darkness as well as silence.

"Come on," said Maggs, in a whisper.

The thieves began to drop through the hole in the wall as fast as possible; but Jack was still hard at work enlarging it, for he saw that it was not near extensive enough to let the horses through, and he had no idea of leaving them behind him.

Dick, when he saw him thus occupied, helped him, and they in the course of a few minutes more got down a large portion of the wall.

"Come—come," said Maggs.

"All's right—here we are—go on, Jack."

"After you, Dick."

"Don't it, there is no time to stand upon ceremony," said Dick, as he walked his horse over the rubbish through the orifice in the wall at once. There was some little difficulty in getting over the ditch, and through the hedge, but by going backwards himself, and elbowing his way, Dick, although at the expense of some scratches, made a path for the horse.

Jack's progress was all the more easy upon that account, and they were both in the lane uninjured.

The thieves were all crouching down under the hedge, but Maggs spoke to them in a low voice.

"Disperse," he said, "if you would save yourselves. Get into the fields, so that the horsemen may be puzzled by the hedges and gates. My only wonder is, where the devil they all are."

"And mine, too," said Dick, as he placed his foot in the stirrup in the act to mount.

"Fire!" said a loud, clear voice.

In a moment a volley of fire-arms swept over the spot, and if Jack and Dick



had been mounted, it would have been the next thing to an impossibility for either of them to have escaped from being hit.

The position of the thieves, under the hedge, was so far favourable that most of the bullets went over them; still some few were hit, but the remainder at once set off across the fields in such a panic, that it lent them double speed.

"Are you hit, Jack?" said Dick.

"No. Nor you?"

"All's right," said Maggs. "Be off with you, before they give us another taste of their quality."

"But you?"

"Never mind me."

"Nay—but we do, though," said Jack. "I know that Dick's Bess won't carry double, but my horse can, and will for a mile or two. Get up at once, Maggs, behind me."

"That's about it," said Maggs, as he vaulted up to the back of the horse. "Now let us be off as if the devil himself were behind us, for it is the only chance, I think."

Dick took the lead, and Jack followed him, and so along West-end Lane they went like the wind.

The moment they started, they heard a voice cry out—

"There they go. After them, my lads."

"Try it," said Jack, as he clenched his teeth, and made his steed, notwithstanding the double burthen he bore, get over the ground at a terrific pace.

The state of the road was far from being favourable, for there had been considerable rain within the last seven or eight days, so that there was much mud; but, still, that was a disadvantage that attached to the pursuers as well as to the pursued; therefore, it was not of material moment.

"On—on," Dick kept saying, and it was quite clear that, if he had liked, after the first half-mile, he could have gone far a-head of Jack and Maggs; but he generously kept by them.

The pace of Jack's horse began to slacken, and they could hear the sounds of pursuit still upon the night air.

"This won't do," said Maggs.

"Yes—yes. Hold on."

"No, I won't. I shall only involve you in destruction with me, Jack. I say, it won't do."

"Oh, yes, we shall be on a harder road in a few more minutes, for we are close to the end of the lane."

"Draw up close to the hedge, Jack, if you don't wish me to break my neck."

"How so?"

"Do it, I beg of you."

"Well, well; but every moment is a life, for all we know."

Jack drew up quite close to the hedge, and then in an instant, with amazing agility, Maggs drew up his feet, and stood upon the back of the horse.

"Good night, Jack."

With one spring he cleared the hedge, and alighted in the field on the other side of it.

"On—on!" he cried.

"Safe?" said Jack.

"Quite. On—on!"

"Good God, Jack! where are you?" said Dick, riding back.

"Here. Push on."

The horse that Jack rode, now that he was released from the weight of Maggs upon his hind-quarters, seemed not to feel Jack at all, for he bounded on like a deer, and kept neck and neck with Turpin's beautiful mare, Bess, which was now fairly upon its mettle.

Some straggling shots now told that the officers were getting desperate and vicious with the idea that, after all, their prey was escaping them.

"Go it!" cried Dick. "Blaze away! How are you, Maggs?"

"Far enough off, and safe, I hope," said Jack.

"What, not with you?"



DICK AND JACK PLANNING THE ROBBERY OF THE BARNET NIGHT-FLY.

"Do you think this creature could carry double at such a pace as this, Dick, and so far?"

"No—no. I ought to have thought of that. But where is he?"

"I dropped him over the hedge, and the traps have passed him a good half mile now, and here we are in Ki buru. Which way is it to be?"

"Right on up Wilsden Lane."

"So be it."

Crossing diagonally the Kilburn-road, they darted up the circuitous lane that leads to Wilsden; but it was no part of Dick's policy to go there. After taking the first turn in the lane, he cried out—

"Follow me, Jack," and then spurred his horse at a low fence to the left of the road, and went over beautifully. Jack did the same, and in two minutes more they were on the other side of a hay-stack, and the horses quite quiet, and only just a little shaken by the hard pelt that they had had from West-end.

"But the traps," said Jack—"Where are they?"

"You are answered, Jack."

Jack was answered by the fact, that in the next moment the officers swept past at a gallop towards Wilsden.

"There you go," said Dick, "and the devil go with you for a parcel of blundering fools, after all. I wonder what we should see in you all to go clattering on to Wilsden with you at our heels, you parcel of curs?"

"Don't be angry, Dick."

"Oh, I am not; only—only——"

"You are a little provoked."

"Well, well, it don't matter. But that volley that they fired at us all was a cowardly thing enough."

"It was."

"Their duty was to take us, not to shoot us. It was time enough when we showed fight for them to do so."

"Never mind it, Dick. I don't think they did much mischief by it, and I am more concerned at the idea of some poor fellow lying at West-end now, wounded, than at the conduct of the officers."

"But we can't help it."

"Not a bit—not a bit. We must get to London now as soon as we can, and put up again at the old public-house. I think, after all, if we are sharp about it, we shall be as safe there as anywhere."

"No doubt about that, and, perhaps, safer. So come on. If we can hit upon a route over the fields this way we shall get into the Harrow-road, I take it, shall we, Dick?"

"Exactly. Bess is indulging herself with a few mouthfuls from the hay-stack. I don't like to baulk her for a few moments."

"All's right. My horse has just made the same discovery; so we may as well let them have a little amusement in that line at the expense of the enemy."

The horses evidently enjoyed the meal of the fresh hay very much, and they put the patience of their masters rather to the test as they kept pulling it out of the stack, and chewing away at it, notwithstanding the bit prevented free mastication.

Dick and Jack both would have been glad, if circumstances would have warranted such a course, to have released the horses from their head-gear, and let them eat at leisure; but that could not be at that present time.

"Now for it," said Dick, as he mounted; "who will lead the way? You or I, Jack?"

"You, if you think you know it, and I will do so if you have any doubt, for I know that I can lead you tolerably correctly."

"Go on, then, in the name of all that is good and lucky."

## CHAPTER CCCVII.

## MAGGS LETS DUVAL KNOW WHAT HIS FRIENDS ARE ABOUT.

It would appear that the officers had really made their way right to Wilsden; for Dick and Jack neither saw nor heard anything further of them.

It was half past three, and a cloudy morning, as the old watchman in Smithfield had it; when the two highwaymen drew rein at the door of the public-house in Barbican. There was a man sauntering up and down by the door-post, and the moment they stopped, he stepped out on the open pavement to meet them.

"Stand, and deliver!" he said.

"Hilloa!" cried Jack. "Who are you?"

Dick laughed.

"I know who it is," he said. "Maggs, if you don't manage to disguise your voice at times better than that, I should say it requires no great amount of cunning to know you by it."

"I was not attempting to disguise it at all," said Maggs, in so very different a tone, that Dick started at the sound of it.

"I beg your pardon, Maggs," he said. "You can do the trick when you like; but in the name of all that is wonderful, how came you here before us, and without any appearance of haste, either?"

"Get your cattle put up first, before I tell you."

"Yes," said Jack, "that is only prudent."

Maggs took from his waistcoat-pocket a small bird-whistle, and blew a peculiar note upon it, and then before the echo of that note had died away, one half of the great gate of the stable was opened, and the landlord, who was just inside, put his head out, saying—

"Here you are."

"Come on, Dick," said Jack, as he rode into the stable, for he was exceedingly anxious to get the horses under cover.

Dick followed him, and Maggs trotted in after Dick. The landlord then closed the gate and put up a long wooden bar across it.

"All's right, I hope," he said.

"Yes," replied Dick, as he dismounted, "but we have had some rather sharp work of one sort and another."

"And some have suffered," said Dick.

"Ah, so Maggs has been telling me: But here you are, both of you, sound in wind and limb, by all appearance, and the cattle don't seem much the worse."

"None at all, I hope," said Jack, as he took the stable-lantern from the landlord and glanced about the feet of both the beasts. "All's quite right. Rest, and a good feed; is all they want. And now, Maggs, do tell us by what conjuration you got here so soon from Wilsden Lane?"

"It's soon told, and easy," said Maggs. "You left me on a hedge in Wilsden Lane. I made a clean enough jump of it, and when I alighted on the other side I found myself in a turnip field, and the first thing I did was to hit my head against a very large specimen of that vegetable that half protruded from the ground, but as my head was considerably the hardest, I did more damage to the turnip than it could possibly do to me."

"No doubt," said the landlord.

"Well, after that I sat up a little, and while I was thinking upon things in general, past swept the officers in pursuit of you two, at a slapping pace that looked as if they really meant it."

"And they did," said Jack.

"Not a doubt of that; but as your horse no longer carried double, I had no fear of the result, as I know very well that the police cattle are seldom noted for great speed. Well, then, I thought as they had abandoned the Edgeware-

road, that I might just as well go back to it myself; so I walked to Kilburn again."

"The best thing you could do," said Dick.

"So it turned out, for I got on the outside of a coach that was going to the Flower-pot in Bishopsgate-street, and I got down comfortably at the corner of the Old Bailey, and, crossing Smithfield, arrived here a quarter of an hour ago without any fatigue."

"And you were watching for us?"

"I thought it would be the best thing I could do, for you might have been otherwise delayed at such an hour."

"Many thanks," said Dick. "And now I don't know how Jack may happen to feel, but I can safely say for myself, that something to eat and something to drink would come in very welcome to me."

"I say the same," said Jack.

"And I," said Maggs; "for I will make this place my home till the morning now."

"Come on then, all of you," said the landlord, "and you will find that the larder is anything but empty. I have had an eye—I may, indeed, go so far as to say, that I have had two eyes to the likelihood that you would come home hungry and thirsty both, so I have made arrangements accordingly; and while you eat, perhaps you can spare time, between whiles, to tell me what has been determined upon for poor Claude Duval."

"That will we," said Dick.

A cold surloin of beef was soon before the party, with every addition to it that could make it a very delightful repast, and they all enjoyed a supper, such as exercise had lent a keen zest to, with an amazing appetite. Dick briefly informed the landlord what had been resolved upon in the case of Duval, and then, at about four in the morning, he and Jack retired to rest.

Maggs took two hours' sleep, and then rising, he left the public-house without disturbing any one, and hastened to Newgate, at the wicket-gate of which he presented himself with that admirable sort of half-foolish smile which made the officers think that he was a very good-natured fellow, but by no means over bright.

In fact, the sort of attachment they had to him, no doubt, arose in a great measure from the feeling, upon their parts, that they were wonderfully sharp fellows in comparison with him; and the jokes they made at his expense always being received with the greatest good nature by him, raised him quite to a position of favouritism in the prison.

"Well, conjurer Maggs," said the man who was 'on the look,' as he opened the wicket to let him in. "How are you to-day?"

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Brown; and I can say that you look well, indeed; but you always does."

"Ah, I do rather flatter myself that I'm not the worst looking fellow in the world, Maggs."

"The best, Mr. Brown—the best, I should say."

"Oh, no—no. Hem! Not quite the best."

"Ah, dear, if you had only had the chances, Mr. Brown, as some fellows have, as are no more to be compared to you nor chalk is to cheese, what mightn't you a been?"

"Well—well, Maggs, never mind."

"No; but it is a pity. You ought to have been a sheriff, Mr. Brown, that you ought."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you for your good wishes, however, Maggs. I, perhaps, should have made as good a sheriff as some folks who do come here with their gold chains on, looking as prim as possible; but it ain't to be, so there's an end of it."

"Ah! more's the pity."



"But where have you been all night, Maggs? Several of the fellows have been asking for you to get them their drops of beer, and so on."

"Why, if you'd believe it, Mr. Brown, I haven't been very well; so I took some physic, and that——"

"Recovered you, and here you are."

"No—it made me worse, in course."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes, and here I is, not quite the thing, but yet able to do my duty, and to oblige any of my friends as will be so good as to want me to do anything for 'em."

"Well, you are a good-natured fellow, if ever there was one, that's quite clear. Can you come on duty to-night?"

"Yes, if so be as I'm wanted to."

"You will, and no mistake. There's been a precious row, I can tell you. Some fifteen of the best men on the Bow Street establishment went out last night on an expedition, and two of 'em has come off second best."

"Oh, lor! How, Mr. Brown?"

"Why, they caught nobody, and got thrown from their horses, that's a fact; and, indeed, I heard the governor say that they had one way and another made a pretty kettle of fish of it."

"Oh, dear! I is so sorry."

In this way did Maggs, by a well acted simplicity, most completely get the better of the folks at the Old Bailey, and at Newgate. It was by successfully flattering the vanity of all with whom he came into contact, from the governor down to the humblest officer of the prison, that he became so great a favourite, and that he threw really sharp, clever men off their guard.

It was about two o'clock in the day before Maggs was placed for an hour upon temporary duty inside the prison, and entrusted with the keys that opened Claude Duval's cell, as well as some others. He knew that the hour would be a long one before any of the officers thought of relieving him; so he dared not hesitate at once to seek Duval, and make him clearly understand what would be attempted to be done for him by his friends Dick and Jack, and by the thieves, upon that night which was now fast approaching.

Upon opening the door of the cell, Maggs found that Claude was sleeping; but the noise of the lock made him move uneasily, and he muttered—

"No—no, not dead. They could not kill her!"

"Poor fellow," said Maggs; "he is thinking of her whom he loved better than all the world—of Cicely."

"I tell you she lives—she lives!" murmured Claude.

Maggs stood in the doorway of the cell gazing upon the poor prisoner with compassionate eyes.

"There!" said Claude—"there they come, now, through the old church-yard, and the red-coats are with them. Oh, if you were but safe, Cicely! Will not even the sanctity of this old cathedral be respected?"

It was evident that the dreams of Duval were carrying him back to Winchester Cathedral, where Cicely had been in so much peril.

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## CHAPTER CCCVIII.

### THE PLAN OF ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE IS CONNIVED BRAVELY.

"DUVAL!" said Maggs, as he stooped down over the pallet-bed upon which Claude lay—"Duval, I say!"

"Save her!—oh, save her!"

"Duval, awake. It is I."

Claude only dashed his arms to and fro, and muttered indistinctly the name of Cicely.

"This won't do," said Maggs, as he laid his hand upon Duval's arm. Awake, Claude Duval; but speak low."

The touch, light as it was, sufficed to arouse Duval in a moment, and he sprang to his feet, his fetters rattling as he did so, and making much more noise than Maggs thought at all prudent to be made upon that occasion.

"Silence!" he said. "Would you bring danger upon me, and destroy your own hopes of deliverance? Peace, I say!"

"Ah, who speaks to me?"

"Don't you know me?"

Duval sunk back upon the miserable couch, as he said, in a faint voice—

"Oh, yes, surely, yes, I know you now. I think, that is, I am sure that you once before said some kind things to me. I know you now. How did they let you get to this place?"

"Plague take it, Duval, you are only half awake now, I think. Rouse yourself, man."

"This is Newgate!"

"Newgate? To be sure it is. I suppose there can be very little doubt of that now. Don't you know me? I am Maggs. Come, take a drink of water, and open your eyes a little wider. How do you feel now?"

"Cooler!"

"I should think you did, for you have upset half the pitcher of water over you. But are you wide awake now?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. I have been dreaming, that's all, as a man is apt enough to do in this place, I fancy. Well, Maggs, what have you in the shape of news for me?"

"Listen to me attentively Duval to what I am going to say to you, for I don't know how long they may leave me to say it in, and it is important that you should know all about it; you can ask me any questions afterwards."

"Go on—go on."

Maggs then rapidly detailed to him all that had taken place at the meeting at West-end, and of the determination that Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack had made to attempt his rescue upon that very night that was now coming; and he concluded his communication by saying—

"Now, Duval, of course everything will depend upon your absolute coolness and discretion at the time I hope that we may depend upon you in those particulars."

"My dear fellow, ask Dick and Jack if ever I was wanting in such qualities when they are requisite."

"That will do quite well. I have no need to ask them, because I am quite sure myself that you will be all right. And now take this key."

"A key?"

"Yes; and to you it is the most important one that ever you had in your hand. It unlocks the fetters that you have on. They might have put you on a rivetted set, and if they had, you would have had to leave Newgate with them."

"They are rivetted."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do. About three or four hours ago, I think it was, they came in with the prison blacksmith and the governor's clerk, and took off the fetters I had on, and rivetted these in their place. I don't know what motive they had for so doing, as I never once opened my lips to them, or they to me."

"I don't at all understand it," said Maggs, as he paced the cell several times with rather a distracted mien. "I can't make out what they mean by it. You gave them money, Claude?"

"They have had twenty pounds of me."

"Then you are entitled to every indulgence; but I suppose it was some whim of the governor's. I cannot account for it in any other way; and the truth of it

is, that I am quite unprovided with the tools to enable you to get rid of the fetters you now wear."

"It is awkward enough."

"Never mind, they will carry you out with them, even if the worst comes to the worst; but if I can bring you in a file or two between this time and two o'clock, I will."

"Thank you, Maggs. I only feel half a man while this cold iron is about my limbs."

"I don't wonder at it. But it is now quite understood that you will be prepared for action?"

"Oh, yes. And Cicely, she is better, no doubt?"

Maggs was confused, but Claude said immediately, in a higher and more excited voice—

"It is in vain for you to try to deceive me. I know that she has been badly wounded, and I have reason to believe that she is lying very ill somewhere; but if I thought she were dead, I tell you, Maggs, notwithstanding all your good feeling towards me, and notwithstanding all my wishes to hold my dear friend Jack by the hand again, I would not leave this cell alive."

"Nay, now, Claude——"

"Do not try to contend this affair with me. It is my fixed resolution. But I know she is not dead. I shall meet her again, I feel quite assured of it."

"Not a doubt of it. In another world, perhaps," added Maggs, to himself, "but not in this."

"Well—well, that is settled," added Duval. "I will be ready, and you can accept for yourself better thanks than words can give you, and tell all my friends that I have no means of letting them know how much I appreciate their generous kindness and devotion to me."

"I will—I will."

"Do so; and yet—yet——"

"Yet what, Duval?"

"If I thought that it was at all likely they would fall in this attempt to rescue me, I would rather die a thousand deaths than permit them to engage in such an enterprise."

"They know all that as well as you can tell it to them," replied Maggs, "and I don't think that any hesitation upon your part would have the effect of stopping them in their attempt to do something for you. They have pledged themselves to it; and upon the aid which you personally give to them will depend, I assure you, in a great measure, the success or the failure of the plan."

"Say no more. I will do all that man can do."

"That is right. If I can get out of the prison and procure you a good file or two, by the aid of which you may manage to rid yourself of your fetters, well and good; but if I cannot do that, Duval, you must not despair."

"Indeed, I will not."

Maggs now felt that he had had quite a long enough conference with Claude, considering the circumstances; and feeling that if the least suspicion should be awakened, the whole plan might fail, he left the cell, and kept watch and ward in the narrow gloomy passage adjoining it which was his proper place, considering that he was playing the part of turnkey on very special duty.

It was as well that Maggs had left the cell of Duval so quickly as he did, for he had not been five minutes out of it when he met the governor of Newgate and one of the sheriffs of London, evidently proceeding to the cell.

"Hilloa!" said the governor. "Who is on duty there?"

"I you please, sir," said Maggs, assuming the simple air and manner by which he was so well known in Newgate. "If you please, sir, I am."

"Oh, Maggs?"

"Yes, noble sir; I is Maggs, if you please."

"All's right," said the governor. "I believe, Maggs, although you are not

so overburthened with cunning as some folks that I could name, you are more to be depended upon. You are a faithful fellow."

"Oh, sir, I hopes as how I is."

The sheriff wanted to be very condescending to Maggs, so, nodding his little round, sleek head, he said—

"Go on, my good Maggs—go on in doing your duty to those placed above you. Always look up with proper reverence to your superiors, Maggs, and you will do right you know. Be humble, Maggs, that's the way for common people to get on."

Common people! Oh, dear! That sheriff was a cheesemonger.

"Thank you kindly, gentlemen," said Maggs; "it makes the tears come into the eyes of a poor fellow to be spoke to by such great gentlemen as you."

"A very civil man," said the sheriff, as he walked on.

"Oh, very," said the governor.

"And knows his place."

"That's what I like him for. He never presumes, you see, sir, and as you say, he knows his place. That is a great quality in a poor person, you know, sir."

"Oh, very great. Oh, dear me, I had a clerk to keep my books—they say he was the son of a decayed gentleman, or something of that sort; but, would you believe it, Mr. Governor, I only called him a vagabond in a quiet sort of way, because he didn't make out a bill I wanted, and what do you think he did?"

"Apologised."

"No—no! Guess again."

"Cried, and begged pardon."

"No. He actually pulled my nose!"

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, he did, and then taking his hat, out he walked, after giving me a kick behind that sent me nearly under the fire-grate, and from that day to this he has never been near my counting-house again, I assure you, or else I would have given him into custody, of course."

"Well, sir, that is truly shocking—ungrateful, too. But here we are, sir, at Claude Duval's cell, and I have my master-key with me, which will open it."

"Ah," said the sheriff, as the key rattled in the lock of the cell-door, "we will now inform him that he will be tried on Friday, and it is now Wednesday, so he will be comfortably enough hanged out of hand on Monday next."

"Walk in, Mr. Sheriff," said the governor, as he flung the cell-door wide open. "Walk in, sir; you will find the prisoner here, sir."

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## CHAPTER CCCIX.

DETAILS WHAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN TWO AND FOUR IN THE MORNING AT NEWGATE.

CLAUDE DUVAL was officially informed by the sheriff that his trial upon various charges of highway robbery would take place on the Friday ensuing, to which communication he merely inclined his head in token that he heard it.

"And," said the sheriff, "of course this is told you in order that you may avail yourself of the interval to procure legal advice, if you please so to do."

"Thank you. I will manage without," said Duval.

"Very good."

The sheriff waddled out of the cell, but the governor lingered for a moment, and said—



JACK AND TURPIN WATCHING THE APPROACH OF LAWYER CROKE'S CARRIAGE.

"Allow me to recommend you a very clever solicitor, Duval. You may as well, you know, spend what cash you have still left in that way as in any other."

"Thank you, I'd rather not."

"Oh, very good."

The governor slammed the door of the cell shut with a vehemence that showed he was not at all pleased at the determination of Claude Duval not to employ a solicitor, for the one he wanted to recommend was his son-in-law, a needy rascal, who had married his daughter merely for the purpose of getting a living by the union.



Maggs had kept his post in the passage adjoining to poor Duval's cell for more than an hour, when he was relieved by one of the regular turnkeys of the prison, who nodded to him with a jocose familiarity, as he said—

"All right, old fellow?"

"Oh dear, yes, Mr. Wilkins. All's right, sir."

"That will do. You are a good fellow, Maggs. Get yourself a pint of beer. Here is the money."

"How kind of you, Mr. W."

"Oh, no, not at all; you shall never want a pint of beer while I have the money to spare for it; so now you can go as soon as you like, and we shan't want you till night again."

"Very good, sir."

Maggs wished very much indeed to get out of Newgate, for he had much to do, but he did not let the officers of the prison see that he had any anxiety of that kind, and, indeed, he stopped in the lobby and gossiped for about five minutes, and then he fetched a pot of beer for the gentleman who was on the lock; but at last he was free, and he strolled up the Old Bailey at a slow pace, till he reached Newgate Street, and then he quickened his pace and went so fast that he was in Aldersgate Street in a few minutes.

Crossing to the other side of the way, then, Maggs dived down one of the small turnings which were upon the site of the present post-office, and he did not pause till he reached a tall, miserable-looking house, the lower part of which seemed to be completely boarded up.

At this house Maggs applied for admittance, by ringing a bell that was attainable by rather a narrow examination of the begrimed door post.

In the course of a few minutes the door was opened a little way, but a chain was up, so that it was quite safe.

"Who is there?" asked a female voice.

"Maggs," was the reply. "Is Dickson at home?"

"Oh, yes, he is. Come in."

The lady, for such we may in very great courtesy call her, took down the chain, and admitted Maggs to the passage of the house.

"Come arter me," she said. "He's up stairs."

Maggs followed the interesting female—who was attired in a flannel dressing-gown, that certainly did not look as if it had been made acquainted with soap and water for some years—up the old dilapidated staircase, and into a room where a man, who was about as cleanly as the lady in his attire, was eating very fat bacon, and drinking raw spirits to aid in its digestion.

"Hilloa, old boy," cried the man, "how are you?"

"Pretty well, and you?"

"Charming. I am rather weak, though, in the stomach, so, you see, I am delicate as to what I take."

"Humph! Under-done fat bacon, and raw brandy. Do you think they are light, pleasant, nutritious things?"

"Eh?"

Maggs smiled. Mr. Dickson did not quite understand him when he spoke of nutritious substances; but he knew the real object of his visit would be easier comprehended. So, taking a pocket-book from his pocket, he opened it at a place where a leaf was turned down, and handing it to the man, he said—

"What do you suppose all that will come to?"

"I'll tell you in a minute, Maggs. Let me see: six horses—one coach, private, with all complete—two suits of livery. Ah, well, it depends on whether you buy 'em or hire 'em."

"The latter, if it can be done."

"That depends on the service, you see; and yet, I don't know, if the value is forthcoming."

"It can be deposited, if that is any object," said Maggs, "so if any danger or

damage should come to the traps, whoever lends them will be on the right side of the hedge, after all, you see."

"Good. Then as far as I think, mind you, Maggs—but I can't say on the moment to within twenty pounds, or so—but as far as I think, mind you, on the moment, I should say four hundred pounds."

"Very good."

Dickson looked at Maggs for a moment or two in silence, and then he said, in a tone of more interest than he had before shown in the transaction—

"Will that do?"

"Yes, if you will undertake it."

Dickson rose at once, and took off the dressing-gown in which he was enveloped, and which, like the flannel garment of the lady, certainly had collected the dust and the grease of many a long year.

"How about time?" he said.

"All must be ready by midnight here."

"That will do."

Maggs dived his hand into a secret pocket in the lining of his coat, and got out a small and very flat tin box, from which he extracted four one-hundred notes, and, handing them to Dickson, he said—

"There is the deposit; and now I know, old friend, that I may thoroughly and entirely depend upon you in this affair. It is one that I have set my heart upon, although it is not one that I feel disposed to say any more about just now, even to you."

"Did I ask any questions?"

"No—no—you never do."

"Very good."

"But still, if this affair was only a secret of my own, I should ask you to be so good as to listen to it; but it belongs to others, and so I let it remain as it is."

"All's right, old fellow. At twelve o'clock you will find under the archway close at hand here, all the traps that you have asked for; and let you be going upon what lay you may, I wish you all the luck in the world, and a little more to the back of that."

"Thanks. I am authorised to say that if everybody comes back here again safe, it is a hundred pound job to you, Dickson."

"Very well, that's agreed then. Poll—Poll, I say!"

"What now?" said the woman, appearing at the door of the room.

"My togs—quick, and tell Jarvis I want the brown cob saddled and at the door in a crack. Good morning, Maggs. It's all as right as it can be, and that's all I can say."

"I know it. Good morning."

Maggs left the place and hastened to the public-house, but as he passed through Aldersgate Street he bought half a dozen very fine small files that would cut anything, and then he proceeded to inform Dick and Jack of what progress he had made in the affair of Claude Duval's rescue, and in what manner Claude himself had received the project.

The two friends were anxiously enough expecting his appearance, and they were well satisfied with the explanation that he had ready for them, and with the arrangements he had made.

"Now mind you," said Maggs, "we must all of us perfectly comprehend what we have to do. There must be nothing left to chance. I will be here at a quarter to twelve to-night, and those six of the family that are to go with us will be here at that hour likewise. We shall want two people, or I should say three, to hold our horses at the corner of Newgate Street, though."

"I can furnish you with those," said the landlord, "and, indeed, as I shall be very anxious to know how the affair comes off, I will make one of the three myself. Then there is my boy, Sam, he will come, and I will manage to get

some one else that can be depended upon, so that you may consider it to be all settled."

"It is off my mind, then," said Maggs; "and now all you have to do, Dick and Jack, is to be as particular as possible in your disguises, and take care how you play your parts."

"The letter, too, from the Secretary of State, must be well got up," said Jack. "Who will do it?"

"I," said Maggs. "I have seen such documents come to the old prison, and I know the style and look of them quite well, and if our host here will send out for a sheet of blue foolscap paper and some red wax, I will show you how a despatch from the Home Office, as far as the outside goes, may be manufactured in a few minutes."

The materials mentioned by Maggs were soon provided for him, and he manufactured a long, official-looking enclosure, with a great coat of arms upon the seal, which he had procured from an old lapidary's shop in Long-lane, Smithfield.

"Now," he said, "I don't mean to say that this would deceive the governor, or any very official eye, but it will do very well indeed for a turnkey of Newgate."

"Especially at two o'clock in the morning," said Jack.

"Just so."

Everything was now duly arranged, and Maggs spent about an hour with Jack and Dick talking over all the little chances of the plan, and all its probabilities and possibilities, one way or the other, so that they left nothing to be considered at a late hour, when action of the most prompt and decisive character would be everything.

"We shall do it," said Dick. "I do believe we shall do it; and if so, it will be about the most daring thing that has been done yet in connexion with Newgate."

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## CHAPTER CCCX.

THE ESCAPE OF DUVAL PROMISES WELL, AND THINGS TURN OUT FORTUNATELY.

NOTWITHSTANDING all his confidence in the arrangements that had been made for the escape of Duval from Newgate, Maggs could not help trembling a little for the result, when he knew that it depended so completely and entirely upon the accidental circumstance of his being required to take the place of one of the turnkeys of Newgate.

That some alteration might take place in that arrangement, and so destroy the whole plan, he well knew; and, however his experience of the internal economy of the prison told him that nothing was more improbable than that such an alteration of intention should ensue, yet its possibility was a source of great anxiety.

Maggs had not thought proper to make any mention to Dick or to Jack of the doubt that was upon his mind.

"I shall only dispirit them if I do," he thought to himself, "and the best thing I can possibly do to ensure them success is, to let them come full of confidence that they will have it. Nothing will be easier than for me to meet them, even at the last moment, in the Old Bailey and let them know that the attempt must be put off until another night, if such a thing should turn out to be absolutely necessary."

That it should not be necessary, however, was the fervent hope and wish of Maggs, for he knew how much of the spirit of enterprise was lost when such an affair as that which was in progress was not duly carried out at the time, and in the manner it had been projected.

At all events, Maggs left Dick and Jack full of hope, after duly arranging everything for the evening, as he, of course, would be in the prison, and unable to take an active part in bringing them to the spot for action at the requisite hour.

It was after ten at night that—tolerably fatigued by all the bustle and the excitement of the day, and with his mind intensely occupied by the many speculations that the coming events of the night gave rise to—Maggs arrived at the wicket gate of Newgate.

“Hilloa, old boy!” said the man on the “lock,” “is that you?”

“Yes, sir, it’s me—poor Maggs.”

“Ah, well—come in. The governor has been asking for you.”

“Has he, indeed?”

“Why, you don’t suppose I should say so if he hadn’t?”

“Oh, dear—no. But what can such a great man as the governor want to say to a poor fellow like me, I wonder?”

“Well, I don’t know. The sheriff has been with him, and after a long talk they sent here to the lobby to know if you were here.”

Maggs felt his heart beat quickly as he heard this, for he dreaded, after all, that some suspicion of the design he had on hand might have crept out. If it had, all was lost. Notwithstanding his agitation and his anxiety, though, he felt the vast importance of appearing quite calm and collected to the turnkey, and he said—

“Well, here I am if they want me now, you know.”

“To be sure, it was some time ago, and I don’t know whether to send to let them know you are here or not.”

“Is the worshipful and honourable sheriff, then, still here?” said Maggs,

“Oh, yes; didn’t you see his coach at the corner by Ludgate?”

“No; I came the other way, and so I missed that great pleasure, for I likes to see a sheriff’s coach, and I likes to see the fine footman; and I often thinks to myself—Oh, dear, why didn’t fortune make me a sheriff’s footman?”

“Why, what a simpleton you are, Maggs.”

“Well, I’m that, I know; but only think, Mr. Jones, what calves they have got. Only think of that—Oh, dear me!”

“Why, you goose, you don’t suppose that being a sheriff’s footman gives a man great calves to his legs, do you?”

“Yes, it does,” said a turnkey, who had been sitting on the bench at the far end of the lobby. “Maggs is right. It does do so. They are cork, you see. My dear fellow, Maggs—bless your innocence, they are nothing but cork.”

“Cork, sir? What! a cork out of a bottle?”

“Ha! Ha!” laughed the turnkey. “Well, you are a goose, to be sure, Maggs, and the great good of you is, that you are a faithful and a good-tempered one. But I do think, Jones, that now he has come, it would be better to let the governor know, as he was asked for.”

“Well, perhaps it will. I’m on the lock, and can’t go. Suppose you go, and say, that Maggs is here? or stay—why shouldn’t he go himself? He knows the way. Be off with you, Maggs, and report yourself to the governor, old boy; you know his room door, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes; but you really arn’t now ajoking with me?”

“No—no, upon my soul, I am not. I wouldn’t do it, Maggs; and, besides, it would be as much as my place is worth to play off any jokes when the governor and the sheriff are concerned; so you may go in perfect safety, old fellow.”

“Thank you. I will.”

Maggs was as anxious as he could possibly be to know what the governor and the sheriff could want to say to him; and although he kept up his rather silly look, which he knew so well how to assume, and although he dawdled along the passages towards the governor’s room, if he had consulted the feeling of impatience that really beset him, he would have flown at his utmost speed.

Maggs, however, had set himself a part to perform, and he was not going to

spoil it by any foolish precipitancy; so he reached the door of the governor's rooms as calmly and as quietly, to all outward show, as it was possible for any man to be, and tapped very humbly and gently on the panel.

"Come in," cried the governor.

Maggs just ventured to put his head inside the door, and said, in his usual weak voice—that voice which he always spoke in when within the walls of old Newgate, and which all the officials of the prison knew so well—

"Did your worshipful honours want to see me? It was Mr. James as is on the lock as said as your worshipful honours wanted to see me; so here I is."

"Oh, yes, Maggs. Come in."

"Thank you, sir."

"Shut the door, Maggs," said the sheriff. "We want to speak to you, my man, and we think you may really do some good; and if you do, of course, we will not forget you, you may depend."

"Oh, worshipful sir, the idea of being thought of for a moment by such a great person as a sheriff and a governor is enough all for to take away a poor fellow's breath, that it is—Oh, dear!"

"Well, well, Maggs, you are a good, honest sort of man. Take a seat, Maggs—you are agitated."

"A little, worshipful sirs. It is such an honour."

"Well; sit down."

"Oh, dear no. I wouldn't—I wouldn't, indeed. What! sit down afore a sheriff and a governor? Oh, no—don't ask me to do it, gentlemen. Only think if I should get proud in consequence, and lose my wits. I ain't over bright, they say, at the best; but I might be worsen."

The sheriff laughed; so did the governor. How gratified they both were at the great superiority, as they considered of their intellects, over the poor humble Maggs, whom they thought looked upon them as the two greatest men in all the world!

"Well, Maggs," said the governor, "since you object to sit down, you can do as you like; but mind you attend to what the sheriff is about now to say to you, for it is very important."

"Oh, dear, yes, sir, I will—I will."

"Maggs," said the sheriff, "you are a poor simple sort of fellow, you know, and nobody minds much what you say or what you do, so upon those grounds you really can be more useful than a brighter sort of man."

"Yes, noble sir."

"Don't interrupt me, but just listen to me patiently, and try to fully comprehend what I say to you. If I use any words you don't understand, you can ask me the meaning of them."

"Thank you, worshipful sir."

How kind it was of the sheriff to speak so to a man who, both in intellect and education, was vastly his superior! But he did not know it, so we must hold him excused.

With a self-satisfied smile, the sheriff continued—

"It is possible enough, Maggs, that you may be able to accomplish what clever men would fail in, and, therefore, the governor and I have hit upon you to carry out a little plan that we have connected with Claude Duval."

Maggs never changed colour in the least as this name was pronounced by the sheriff, although the fact that it was so pronounced had excited his liveliest fears that by some means the adventure that he had so fully intended should come off that night with success, would miscarry.

"Yes," added the sheriff, "we really think that your simplicity—your appearance of utter want of design—your poverty—all may be found serviceable to the ends of the law."

"The law, sir? Oh, dear, I don't know nothing about the law."

"But you will."



"Oh, I hope not, worshipful sirs. I assure you I never was took up by the law in a' my life."

They both smiled.

"Nor will you ever, so long as you do your duty to us as a good and faithful servant. And now for what you are to do, and which, notwithstanding your good sense and modesty in denying all notion of extra reward, you shall be munificently paid for doing."

"Yes," put in the governor; "you shall be most munificently paid. Did you ever, now, in all your life possess five guineas?"

"Five guineas, sir?"

"Yes. No doubt to you, who are a poor fellow, it seems to be a very large sum; but never mind that: you shall have as much for yourself if you succeed in carrying out the little project we are about to set you upon the execution of."

"Five guineas?—It's quite a fabulous sum of money, gentlemen."

The sheriff laughed at him, and rattled the money that was in his pocket, as a well-to-do, fat, easy-pursy, swindling citizen of London may well do, and then he said—

"In plain language, then, Maggs, what we want you to do is to go to the cell of Claude Duval, and pretend to have great sympathy with him, and tell him how sorry you are that he is taken up, and that you hear he will be hanged, and all that sort of thing."

"I will, sir," said Maggs, much relieved that the duty he was set upon would not take him out of the prison.

"Then you must ask him if there's anything you can possibly do for him; and if he don't mention it himself, you can hint that it would give you great pleasure to take any message for him to any friend; do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, noble sir."

"Well, then, from all this, what we wish is, that you should get from him where Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack, the two notorious highwaymen with whom he used to go about, and be the terror of the road, are to be found. You understand me now?"

"Yes, your worshipful worship, I do. I am to find out, by pretending to be his friend, enough to enable me to be his worst foe?"

"Why, a—yes—well, that's it."

"I am to pretend to sympathise with a man in prison, while I play the spy all the while, and worm his secrets out of him through the medium of his best feelings?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"He! he!" laughed Maggs with a silly kind of laugh that he could put on capitally at pleasure. "He! he! I'll do it wonderful. Oh, won't I do it for five golden guineas. I do think, do you know, gentlemen, that he will take me for such a fool, that he will tell me everything"

"Very likely."

"Yes," added the governor; "these fellows, when they get into prison, would give anything in the world for somebody to talk to."

"And I ain't half such a fool as I look," said Maggs.

"I don't think you are," said the sheriff, "to tell the truth."

"I'm sure he isn't," said the governor; "at all events, he is quite wise enough to be able to do what we wish upon the present occasion; are you not, Maggs?"

"I believe you, sir, I am."

"Very good; now go at once, and you will have every facility for seeing the prisoner; and we beg that you will lose no time in speaking to him upon the subject, for if we could only find out where Turpin and Jack are to be found, we would pounce upon them, and it should go hard but what we would hang the whole three of them on the same morning, which would be a capital piece of work."

"Capital it would," said Maggs. "Good night, worshipful sirs. I'll do my very best to-night, you may depend."

### CHAPTER CCCXI.

THE SHERIFF FINDS THAT MAGGS IS TRULY ANYTHING BUT SUCH A FOOL AS HE LOOKS.

MAGGS, to tell the truth, was rather delighted at his interview with the sheriff and the governor. If any weak hold upon his sense of honour as being employed by them had retained itself faintly upon the heart of Maggs, it was now dissipated.

They had passed upon him, certainly, the most grievous insult that they possibly could—that is to say, they had thought him to be capable of committing a very base act of treachery; and after that they could hardly feel either surprised or angry at the fact of his betraying them as he was about to do.

But yet Maggs felt that his vocation or mission, call it which you will, was at Newgate. He felt that there he was inestimably useful to the fraternity of thieves, and that it was only by staying there that he could continue to be very useful.

Hence, then, was it that Maggs hoped, notwithstanding all that might happen that night, to escape any blame on its account; but if he should really find it to be impossible to carry on the affair without compromising himself, he was quite prepared to do so.

At the same time that he would, if he could, retain his old standing at Newgate, he told himself that if upon any occasion it was to be sacrificed, there could not be a better nor a more important one than that which was about to ensue.

"I will succeed," said Maggs, "at all risks. I will save Duval, or I will be thoroughly convinced that it is quite impossible at any sacrifice, or through any danger to do so."

When a man makes such a resolve as that, he is very likely indeed to succeed in what he undertakes, and hence Maggs had the best of hopes. When he reached the lobby again the turnkeys rather eagerly questioned him as to what the governor and the sheriff wanted with him, but Maggs was not going to tell them.

"Oh, you'd hardly believe it," he said, "that they wanted to give me a regular situation in the prison."

"I'll be hanged," said Jones, "if I didn't think so, and then one of us will be packed off, as sure as a gun."

"No, you won't," said Maggs, "for I wouldn't have it."

"You wouldn't?"

"Sartainly not."

"You don't mean that now, really, Maggs?"

"Oh, yes, they offered to make me what they call a ~~super~~—super—a something beginning with super."

"Supernumerary, I suppose?"

"Yes, that was it, a supernumerary turnkey, and to give me a matter of thirty-five shillings a week; but I said, 'No—give me what you please, and let me go out and in as I like, and when I like, and make myself as useless as I can.'"

"As useful, you mean."

"To be sure I does; so there's the end of it. Why, who would get you your drops of beer and your bits of tobacco, and go a hundred little messages for you all, of one sort or another, if I had any regular duty to do?"

"That's it, Maggs, that's it."

"To be sure it is; so I declined it, and there's an end of it. I won't be a regular turnkey, but I like to go about the old stone-jug, and be as useless——"

"Useful, my boy."

"Yes—useful as possible to you all; so here I am, just as usual. I ord bless you, Mr. Jones, if they had offered to make me the lord mayor, I wouldn't have had it, that I wouldn't."

"You are a trump, Maggs."



TURPIN LISTENS FOR HIS PURSUERS AFTER ROBBING THE NIGHT-FLY.

"He is a trump," said the two officers, whose duty it was to be on guard in the lobby. "He is a trump, and no sort of mistake in this here world. Give us your fist, old fellow. That's right. We respect you, Maggs."

"And I suspect all of you."

"Respect, you mean."

"To be sure I do. Oh, dear, what a poor head I have got, to be sure!"

The turnkeys were quite delighted with this conduct upon the part of Maggs, and never had he been in such high favour with them all as he was upon that special occasion. It was now not far from eleven o'clock, and at twelve he was to go on duty, to give the officers who ought to have remained till two time to go home.

We have before said that this substitution of Maggs for the regular officers at any time was winked at by the governor, as Maggs was considered quite competent and trustworthy; and in so easy a way it was thought no evil to let the regular officers of the prison have a little relaxation at odd times and seasons, when their absence was of no moment.

And now Maggs took care to show no uneasiness or haste to get to Claude Duval's cell; but he let the hour slip away as quietly as possible; and when it was twelve, and the officer who was going home gave him a tap on the back, and said, "Now, Maggs, my boy, keep a good watch," he merely replied—

"Won't I, that's all."

"I know you will. Good night. I shall be back about three, I hope, and, perhaps, before it. Good night."

"Good night," said Maggs; "and mind, Mr. Brown, you needn't at all hurry yourself, for I shan't miss you, you may depend upon it."

"All's right—all's right."

The officer was gone, and Maggs fastened the huge bunch of keys that had been left to him to his waist, as he said—

"Well, I'll have a look at Claude Duval, and see whether he is all safe, afore I sits down in Brown's chair."

"Do so, Maggs," said Jones. "It's only proper you should. Brown ought to have done so before he went."

"Oh, he knew I would, at leastways he guessed as much, no doubt," said Maggs, as he took a lamp, and went along the long, narrow, gloomy passage that led to Claude Duval's cell.

If the sheriff and the governor had only seen the remarkable change that came over the face of Maggs as he neared the cell in which was the prisoner in whom both he and they, only in different ways, felt so deeply interested, they would hardly have believed the evidence of their own eyes.

Once he turned and listened. He could faintly hear the murmured tones of the turnkeys in the lobby conversing.

"They have no suspicion," he said. "All is well."

Then, when he reached the door of Duval's cell, he paused again, and listened attentively—all was profoundly still, for he was then out of ear-shot of the turnkeys in the lobby.

"All is well," he said again.

Maggs took these precautions, notwithstanding by the request of the sheriff, and with the knowledge of the turnkeys, he was seeking the cell of the prisoner, but he felt that he could not be too cautious, and that everything would depend upon his own and Claude Duval's presence of mind.

Maggs unlocked the cell door, and left the key in the lock. It grated harshly upon its hinges as he opened it.

"Who's there?" cried Duval.

"Hush! It is I."

"You are most welcome, Maggs. I——"

"Speak low. Your tones are very sad, Duval; what has happened to you now? You are not ill, I hope?"

"Oh, no, Maggs; but, to tell the truth, I have been foolish enough to allow my nerves to be a little shaken by a dream."

"Oh, you will soon shake that feeling off."

"Yes, I hope so. But I thought that in this cell I saw a coffin with the dead body of a female in it, and that a figure of death, armed with a spear, suddenly appeared, and said—

“Look! Claude Duval—look!—yes, look at the face of her whom you loved, before the worms so deface her beauty, that even to you she would be a loathsome spectacle.” It was at that moment, Maggs, that I heard the rattle of your key in the lock of the door.”

“I am glad I came to put to flight such uncomfortable visions, Claude; you should laugh at them.”

“Alas! I cannot.”

“Well—well, perhaps not; but you will soon forget them. I bring you the best and most cheering news.”

“Ah, indeed?”

“Yes. Speak low, and listen to me. By-the-by, I will keep the door of the cell open, and stand close to it, and then it will be impossible for any one to come down the passages without me knowing it. I do not think, mind you, Duval, that there is the slightest breath of suspicion abroad, but it is as well to be on the safe side.”

“You are right, Maggs. Oh, how much I owe you!”

“Nothing—nothing.”

“Yes, but I do, though, Maggs, and I will take good care if I do, through your means, obtain my freedom, that I will make the attempt to show you that I can be grateful.”

“You will oblige me by saying no more on that head. At all events, wait till we can shake hands on Ealing Common, or Hounslow Heath.”

“Ah, that will be glorious.”

“Well, I hope that that time will come to-morrow, for at two o’clock—the two o’clock that is now fast coming—your friends will be here to try to drag you from Newgate.”

“Will they, indeed, persevere in such a bold and admirable plan?”

“They will. But you shake! you are agitated.”

If we were to say that Claude Duval at this time felt quite cool and collected, we should be giving currency to an idea that could not be in any way sanctioned by the fact, which was, that he was much more agitated than he had ever known himself to be upon any occasion of his eventful career.

He was himself both annoyed and surprised to find that such was the fact.

We can probably account for it better than Claude Duval could himself.

The fact was, that the want of air and exercise, to which he had been so accustomed, that they were more essential in their abundance to his health than to those of most persons, had had the effect of very much depressing him.

This was the precise reason why Claude Duval did not feel in his usual condition.

“Oh, Maggs,” he said, “how can I be otherwise than agitated at the idea that I shall soon, perhaps—nay, I will not entertain any doubt, so I will say for certain, breathe the fresh air of liberty, and be able to rush to the arms of Cicely?”

“Oh, yes—yes.”

“Maggs!”

“Well, Duval?”

“You will now, like a man and a dear friend to me, as you are, tell me how she is. Is she suffering from a wound? In a word, is she well, Maggs? Come, tell me now, distinctly.”

“She is suffering from no wound, Claude—she is well.”

“Thank Heaven, then, all is well, and I ask no more.”

“It is well. Dick and Jack can tell you every particular that you may wish to know, and I refer you to them. But how do you get on about your fetters?”

“Oh, bravely. They are in such a state, Maggs, that I feel I have but to make an effort, which even my weakened powers are equal to, and I can cast them from me. Do I look very pale?”

“Oh, no. But the air of Newgate soon robs a man of his colour. It would



pale the cheek of a ploughboy in a week. There is something dead and pestiferous in it. Oh, that two o'clock were come, Claude."

"I echo that sentiment, Maggs."

How long that two hours seemed from twelve till two!

A thousand times over did Claude Duval think that the hour must have passed, and that, although listening for it most intently, it had, in its sound from the old church clock of St. Sepulchre's, escaped his ears, and he said as much to Maggs.

At length, faintly came the sound of the chimes from that clock, the sound of which had heralded so many a poor shrinking soul into eternity.

As the cell of Duval was situated, it was just possible by close attention to hear the hours struck by that clock, and now, at the sound, Duval sprang to his feet.

"It is time, Maggs!" he said—"it is time."

"Hush! Now, of all times, then, let me pray you to be still and calm. Claude Duval, upon that depends all else."

"I will—I will!"

"Leave all to me, and to your friends."

"But, Maggs, you will give me a weapon—you will not, if all should go wrong, suffer me to be dragged back to this cell again without a struggle? I must and will have arms."

"You terrify me by your vehemence."

"Oh, no—no! But you hear me—you understand me? You, if you were situated as I am, would do as I do—you would feel as I feel, and you would say as I say. Arms—I want arms!"

"Hush! There are a pair of pistols, the fellows of which you would find it difficult to match in London."

"Loaded?"

"Yes, carefully. But now, knowing, Claude Duval, that you have the lives of two men in your hands, let me implore you to do nothing rash. All noise must be avoided. One ill-directed shot would bring upon us the whole force of the prison."

"I know it—I know it. I will justify all that you might expect of me, Maggs. But the time has come, and I hear nothing. Ah! the sound of carriage wheels outside—they pause at the door of Newgate. They come, they come, Maggs."

"Hush!—hush!"

"Ah! there is a voice from the lobby. Listen—listen. I hear it now."

Yes, there was a sound from the lobby of the prison, and the heart of Claude Duval beat fast and thick.

Another sound—he knew not whether it was strife or merely commotion; but he felt that it was time for Maggs to go.

Maggs felt this, too.

"I go," he said—"I go. Now, Duval, keep by the door of your cell, and when you hear a whistle, it will be from me, and it will be then time for you to come into the lobby. Mind, I will let you pass me, and you will meet Dick and Jack."

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Now, be calm, and good-by for a few moments only, I hope and expect."

Claude Duval was alone. Oh, how terrible was the suspense of the few moments only that ensued, for they were but moments, after all. To his perception, all his imprisonment had not been so long as the period that elapsed between the absence of Maggs and the sound that was to signify to him that it was his cue to advance along the passages towards the lobby.

At length, just as he was getting quite maddened by the delay, he heard a faint, but long-continued whistle.

"Time—time!" said Duval, and he bounded along the vaulted passage with the speed of the wind. "It is time—it is time!"

Let us now see what Jack and Dick, with their six friends, are really doing, and how far they have progressed in the affair, the success of which they had so deeply at heart.

## CHAPTER CCCXII.

### THE CONTEST WITH THE TURNKEYS ENDS SUCCESSFULLY FOR CLAUDE DUVAL.

IF the space of time that intervened between dark and the hour when the enterprise in which Jack and Dick Turpin felt themselves so deeply interested felt long and tedious to Maggs and to Claude Duval, it was likewise so to all concerned in the daring attempt that was about to be made to take from Newgate its most important prisoner.

A thousand doubts and surmises beset Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack. They thought at one time that, after all, the man who had been engaged by Maggs to procure all the necessary materials for the conduction of the enterprise might suspect what it meant, and so might think it better worth his while to make good terms with the authorities than to keep his word with the thieves; but reflection always put an end to such a doubt, by showing that the interest of that man must be much more in keeping than in breaking faith with his employers.

But, still, some chance accident might at the last moment knock the whole affair upon the head, or Maggs might be suspected, and in that case they would only be running upon certain destruction by going to Newgate.

But, still, they never for a moment wavered in the fixed determination to go, so intent were they upon carrying out the plan, although they incessantly vexed themselves with so many suppositions regarding the possibility of failure.

We may add, too, that their doubts did not tend to make them a whit less exact or careful in making all the preparations in their power for the successful carrying out of the plan; they determined, unless they heard something positive as a stay to it from Maggs, to stand or fall by it.

But the longest looked-for day and hour will come at last, and so Dick and Jack found that it was time for them to leave the public house in Barbican, and proceed to the street at the back of St. Martin's-le-Grand, to meet those who were to go with them on the enterprise to Newgate.

As Jack and Dick were to present themselves as emissaries from the secretary of state's office, they had got themselves up in theatrical fashion accordingly, and very well they did it:

They both wore powdered wigs, which at that time were very much the fashion at the court, and Dick had on a suit of grey velvet, which looked very neat. Jack arrayed himself in a dark brown suit, and they both had paid great attention to the richness of their cravats and ruffles.

When they looked at each other they could not help smiling at the great metamorphosis which an alteration of costume so completely had effected in them both.

"I should not have known you, Jack," said Dick.

"Nor I you, Dick."

"Well, if we could have deceived each other, it will go hard but we deceive those who, at the best, have but a very superficial and slight knowledge of either of us."

"It will; and now that I see both of us in our disguises, a feeling of greater hopefulness comes over me. I seem as if I were assured we should succeed."

"That is a good feeling. You ought to encourage it. But come, now, it is time."

It was truly an expedition of life or death that they went upon, and they were well armed for the occasion. They had not made such an understanding dis-

tinctly in words ; but it was a kind of tacit resolution between them that they would not be taken alive, and that, therefore, there were but three things that could happen to them on that night.

First, they might get away with Claude safely ; secondly, they might fail in rescuing him, but yet escape themselves ; and, thirdly, they might die in Newgate, or on the outside of it, fighting against an overwhelming force.

Such a state of things as this may not make men sad, but it cannot lead to much positive cheerfulness ; so we can hardly be surprised, that Jack and Dick were more than usually grave upon that eventful night.

The man who had been employed by Maggs to get ready all the materials for the enterprise was to the full as good as his word, and all anxiety upon that score was soon at an end.

Near the corner of Monkwell-street, at the back of St. Martin's-le-Grand, Jack and Dick found the chariot which had been bargained for, and at a little distance they saw the six mounted men who were to take part in the affair.

"All's right, Turpin," said a voice from the carriage, as Dick reached the door of it.

"Ah ! who speaks to me ?" said Turpin.

"It's all right," added the voice ; and then the chariot door was opened, and the man of whom Maggs had hired the things stepped out. "I thought," he added, "that in case of any mistake, I had better be here on the spot myself, you see."

"And you know me ?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I am rather sorry to hear that, for I had flattered myself that my disguise was perfect ; but now you have taken that conceit out of me."

"Not at all. I heard your friend there, whom I don't know at all, call you Dick ; and putting this and that together, and having a precocious idea upon the subject, though, of course, I didn't ask Maggs any questions, why, I said to myself, 'This is Turpin, and he is going to make a bold dash to get Duval out of the stone-jug.'"

"You are right."

"I thought I was ; and now, as Maggs knows me well, and as you have heard of me, and, perhaps, have a pretty good idea that I may be trusted, I have one request to make to you."

"What is it ?—our time is short."

"It is, that you will let me come with you. I am not the worst hand in the world at a tussel if it should come to one, and I am well armed, and will do you all the service I can,"

"Come on, then ; you will, no doubt, be a great help to us. What say you to it, Jack ?"

"I agree, with all my heart."

"Which Jack is that ?" said the man.

"That I will tell you after this night's business is over," said Jack. "It is a long story, and there is no time now. Let us come on. Get into the coach again, Mr. a—a—"

"Nabbs," said the man. "That's what I call myself for shortness ; but I ain't going to get into the coach—one of the most troublesome things in the world is to find one who can drive well, and who will fight well at the same time ; so, if you will let me be your coachman, I can do you more good, I think, than in any other way."

"We are much beholden to you," said Dick.

"All's right," said Nabbs ; and he attired himself in a huge livery great coat, with about twenty capes, and which effectually hid all his other clothing. In fact, all that could be seen of him was his top-boots beneath the coat, and his head above it. He then put on a regular coachman's wig, and a three-cornered hat, and he looked just the beau-ideal of a State-coachman in undress.

"That is famous," said Jack.

"The very thing," said Dick; "and now off we go at once, I hope?"

"Yes—all's right."

The six mounted men approached the carriage, and one of them said to Dick—

"It is all right now; we have all the horses with us, that is to say, one a-piece for ourselves and one for Claude. Where are your cattle, Turpin? They ought to be handy."

"They are at the crib in Barbican; but we can easily get them in good time. Remember what you have to do."

"Yes. Everything is right. The horses will be taken care of at the corner of Newgate-street."

The lamps were lit in the chariot, and then, indeed, Dick and Jack saw that it was quite a stylish set out, and much they wondered where Mr. Nabbs had been able to procure such a vehicle.

"All's right," said Nabbs.

Off they set at a dashing pace for Newgate, and as Dick and Jack rested upon the soft, cushioned seat of the chariot, they could not help looking at each other and asking themselves if it were not all a dream.

It did seem so strange that they should be in such a vehicle, and wear such costumes, and driving to Newgate. But there they were, sure enough, and as the carriage turned into Newgate-street, they felt that the time for thought had gone past, and that for action had arrived.

"You can depend upon your arms, Dick?"

"Oh, yes, Jack; and you?"

"Yes—I have been particularly careful. What an hour the next will be, Dick, to all of us!"

"Ay, it will. But its result will depend upon ourselves. Be cool, cautious, and firm, Jack. You do not feel in any way flurried?"

"Oh, no. I am going to try to save Claude, and that feeling nerves me. You will not find me fail. Here we are."

"Yes—here we are."

With a dash and a rattle the chariot stopped at the gate of Newgate—that little wicket gate at the top of the three or four stone steps, up and down which so many beating hearts have been carried by unwilling feet. Oh, if those old grey stones could only speak, what recollections might they not impart of the numerous personages who had passed them!

The lights at the sides of the chariot flashed upon the rugged wall of the prison, and a man, dressed very nicely as a footman, opened the door, and stood with it in his hand respectfully for Dick and Jack to alight.

Now, in stopping the chariot, in opening the door, and in letting down the steps, all the noise that could be made was made, so as to impress upon the minds of the turnkeys that it was somebody of importance who had arrived; for noise and insolence go a long way with the vulgar. Hence the assumption of both, by those who wish to exert a sway over weak and ignorant minds.

Dick stepped out of the chariot first, and then Jack followed him. By the light of the carriage lamps, Dick took one glance at Jack's face; but he saw that it was quite firm, and betrayed no anxiety or tremour.

"He will not fail," said Dick, to himself; and ascending the steps, he kicked at the low half-door of Newgate.

"Hilloa!" said the turnkey, in a half-sleepy tone.

"Open the door, fellow!" said Dick.

"Eh?—Oh, I beg your pardon, sir—yes, sir—Walk in."

The turnkey had caught sight of the chariot—the lights—the coachman, with his coat of many capes, and the footman with his shoulder-knot of gold lace. The gate was flung open, and Dick entered the lobby of Newgate, followed by Jack.

There was an awful pause for a moment, only broken by the sharp click of the lock, as the turnkey closed the wicket again. The two other officers of the

prison, whose duty it was to remain in the lobby, rose from the bench upon which they had been sitting, and stared at the visitors.

"The governor is within, of course," said Dick, in the same sharp tone of command that he had previously spoken in.

"Yes, sir."

"Your lordship is sure to find him at this hour," said Jack.

"Very true, your grace," said Dick.

At these words the turnkeys all made a low salaam to the spirit of nobility, that worshiped genius of Englishmen. The idea that one of the visitors was a lord and the other a grace was quite sufficient to induce the turnkeys to place their necks under their feet if they demanded it.

"Take this despatch from the Secretary of State," said Dick, as he produced the long official-looking letter that Maggs had prepared, "and give it to the governor, and say, that two gentlemen are waiting. That will do, your grace I think?"

"Certainly, my lord," said Jack.

One of the turnkeys on duty darted forward, and with a low bow and a look of great reverence took the letter.

"I will call upon the governor at once, if you please," he said.

"The gentlemen will, perhaps, step into the chaplain's private-room?" said the other officer.

"Oh, no, we prefer remaining here," said Dick. "I believe we do, your grace?"

"Certainly, my lord," said Jack. "It amuses us."

"It does—it does. The novelty of the thing is something. You can take the letter, but there is no particular hurry, my man. Don't alarm the governor by awakening him too rapidly."

"No, sir—my lord—your highness, I mean."

The officer was so impressed by the dignity of the visitors, that he fairly backed out of their presence.

"And so," said Dick, as he only waited to allow the turnkey time to get out of hearing, "this is the lobby of Newgate?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Ah! To be sure. A singular place, your grace."

"Oh, very," said Jack. "I think it will do now."

"Yes, so do I. You take that one, and I will take this."

Before the astonished officers could come to any conclusion as to what these singular words from the two distinguished noblemen could possibly mean, Dick sprang upon the man on the lock like a tiger, and grappling him by the throat, he said in a low voice—

"One word—one cry—one movement indicative of alarm, and by Heaven I will break your neck."

Jack made a dart at the other officer, and with such force that they both fell on to the floor together, and the back of the turnkey's head came with such a ringing blow against the stone floor that he lay nearly insensible. Jack was sorry to have to do it, but too much was at stake in the whole adventure for him or any one to stand upon ceremony, so he seized the officer by the cravat, and lifting his head about six inches from the floor, he brought it down again with another blow that effectually stunned him.

That officer never spoke again.

It would be difficult to say what condition of mind the officer's, whose duty it was to keep watch and ward in the lobby of Newgate were thrown into by this most unexpected attack. Certainly, if the roof of the prison had fallen in and buried all beneath it in one common ruin, they could not have been more utterly astounded.

But no time was given them for reflection.



As for the turnkey that Dick had hold of, he began tot urn black in the face from the pressure on his throat, and Jack, coming toward, them, said—

“I have disposed of my man, and will gag this fellow. I have a gag made with a cõrk and a piece of string, that will just do it.”

“That’s right, Jack.”



THE APPATITIONS IN THE GARDEN OF HAWTHORN-HOUSE.

In another moment the man was past all power of speech; and so exhausted was he by the choking process that had been going on, that, when Dick let go of him, he fell as if dead to the floor.

All this happened, inasmuch as it happened simultaneously, in much less time than it has necessarily taken us to relate it. Indeed, one minute had not

elapsed altogether from the commencement of the attack before Jack and Dick were undoubted masters of the lobby of Newgate.

So well arranged was everything, that they knew what to do next without any bother. Jack turned the key in the lock of the wicket, and opened it, stretching out his arm as a signal.

From behind the coach, then, whither they had crept, the six members of the family who were to assist in the affair emerged, and rushed up the steps of Newgate and into the lobby.

At the same moment, Maggs appeared from the narrow passage leading to the cells.

### CHAPTER CCCXIII.

#### THE ESCAPE AND THE PURSUIT—AN EXCITING SCENE.

So far, then, the enterprise had been eminently successful, and it owed all its success to the daring nature of it.

If there had been the least tampering with the difficulties that presented themselves—if there had been the smallest amount of shrinking from what there was to do, a total failure must have been the result ; but all was done, on the contrary, with calmness and absolute decision.

The turnkeys and officers in the lobby, could scarcely believe their senses. They looked about them like men in a dream.

Maggs was pale, but firm.

"Ah! what is this?" he said, for he was intent upon keeping up the character of being as much surprised at the attack as the turnkeys were.

"We will show you," said Turpin ; and he took hold of Maggs by the arm with his left hand, and clapped a pistol at his head with the other. "Show me the way to the cell of Claude Duval, or you are a dead man. Which is it to be?"

"I am cowed," said Maggs. "I can't help it. This way," he added, in a whisper to Turpin.

They both passed out of the lobby down the narrow passage leading to Claude's cell, and were met by a turnkey, who had a newspaper in his hand, and who said—

"What's the matter in the lobby, Maggs?"

With a blow from the butt-end of a pistol, Turpin stretched that man insensible on the stone floor. At the instant, then, Claude Duval sprang forward, and grasping the hand of Turpin, he cried—

"My dear friend, is it, indeed, you? Have you placed yourself in this frightful peril for me?"

"Quick," said Maggs, "on every moment hangs a life!"

"That's true," said Turpin. "Come on."

They were in the lobby again in a moment, and just as they reached it, the man who had gone with the letter to the governor came back, and said—

"The governor says he——"

Sixteen-string Jack had the man by the throat before he could say another word, and thrusting the barrel of a pistol into his mouth he whispered—

"One cry, and your brains spatter that wall."

"All's right," said Turpin.

"One moment," said a voice ; "now all's right."

The members of the family, who had been admitted by the wicket, had been busy tying the turnkeys, both by their ankles and wrists, to each other, so that they were completely helpless.

"Open the door," said Jack.

"It is."

Ding—dong ! went a bell, and then furiously it pealed forth an alarm. They looked at each other aghast.

"The alarm bell," said Jack. "I have heard it once before. Fly!"

"But who has rung it?"

"Don't stop to ask that. All we have to do is to get out of reach of it."

The wicket was flung open, and the members of the family only hung back a moment or two to allow Claude Duval and his particular friends to pass.

It was then that Dick Turpin turned upon the threshold of Newgate and addressing the turnkeys, he said—

"Now, my men, I know that you will have to put the blame of this affair upon somebody, and it is as well that the saddle should be placed upon the right horse. I will, therefore, tell you that it is my doing, and I am Richard Turpin."

The turnkeys uttered various groans, and in another moment Claude and his friends were in the open street.

The coach was gone. It had done all that it could do, and the instruction to those who had charge of it was to drive off at once as soon as the *melee* fairly began in the lobby of Newgate. This looked like desertion; but it was not such in fact, for the coach, after the affair had made that progress, could not possibly answer any good purpose.

It would have been absurd to try to escape by its aid, as such a vehicle would have stood no chance against the most ordinary pursuit, putting out of the question the fact that it could have been so very readily overtaken.

"Now for the horses, Claude," said Turpin; "they are, as they should be, at the corner of Newgate-street."

"It seems like a dream," said Duval.

"No—no," said Jack, in a voice of great emotion; "it is no dream, it is all true, and you are saved."

Claude pressed Jack's hand, and they all went up the street in a throng. They had not got above half-way, though, between the wicket of the prison and the corner of Newgate-street, when they heard some sounds of strife in advance of them:

"Dick," said Jack. "forward."

"Push on," cried Claude. "There is no time for hesitation, now. Push on, I beg of you."

"We have no need," said Dick. "Those of our friends who have charge of the horses are coming back to us here."

The noise assumed a more serious character, and in a few moments it was quite evident that something was a'raiss. What that something was, then explained itself, as one of them who had charge of the cattle came running towards Claude and his friends, saying—

"The watch—the watch! Where are you all?"

"Here," said Turpin. "What is it?"

"A strong party of the City watch came upon us, and tried to take us into custody with the horses."

"Ah, indeed! Forward, friends—forward!"

The flash of the lanterns of the watch, and the rattle of their staves, now came quite plainly upon the ears of the confederates, and those noises, joined to the incessant clanging of the prison bell, made up a species of alarm that in a little time must be productive of serious consequences to the fugitives, if they could not rapidly escape from so dangerous a vicinity.

The sudden charge of Claude and his friends, with the members of the family with them, had the effect of routing the watch.

Dick got hold of one of the iron short staves then in use by the night-watch, and laid about him with such effect, that half-a-dozen of the foe were prostrated in a few moments.

There was one watchman who was a tall, powerful man; and while he fought with his stick, he continued with his other hand to spring his rattle, so that he engaged the enemy and gave an alarm at the same time.

Maddened by excitement and the dread of being dragged back to his cell at Newgate, Claude Duval, with a cry of rage, sprang upon the man, and they both fell together. To wrest his rattle from him, and give him a blow on the head with it, that put an end to his mortal career, was then, to Claude, the work of a moment ; and he rose, flushed and heated, to his feet.

The watch were dispersed.

"Now, Claude, off with you," said Dick. "Don't stop another moment. Mount—mount at once !"

"D—n that prison bell," said Jack.

"Is it one?" said a voice.

"Yes," said Dick. "Disperse now."

Upon this, the members of the family who had done such good service, and who, up to that time, had kept by Claude and his friends, with one accord scampered away in different directions. Some took their course up Giltspur-street into Smithfield—some ran down Skinner-street, and found shelter in the rookery to the right of Holborn Hill, and others again made their way into the city, and some to the district at the back of the Royal Exchange.

In the course of half-a-minute they were all gone.

The only persons that remained then upon the spot of the encounter with the City watch were Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, Jack, and the landlord of the public-house in Barbican.

"Where is Maggs?" said the landlord.

"He stays. He is not suspected," said Dick. "Come on."

They were all on horseback in a moment, now ; and, for the first time, then, since he had left the lobby of Newgate, Claude Duval felt as if he might draw a long breath. The effect of feeling that they were on horseback once again, was very great upon Dick and Jack. They both felt as though, at that moment, all danger had ceased, and the daring enterprise had thoroughly succeeded in every possible way.

"Off with you all," said the landlord ; "and as there is no pursuit, I will go home at once. If there had been, I should have ridden a few miles into the country with you ; for an extra hand might be of great service to you all, just now."

"It might be everything," said Claude ; "but, thank Heaven, it is not wanted, I live—I breathe again."

They had just put the horses in motion, when they heard a shout behind them, and the clatter of horses' feet, and they all looked round, and directed their glances towards Newgate. The sight that then met their gaze was quite sufficient to show them that all was not over quite yet, and that, probably, the danger of the enterprise was only then in earnest about to begin.

It was well known that at an inn-yard, immediately opposite to the door of the common entrance to Newgate, some half dozen horses were always kept, night and day, ready for the road, in case of any emergency requiring their use. The spectacle that met the eye of Claude and his friends, then, consisted of these horses being brought out, and of a throng of men waiting to mount them, and eagerly putting themselves ready for a chase after the fugitives.

"Ah," said Dick, "we shall have some rough work, yet."

"We shall, indeed," said Jack.

Claude's eyes flashed with excitement as he glanced at the officers, and the colour deepened upon his cheek as he spoke.

"Let them come," he said. "This puts one in mind of old times. Don't it you, Jack ? Let them come."

"It does, Claude."

"Which is to be our way?" said Dick Turpin.

"North," said Jack.

"So be it," said Claude. "On—on."

"I go with you," said the landlord. "Four can make a better fight than three can."

Without more ado, they all four now trotted down Skinner-street, for they felt that their cattle might have to do hard work, and they did not wish to put them to any speed at once. The valley of Holborn-hill lay before them, and then there was the ascent of the hill—which was much worse than it is now—so that they prudently saved the speed and the courage of their horses.

Any one, now, to see the four men trotting so quietly and so comfortably down the hill, would little have suspected that they knew they would be followed by those who were armed for their destruction, and that, in reality, it was a matter of life or death with them.

As regarded the pursuit of the officers, though, one of two things must take place at its outset.

In their eagerness of the pursuit, the officers might put their horses to all the speed they could muster at once, and so incapacitate them for any long-continued exertion, or they must imitate the more prudent conduct of the highwaymen, and trot gently and easily until they came to a level, when, after the horses had got warmed to their work, they would be able to act much more efficiently.

In either of these cases, the fugitives would be able fully to maintain the advantage with which they started, for they would be upon the level before the officers could reach them either way, and the probability was, that they were very much better mounted than the police could possibly, upon the spur of the occasion, be.

"Take it easy," said Dick, as they passed the end of Fleet Market—"take it easy. I don't see anything of them yet."

"It's all right, if we once get the rise of the hill between us and them," said Jack. "If they blow their horses in galloping up it, or walk them to save their breath, it will be equally good for us."

"There they are," said the landlord of the public-house.

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#### CHAPTER CCCXIV.

##### THE CHASE FOR THE FUGITIVES CONTINUES INTO THE OPEN COUNTRY.—AN ENCOUNTER.

EVEN as the landlord spoke, the mounted officers, to the number of nine men, well armed, and eager for the recapture of the prisoner, for whom they were offered at once five hundred pounds amongst them, appeared upon the brow of Snow-hill, a few paces from St. Sepulchre's Church.

Under ordinary circumstances, the proximity of the officers to Claude and his friends, would have been rather alarmingly close; but, considering the nature of the ground, the distance was in reality great.

The officers only paused a moment to catch sight of their prey, as they fully believed Claude and his party must soon become, and then, with loud cries, they dashed onwards.

It was quite evident that they thought their numbers would suffice to put an end to all opposition, and to take prisoners of the small mounted party at once, and hence they disregarded the hill, but went down it at a pace that alarmed their cattle.

By good luck, rather than any good management, they all reached the hollow of Fleet Market in safety, for nothing alarms a horse more than to hurry him from a stable, and ride him recklessly in the dark down a hill. If they had had two or three falls among them, it would only have been in the natural order of things.

But, as we say, luck befriended them, and they reached the hollow in safety; but by that time Duval and his friends were at Holborn Bars.

Without the slightest pause, then, the officers spurred their already frightened cattle up Holborn-hill, which was the most foolish thing they could possibly do;



for when they reached the top, it was not possible to get a good clear gallop out of the horses.

Claude and his party had reached St. Giles's by that time, and the horses were in as fresh a condition as when they started—in fact, they were in a better condition for work, for they were just getting warm and comfortable.

The officers, then, began to find out the mistake they had made in going off with such a burst, and they patted their horses, and only walked them between Ely-place and Holborn Bars.

Thus they lost more time than as if they had taken things easily at first, which is generally the case in all concerns of life, as well as in horse-riding.

Now, the highwaymen began to show the great advantage of the judicious manner in which they had managed their steeds, for they started up Tottenham-court-road at such a pace, that it was a doubtful thing if the officers' horses could come near it under any circumstances; and yet it was an easy pace, too, and by the time they emerged into the Hampstead-road, they were all four abreast, and going at a steady gallop, which the horses kept up without the use of whip or spur.

The officers, however, had done all they could to repair the error they at first committed at starting, and having, in some measure, allowed their horses to get breath enough, they, too, fairly began the chase, and the retreating party could hear the clatter of the horses' feet as they came on at all the speed they could make after them.

"Do we beat them?" said the landlord.

"Yes," said Jack; "three sets to two."

"That will do."

Camden Town was passed, and then came the district of Pancras Vale, during which the highwaymen allowed their horses to moderate their pace a little, as the road was very heavy in that place, as, in fact, it generally is, from taking so much of the surface drainage of the high-land to the north of it.

Jack now pushed on a few paces to advance, for no one could be better acquainted with the North-road than he was. He knew every house and every tree upon it; and so was a most efficient guide, indeed, to the others.

Dick now and then looked back, but he could see nothing of the officers, and the sound of their horses' feet was no longer to be heard, either; but that might be owing to the fact that they were off the stones, and were on soft country road.

"We distance them," said Claude, "I think."

"And I know it," said Jack. "Follow me, and keep to this side of the hill; here, and we shall be able to get up it at a better pace."

The hill they had reached, now, was that which constitutes the great evil of the Hampstead road for horses and carriages. Haverstock-hill was at that time completely destitute of houses on either side.

With the exception of the old inn, the Load of Hay, and Steele's Cottage, as the little white cottage to the left of the road just on the summit of the hill was called, owing to its having been the residence of Steele, the essayist, there were no houses after leaving the centre of Pancras Vale.

Up Haverstock-hill they went at a walk; and when upon the summit of it, just by Steele's cottage, they all turned, as if by one accord, to look back from that eminence at their pursuers, and at the great city they had left behind them.

In the middle of Pancras Vale they saw the officers coming on at full speed.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine of them," counted Dick Turpin. "That's rather long odds, don't you think, Claude Duval?"

"It's no matter," said Claude. "Nine horses make no greater speed than one, and we must never let them get near us."

"But yet," added Dick, "what say you to having a shot at them for this pursuit?"

"Better not," said Jack. "Push on, I say. They must walk up this hill—that is as clear as fate; and by the time they stand upon this spot, we may be on Hampstead Heath, if we like."

"On—on, then!" said Claude.

"Follow!" cried Jack. "I can take you easily up the next hill, and I think we had better go right through the village."

"Be it so."

Jack was well mounted, and he now put the horses of his friends to their metal, for he got over the bit of hard ground at a tremendous rate. It is but a mile, after all, although, after traversing the hill, it looks a long one; but the mounted highwaymen were over it, and walking their steeds again up Red Lion Hill, in an incredibly short space of time, indeed.

They could now see nothing of the officers, as they were hidden by the brow of Haverstock-hill.

"Is it that we are so high in the world," said Dick, "that makes the place look so bright?"

"No," laughed the landlord; "but the morning is coming. We shall have broad daylight about us in another hour, or hour and a half at the outside. Don't you see how the white fog down there on the low heath is coiling about, and beginning to think of dispersing for the day?"

"Oh, yes; I see it—I see it."

"It is a sweet sight," said Claude Duval, "after a time spent in a cell in Newgate."

"On—on!" said Jack.

They followed him up Red Lion Hill, and keeping to the side of the road to the left, they avoided some of the steeper bits, and so they rode through Hampstead without meeting a living soul, for no one was yet up; and just as they turned Heath-street into the open heath, the officers in pursuit were trotting up Red Lion Hill, and beginning to have some serious doubts with regard to the success of their enterprise.

"Confound him!" muttered one of them; "I know what Claude Duval is; and that Turpin, too; they would think nothing of going right on for a couple of hundred miles, for the fun of the thing."

"But their cattle would fail them," said another.

"Hang them, I don't know that. Those fellows know how to manage a horse, so as to get just about double the work out of him that any one else can at about half the distress."

"Is it true," said another, "that Turpin rode to York with hardly a stop by the way?"

"Yes, it is; and some said that he killed his Black Bess by so doing; but he didn't; for if my eyes don't deceive me, she is now on the road, for he rides her at this present time."

"The pursuit is hopeless."

"Who says that?" cried the chief officer. "Who says pursuit is hopeless, I should like to know?"

"I did, Mr. Godfrey."

"Oh, it's you Maggs, is it? Well, I certainly should not have thought you were the sort of man to flinch."

"I ain't flinching, Mr. Godfrey; but I say that, if Dick Turpin is on his black mare, Bess, as her calls her, we may go after him to the borders of England before we catch him."

"Never mind about how Turpin is mounted," said the chief officer. "He won't, after all he has done, and after all that has happened, desert the others, and you should recollect they have not all of them a devil in the shape of a black mare to carry them about."

"That's true," said Maggs.

"Then it's not much consequence what Turpin could do, if he don't do it;

so come on. We will, and we must have them. Recollect that there is a price upon Turpin's head, as well as upon Duval's."

"That's all right enough. But who are the other two, Mr. Godfrey, do you think? Who can they be?"

"Nobody, you may depend; and very likely, if it came to a brush, they would be off, and leave Turpin and Duval in the lurch. Then I don't myself see how nine men are not to take two."

"I don't know that," muttered one of the officers. "That Duval is a brave devil for fighting, and so is Turpin. It will be the death of a few of us, I reckon; but come on—I'm willing."

"So am I," said Maggs.

"That's right, comrades," said the chief officer. "Willingness does anything and everything in this world."

It will be seen, by this brief conversation that had taken place among the officers, that they had not, after all, a very great hope of being able to capture Duval and his friends, although they felt that it was their duty to continue to endeavour so to do, let the peril they would have to encounter in so doing be what it might; so on they went up the hill.

In the meantime, Claude Duval and his friends had fairly emerged on to the open heath, and the first living things they saw, were a couple of men, well mounted, and in scarlet hunting-coats.

It appeared, too, that the two huntsmen, who, no doubt, were going across the country to the meeting of somebody's hounds, saw Claude Duval and his party at the same time, for they stopped and looked at each other a little incredulously.

"What the deuce do they mean?" said Dick. "Surely two men are not going to stop us all four on suspicion?"

"Hardly," laughed the landlord.

After a few words with each other, the two gentlemen in the scarlet coats trotted gently on towards the party that was advancing, and when they got near enough to speak, one of them said—

"Are you officers?"

"No," said Dick.

"It's them! Come on—come on!"

As he spoke he turned his horse's head on one side, and was about to gallop off, but Claude caught his horse by the bridle, saying—

"Sir, what made you ask that question of us?"

"Hands off, rascal, or I will knock you down! What is it to you why I asked it? I don't know but I ought to detain you all, for you may be the very man who escaped from Newgate a few hours ago."

Claude and his friends looked at each other in amazement, for they could not imagine by what process this man had found out the fact that they had escaped, when they had ridden at tolerable speed all the way, and the news could hardly have got to Hampstead Heath before them.

Turpin had laid hold of the bridle of the other mounted man, and for a few moments there was silence on both sides.

"You have done it, Mr. Mills," said he who had not before spoken.

"Done what?" said Claude.

"I will say no more," said Mr. Mills, as his friend called him. "Hands off, fellow. I am armed, I tell you, and you will best consult your own safety by letting me pass you, and riding on."



THE WOUNDED SPY INFORMS THE "FAMILY" OF THE PLACE BEING BESIEGED.

## CHAPTER CCCXV.

DETAILS VARIOUS ADVENTURES ON THE GREAT NORTH ROAD.

CLAUDE DUVAL was so surprised at the fact of a person leisurely riding up Hampstead Heath having a knowledge that there had been an escape from Newgate only a few hours before, that he was not at all disposed to let him go until he explained the mystery.

"Hark, you, sir," said Claude. "It's a bad thing to be too curious, but in one's own affairs we may be pardoned the feeling. If you don't tell me this

moment, for we have no time to spare, how you came to be aware that there had been an escape from Newgate, I will blow your brains out."

As he spoke, Claude took a pistol from his saddle, and placed the muzzle of it in rather uncomfortable proximity to the eye of the gentleman in the scarlet coat.

"Would you murder me?"

"Yes. One—two—three—four——"

"Stop! What are you counting for?"

"I am going to pull the trigger at twelve. Five—six—seven—eight—nine."

"Stop! I will tell you. The governor of Newgate sent a man on a fleet hunter across the country to let all the magistracy know of the fact of the escape of Claude Duval from prison, and it was only ten minutes ago that he called at my house, yonder, and told me, and then he galloped on."

"You are a magistrate, then?"

"I am."

"And your friend?"

"Oh, he is only a visitor of mine."

"And where, gentlemen, were you going?"

"To Edgeware, to meet the hounds."

"Will you give me your word of honour that you will go on your way, and take no notice of having met us?"

"No."

"Very well. I don't blame you for saying no to such a proposition. I think if I were in your case I should say as much; but we shall be under the necessity of stopping your sport for to-day. Dick, we will leave these two gentlemen on foot, and take their horses with us for a few miles; then we will let them go, and, no doubt, their owners will get them easily again."

"I resist such treatment," said the gentleman who was with the magistrate, and he aimed a blow at Dick Turpin with his riding-whip, which was very heavily loaded. The blow missed, and Dick said, quite calmly—

"Don't try that again, sir. I have patience, but I don't know the moment when it may leave me."

Making a dart at this person, Dick got hold of him by the collar, and had him off his horse in a moment, and threw him on the heath.

The magistrate very quickly dismounted.

"One man," he said, "can do but little against four, and I don't think I can do any good at all by throwing my life away. Here is my watch, and here is my purse."

"Keep them, sir. As for your friend, he is fair game."

"I have him all right," said Jack, who had dismounted, and got a handsome gold watch, and a well-filled purse, and rather bulky pocket-book from the unhorsed man, who had been so roughly placed on the heath by Dick Turpin.

"Who are you?" said the magistrate to Claude.

"Guess," said Duval, with a smile.

"You are Claude Duval?"

"I am, sir. Good morning."

"Stop a moment—stop. Yet, no—I ought not—yes, I will. Don't go through North-end."

"Thank you, sir. Here is your horse again. Allow me to return him to you as fresh as I took him. You can go now, and enjoy your day's sport, and I hope it will be a good one."

"On—on!" cried Jack. "Look behind you, Claude."

Claude did look behind him, and he saw, just coming on to the heath, the officers, who had made their way up Holly-bush Hill, and so emerged a little to the westward of where Claude and his friends had come on to the heath.

"Hilloa! Help!—help!" shouted the gentleman who had been laid upon the ground by Turpin—"help!"



"You had better be quiet, sir," said Duval. "This is rather bad conduct of you."

"Murder!—murder!"

"On—on!" said Jack. "We have not a minute to lose."

They just paused to try to count the number of the officers who were now in pursuit, but they could not do so at once, so they would not delay time, and off they went along the heath road at a great pace.

"Recollect," cried Claude, "not to go by North-end."

"By Jove! we can't help it, now, for we are in the direct road for it," said Turpin. "Duval, you know we should have taken the right-hand road across the heath, if we meant to avoid North-end, and, instead of that, we have taken the left."

"It can't be helped now," said Claude. "Get your pistols ready."

They could hear the shouts of the officers, now, quite plainly as they came along the heath; but they very imprudently made a pause at the point where the encounter had taken place with the two huntsmen; for he who had been unhorsed by Dick Turpin was still calling out for help in such a way; that the officers fully expected he had been murdered, or was in some terrible extremity.

Every moment, now, was so precious to the fugitives, that in the little time that the officers paused around the gentleman in the scarlet coat, they increased their distance by double the space from their pursuers.

The real fact was, that some of the officers had not their hearts in the job that they were put upon at all. Well they knew that if they should succeed in coming to close quarters with those whom they were pursuing, it would be anything but an easy conquest they would make of them, if they made a conquest at all, which was an exceedingly doubtful proposition, as they well knew.

There were, as they saw, four desperate, determined men. They knew that one was Claude Duval, of whose courage the most fabulous stories were told, and passed current.

Another they knew was Dick Turpin, of whose prowess they likewise had had pretty good grounds to judge of. Then they could not doubt but that whoever the other two were that were to be found upon such an occasion in such company, they had been well chosen by Claude and Turpin.

It was no wonder, then, that, under such circumstances, the ardour of the officers should cool down a little as they proceeded.

That some four or five of them would probably be killed in the encounter with Duval's party, if such should take place, was a contingency that bore such an impress of truth, that it was difficult to doubt it; and, although the officers had no great tenderness for each other, yet the doubt as to which of them would fall for the benefit of the survivors was one of the most uncomfortable ideas in the world, and infected all the party with

"The pale cast of fear."

Hence, probably, it was that they were not very angry to find an excuse in the balling of the scarlet-coated gentleman on the ground to pause awhile, and to let the pursued get to a more respectable distance in advance of them.

Certainly, if one or two stopped, the others were sure to do so; for if they thought their force hardly strong as it was in its entire integrality, they would hardly think of dividing their force.

Indeed, if it had not been for the determined man who had the command of the party, the probability is, that the pursuit would never have lasted so far as Hampstead Heath at all; but he was a prudent man, and had a reputation to lose, as well as much to gain, by the affair.

"Now, sir," he said, to the scarlet-coated individual, "if you are dying, say at once who struck the blow, or fired the shot, for our time is valuable."

"Dying?"

"Yes. You are mortally wounded, I suppose?"

"No, thank God! Beyond a bruise, I fancy, owing to being rather roughly made to fall on the heath, I am not aware that anything is particularly the matter with me."

"Then why, in the name of all that is abominable, did you bawl out in that way so for?"

"To help to capture the rascals."

"Oh, bother take you. You have hindered us five minutes, and that's a mile. Come on, comrades, we will have them yet—come on."

"Yes—yes," said the others. "On—on!"

They said "On—on!" but if they could only have found some direct excuse for going down Hampstead-hill again, instead of turning along its heath, how much happier they would really have been—for the greater part of them, at all events.

In the meantime Claude Duval was not at all unmindful of the warning he had had not to pass through North-end, and he called out to his companions—

"There is danger at North-end; but our best plan is to dash through it, I think."

"So do I," said Dick Turpin.

"No doubt of that," said the landlord. "What is the danger, Claude Duval, do you know?"

"No."

"Never mind," said Dick. "On—on! is the word."

The reader who is at all familiar with the beautiful and picturesque Heath of Hampsted, is, no doubt, well aware that across it, going northward, there are two roads.

The road to the right leads to Highgate, if pursued for a distance of about one mile and a half.

The road to the left leads through North-end, towards Golden Green and Hounslow, one of the most country-like and picturesque portions of the environs of London even to the present day.

It was the road to the left that Claude Duval and his three friends took.

That road was, at the time of our story, exceedingly steep and precipitous, although it was partially lowered by a cutting being made through a high portion of the hill. That cutting is now very considerably lowered, so that as you proceed along that bit of road, you have a bank upon each side of you at some parts of thirty feet or more in height, covered to the right hand with luxuriant wild vegetation.

It was through this cutting, then, which terminates immediately upon the little cluster of houses called North-end, Hampstead, that Duval and his friends galloped at a good pace.

The idea that there was danger at North-end had induced them all to prepare for it as best they might.

Claude had pushed on a pace or two in advance, and had loosened his pistols in the holsters, so that they were ready for immediate use. The others had likewise seen that their arms were in order.

For a moment or two Claude was of opinion that the danger had not arrived, inasmuch as the place looked as peaceable and quiet as it possibly could; but it was only for a few fleeting moments that he had that opinion.

There is rather a steep descent just at the other side of North-end, known by the name of Golden-hill, and on one side of that—the left—was a garden wall, extending some distance along the road, and then branching at a right angle into a meadow.

Just as Duval reached the brow of the hill there emerged from the corner of this wall ten or twelve mounted men, headed by one dressed like a gentleman, who immediately called out, in a loud voice—

"I summon you to surrender, in the name of the law!"

"Oh, indeed," said Claude. "Charge!"

On they swept, but before they got up to the assemblage a rattling discharge of fire-arms came among them.

"Fire!" cried Claude.

Four well-directed pistol-shots in a moment were sent into the throng, and from the confusion that ensued it was pretty evident some mischief had been done among them.

"On—on!" cried Claude.

In an instant they swept past the officers, and in their progress Turpin knocked one man off his saddle by a well-directed blow from the handle of a heavy riding-whip that he had with him, and so they cleared the danger at North-end.

A slight attempt was made to pursue them, but soon given up; and when Claude Duval saw that, he drew rein at Golden Green, and said, anxiously—

"Is anybody hit?"

"No," cried Dick and the landlord both in a breath.

"Nothing of consequence," said Jack.

"Ah, they have touched you, Jack."

"In the arm, Claude, but really I don't think it is anything. I can bend my arm well enough, so the bone is not touched, and I think the bullet went right through and is gone, so that will be all the better."

"Confound them," muttered Claude, as he bound a handkerchief round Jack's arm, "they came out to hunt me with all the gusto that they would bring to the hunting of a fox."

"More of it, Claude," said Dick.

"Do not wait here," said Jack. "Never mind me, Claude. Let us push on. It will not do to let the officers get up to us, you know."

"I don't know that," said Dick.

"You don't know it?"

"No, Jack. The fact is, my opinion of the officers is such that they will not, if they can help it, come to close quarters with us. They are pursuing a policy which is at once as cowardly as it will be effectual."

"What is that you say, Dick?" said Claude. "You have an idea, I see, about the conduct of the officers that we should all know. What is it?"

"I know his idea," said the landlord, as he patted his cheek with his handkerchief.

"Ah, you are hit, too," said Claude.

"You can't call it a hit. The fact is, one of the bullets just scraped the skin off my cheek, but it has begun bleeding now at a great rate. It is nothing, though."

"Narrow escapes both," said Claude, glancing at Jack and the landlord. "A little nearer and that straggling volley would have been fatal to us."

"Oh, do ride on," said Jack. "Why do we wait here?"

"On, then," cried Dick, "and I can tell you what my idea of the policy of the officers is, as we go along."

"Do so, Dick."

"Well, it is just this. They don't want to come up with us, but they want to hunt us, you see, always hoping that we may be constantly meeting other foes in front of us, who will have a shy at us and knock some of us over; and if that sort of fun goes on long, you know, why, in the natural order of things, we must at last be done for."

"That's about it," said the landlord. "You see, they know if they come to close quarters it will just be a brush for a few minutes, at the end of which some three or four of them will be put out of their troubles in this world, even although they should succeed in bringing us all down, and your officers don't like that way of doing business."

"Do you hear that, Jack?" said Claude.

"I do."

"And you agree with it?"

"It is, I am sorry to say, too sensible, and too much in accordance with my own experience, to doubt. It is quite clear that we must force them to close quarters, and take the chances of the fight. Just fancy our running the gauntlet through fifty miles of country in this sort of way. To be sure, if we could find a hiding-place, or play the double upon them, it would be better."

"They are too close upon our track for that," said Dick.

"Well, I'm ~~rather afraid~~ they are, Dick."

"And all this is on my account," moaned Claude.

"Don't you flatter yourself it is any such thing," said Dick. "That's not it at all."

"Oh, yes—yes, it is; and now I beg of you all three to ride on, and leave me at the first narrow part of the road, where I can make a good defence for some time, and so block up the passage until you can attain a place of safety."

"It's of no use your speaking in that way, Claude," said Dick; "we don't mean to do it, so there's an end of that. What now, Jack, in your experience and knowledge of the road, do you advise?"

"It is quite clear," said Jack, "that if we are to get into any hiding-place, or to double upon the officers across the country in any way, we must beat them off first, so that they shall, for a time, lose sight of us."

"True enough that, Jack."

"Then, the only way to do that is to make a bold stand somewhere that we can pick out for ourselves as favourable, and let them come up to us, and so give them a taste of our quality. The head of some well-wooded lane would be just the thing; and if we ride on a little further, we shall find plenty of such places."

"Agreed," said Dick. "Come, Claude, what do you say to that?"

"I say agreed, likewise, if you will not leave me."

"That we will not. Why, what could put such a thing into your head? Come on, now. We can get a little more speed out of our cattle; and as they will have a little rest, now is the time to do so."

Jack, by common consent, was permitted to take the lead, as his acquaintance with that road was an exceedingly intimate one, since it was for many years the scene of his early exploits. It might fairly be said of him, that upon that road—

"There was not a tree, a house, or stone,  
To that bold rider there unknown;"

and at that time of day, changes did not take place so rapidly in the suburbs of London as they do now.

And yet, probably, as regards the natural scenery northward of the metropolis, after getting some six or seven miles off, we have less to lament in that way than we could possibly imagine.

In the surface of country lying between the road from Hampstead to Mill-hill on the one side, and the Edgware-road on the other, there are some of the finest green lanes that any part of England can possibly exhibit.

There will be found real country vegetation; and although really so near to the great city, the silence and the country-look seem so natural, that we could place any one there, and make him believe that he was hundreds of miles away from London.

We trust that some of our readers will take an exploring walk to that locality.

The party now passed a little miserable road-side public-house, which looked as if the roof had crushed it; for it was all on one side, and conveyed the evident idea to any one that a tolerable kick would send the whole edifice over.

A couple of men at the door of the little hotel took a good stare at Claude's party as it flitted rapidly past; but no other notice was bestowed upon it.

They now got to rather a narrow bit of road, beyond which was a steep hill, to the foot of which a cart laden with a quantity of young timber had just arrived.

Jack drew up.

"Claude," he said, "there is only a boy with that cart of timber, and there is a lane close by here that will suit us very well; but it will suit us a great deal better if some of that timber were thrown across the entrance of it."

"Capital," said Claude. "Suppose we take possession?"

"Might must be might," said Dick, as he rode at once up to the boy, and called out to him.

"Hilloa, my lad! would you like a guinea or a knock on the head?"

"A guinea," said the boy.

"Very well, you shall have it; but you must obey our directions, and if you don't, you will get the knock on the head first, and then have to obey them after all."

"Eh?" said the boy, with such a stupid look, that it was pretty evident some parts of Dick's speech were completely lost upon him.

"Don't you understand me?"

"Anan!"

"Oh, well, I suppose you don't. Jack, where is the lane?"

"Just yonder, by the chestnut trees."

"Very well. Hold my horse a moment, some of you."

"I will," said Claude.

Dick Turpin at once dismounted; and laying hold of the leading horse of the two that drew the cart, he began to lead it to the corner of the lane.

"Stop!" said the boy. "I mustn't—"

"Get out of the way!"

"Oh, but—Murder!"

Claude had laid the lash of his whip over the boy's shoulders with an efficacy that rather startled him; and after putting himself into all sorts of grotesque attitudes to get rid of the pain, he called out—

"I'll go and tell maister."

And then off he set up the hill.

"A good riddance," said Dick.

A few moments sufficed to get the cart to the end of the lane, and then Dick unyoked both the horses, and let them go where they liked. The landlord dismounted, and helped Dick, so that they soon had out of the cart a lot of timber, and had formed a pretty good barricade at the end of the lane, and then they, by dint of great exertion, turned the cart over on its side likewise, so that the lane was completely stopped up for horsemen or carriages.

Of course, they had taken care not to shut themselves out.

All this working, with the good will that they set about it, did not take above five minutes to do, and then they all four dismounted, and looked carefully to their arms.

They found they could fire three volleys easily, without waiting to re-charge their weapons, so they considered they were pretty well provided against the contingencies of the combat.

Claude now looked more carefully than before to Jack's arm, and he had the satisfaction to find that it had ceased bleeding, although it was more painful than it had been some short time before.

"Don't attempt to move it, Jack," he said.

"I will not if I can help it," replied Jack. "Do you hear the officers, any of you?"

"No," was the general answer; and then Duval asked Jack if he knew where the lane led to.

"Yes," he replied; "it goes right away to Edgeware; but it takes many a turn and wind before you can get there by it, and in some places it is so narrow that the branches of the bushes on each side would touch even a foot passenger. Our object, though, will not be to pursue the lane above a mile or so, at all events. We can do better, I think, by then taking to the meadows, and keeping all snug till nightfall."



"Yes," said Claude. "When the sun of to-day sets I shall begin to think that all is right. We can give our horses a rest till midnight, and then I should say let us get westward of London, for in this direction there will be a hue and cry for a week to come."

"There will, Claude," said Dick. "But now I hear them. Keep close, all of you, and let the horses be as close to the trees as possible."

## CHAPTER CCCXVI.

THE OFFICERS ATTACK CLAUDE AND HIS PARTY, AND GET THE WORST OF IT.

THE greatest possible care was taken now by Dick Turpin to put his own steed out of danger of chance shots, as well as those of his friends.

By tying the creatures by the bridles to some of the low branches of the trees that were in the hedgerow, they were pretty well protected from any mischief the officers could do them. Besides, it was not to be supposed that the officers would waste a shot upon a horse when they had a man to fire at.

The clatter of the horses' hoofs of the pursuing party could now plainly enough be heard upon the road, and it was quite clear that in a few minutes they would reach the spot where Claude and his friends were, as it were, barricaded.

"They may pass us," said Jack.

"Well, it is possible," said Claude.

"But not very likely," said the landlord, as he still patted his cheek. "They keep rather too good a look out for that. If it were twilight now, such a thing might happen easily enough."

"Yes. But if it had been twilight," said Dick, "I think we could have done better than we are now doing."

"Hush!" said Claude. "Here they are."

Claude was right. The officers had reached the corner of the lane, and they all but passed it in their hurry; and if one of them had not uttered an exclamation, from which his companions conjectured him to be in danger, the chief of the party would have ridden on, without being aware that he was passing the very people he was so anxious to come up to.

"Hilloa!" cried that vigilant officer, who could not hold his tongue. "What's this?"

"What?" said the chief. "Ha, I see! Here thy are. Halt!"

The officers reined in their prancing steeds.

"Nine of them," said Jack.

"Yes—only nine!" said Claude.

"Take care of yourselves," said Dick. "They have their pistols. What do you say, Claude, to giving them a taste of our quality?"

"I don't like to fire first upon these occasions," said Duval; "but in this case I feel that I am completely in your hands, and will do as you do."

"Well—well, let them have the first fire, then, if they like it."

"Look about, my men," said the chief officer. "The rascals are here, and we are sure to have them; but it is our duty to do so with as little loss as possible."

"Certainly," said all the officers.

The chief officer was a man of much courage, and heedless of the pistols of the highwaymen, which he could see plainly in their hands, he rode up close to the barricade they had erected at the corner of the lane, and spoke to them.

"Resistance is little short of madness," he said. "You know as well as I do that we must have you."

"Go back, sir!" said Claude.

"I know you, Claude Duval," added the officer; "and it is quite out of the question for you to keep at large. The whole country will be armed against you."

"Hark you, sir," said Dick Turpin. "I can inform you that we are determined



MAGGS VISITS CLAUDE TO TELL HIM OF THE PROJECTED ESCAPE.

to defend ourselves to the last extremity. If there should come any loss of life or any grievous hurts upon this occasion, they will lie at your door, inasmuch as if you leave us alone we will leave you alone."

"Oh, this is nonsense!" said the officer. "I know you, too. You are Richard Turpin, for whose apprehension rewards the reach the sum of eight hundred pounds."

"I don't see," said Dick, "that the amount of the reward for me holds out any inducement to me to give myself up. I am not aware that I should get any of it."

"Perhaps you know me," said Jack.

"No, I don't—nor do I know your other companion; but Jack Ketch is not very particular."

"If we were angry now, and wished to take offence," said Turpin, "that speech would be your last."

"Oh, nonsense! you are not all out of your senses, I suppose? There can be no good in resistance."

"We are not convinced of that."

"Then convince yourselves. Here we are, more than two to one, and as well armed as you can possibly be, so what can you expect as the issue of a struggle?"

"We shall see."

"And, likewise, we are now doing our duty, while you are but criminals waiting justice."

"Don't it strike you that the preservation of our lives is about as strong a stimulus to exertion as your wish to get hold of the reward you speak of, my friend?"

The officer bit his lip at this; for, in his heart, he knew that he could not depend upon the men he had with him. Hence was it that he was so exceedingly anxious to make terms if he could with the foe.

"Now, listen to me," he said. "I dare not hold out any hopes to you, Claude Duval, nor to you, Richard Turpin, for you have both committed so many crimes that the law won't be interfered with; but I put it to you, now, whether it is not better quietly to give yourselves up without any more ado, than to be taken with the addition of another murder or two to answer for?"

"Cool, that," said Dick.

"Come, now, your answer."

"It is just this; that if I am attacked, and I defend myself, I think killing no murder."

"I am much of the same opinion," said Claude, "and so we mean to let you commence the strife; but woe be to you if you do; for I tell you, Mr. Officer, that, notwithstanding all your bother, not a man of you shall leave this spot alive. I am Claude Duval, and it is pretty well known that I ever do my best to keep my word."

"Well," said the officer, "you will see that—that—"

The officer, who was a little way off, looked dreadfully fidgety as Claude spoke the words we have recorded in his cool, calm, determined manner.

"I appeal to you two, who I do not know," added the officer. "Up to the present your only offence that I know of is, that you have ridden a few miles in the company of two notorious felons; but I warn you, if you lift a hand against the officers of justice you are with them equally guilty; so I ask you both to save your lives."

"Well, Jack," said Dick, "you hear him."

"It requires no answer," said Jack.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes. Go your way, man, and don't be making a fool of yourself by prating here such nonsense. You have had your answer. We are four to nine, it seems; but we mean to fight—That is all you require to know."

"Take that," said the officer, as he fired a pistol at Jack's head, "and that puts you at your ease, my fine fellow, whoever you are."

"Tracherous rascal!" said Claude, and on the instant, as the officer turned to fly, he fired at him.

The officer uttered a yell and fell back off his horse.

"Help! help!" he cried. "I—oh, help—dark—night—Fire! Oh mercy!"

The bullet had entered the back of his head, and with the utterance of that last word, "Mercy," he was a dead man.

"Jack, did he hit you?" said Claude.

"No."

"Thank God! Ah! what is this?"

The landlord of the public-house lay upon the ground, and his death-like pale face told the tale of where the officer's bullet had gone.

"You are hit, then?" said Claude.

"Rather. It passed Jack and found me, you see, that's all—that's all, I'm done for, now!"

"It was a foul and treacherous shot."

"Look out!" cried Dick Turpin.

The officers suddenly advanced and fired a volley, which was as promptly returned by Claude's party, although, now, they could only fire three shots at a time.

"At them again!" cried one of the officers, "one of 'em is done. At them again—fire away!"

Another volley came shattering among the trees, and Claude's hat flew off with a couple of bullets in it.

"Blaze away," said Dick, as calmly as possible, and he fired again. Claude and Jack did the same, and then again.

This continuous fire seemed rather to astonish the officers, and Jack, who was by the landlord, possessed himself of his pistols, and kept on firing at them.

Three of the officers had fallen from their horses to the ground, and another having his horse wounded, was ran away with at a mad gallop by the infuriated animal. Dick Turpin had received a slight wound, but Claude was unhurt. There were still five officers, however, to three of the highwaymen, and for a moment or two they ceased.

"Fire!" cried Claude.

They heard him, and in a moment one shouted out—"We shall all be killed!" and turned and fled. The others immediately followed his example, and they tore off at a much greater speed than they had ever exerted in pursuing the highwaymen.

"Load again," said Claude, "they may be back upon us."

Not a word was now spoken till all their pistols were loaded, and then Duval sprang upon the side of the cart and took a long look down the road.

"Do you see them?" said Turpin.

"Only just—now they are gone."

"We have won the fight, then!"

"Yes, but at such a loss," said Jack. "Look here, both of you. He is going fast now."

Claude jumped off the cart, and hastily approached the dying man. Dick, too, was in a moment by his side.

The landlord lay upon his back, and the expression of his face was quite sufficient to show that death had set his seal upon him. One of his hands was busily employed in plucking at the grass that was in great luxuriousness around the spot on which he lay.

"This is sad," said Claude.

"It is, indeed," sighed Jack. "It would have been better if the bullet had done the errand it was sent upon, and hit me."

"Poor fellow," said Turpin. "In his day he was a bold hand, and now he has come to the end that we would have said he had fairly escaped by retiring from the road."

"Can nothing be done for him?" said Claude, who was deeply affected at the death of that man who had done so much for him, and who may be said to have come by his melancholy end in his service.

"Nothing," said Jack.

Dick, too, shook his head.

"I feared as much," said Claude.

"Hush!" said Jack; "he speaks."

"Hold that one!" said the dying man—"Now, Claude—brave Claude—open the wicket—the court—no—no—gone! Listen how the bell tolls. Somebody is going—going—"

There was a horrib'e rattling sound in his throat, and they all three shrank back for a moment.

"This is horrible," said Claude. "How much better if the shot had at once been mortal!"

"He don't suffer," said Jack. "The mind is too far gone to take cognizance of suffering now."

"Help!—murder!" shrieked the dying man. "This is—death!"

He had half risen; but the effort was his last, and he fell back again like a lump of lead.

"Gone!" said Jack, with a shudder. "Peace be to you, old friend, and may your crimes find pardon where we must all sue for it, and let us hope not in vain—not in vain!"

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## CHAPTER CCCXVII.

### THE GRAVE BY THE OLD OAK.—MORE ALARMS.

As Jack uttered the words with which we concluded our last chapter, he lifted his hat from his head. Dick did the same, and Claude, who was bare-headed, bowed low, in acknowledgment of the presence of the dead, and of the sentiment that had come from the lips of his friend Jack.

For the space of about three minutes none of them spoke; and then Jack broke the silence, by saying—

"We must provide a grave for him."

"Surely," said Claude.

Dick nodded.

"It shall be done," he said. "If all the officers in England were gathering in one sanguinary host to attack us, I would bury this poor piece of inanimation now. This is a lonely spot."

"It feels more loney now," said Jack. "The presence of the dead, I think, has the effect of making a shuddering solitude of such a spot as this."

"There is one thing that we ought to do," said Claude Duval, "in the cause of common humanity."

"What is that?"

"Look to our foes, who lie in the road. If any of them be not dead, let us do for them what we can."

"Agreed!" said both Jack and Dick Turpin, and they immediately followed Claude Duval over the logs of wood and the cart into the roadway, where lay the officers who had fallen.

A very few minutes sufficed to bring the three friends to the spot of the encounter, and the first body they came to was to that of the chief officer who had fired so treacherously at Jack, and killed the landlord of the public-house.

"Quite dead," said Dick.

"And he deserved his death," said Claude. "I cannot regret that shot. This one tried to commit what must be called an assassination, for it was nothing better."

"He did so."

They then went to the others, and in only one was a spark of life discernible. He, when they tried to support him, just breathed one sigh, and then expired.

"All over," said Dick.

"What shall we do with them?" said Jack.



"They have many friends who will take charge of them," said Claude; "and, indeed, if we had both the means and the inclination to bury them all, it would be better not. All we need do with them is to draw them to the road-side, and there leave them."

"Be it so," said Jack. "Our own comrade we may inter; but these must go through all the ordeal of coroners' inquests, and all that sort of thing."

They now drew the four dead bodies to the grassy slope by the side of the road, and there they let them lie side by side, without making the least attempt to take anything from them. After that, Claude and his two friends went across the obstruction into the lane again, and then Claude saw that Jack had brought with him a couple of the broad cutlasses that the mounted police had worn.

"What are these for, Jack? We don't want them."

"Yes, we do, now. They are the only weapons we have with which to dig a grave for our poor friend here."

"True—true, Jack."

"You and Dick must do it; for, although I have all the will in the world to turn a sod for such a purpose, my arm, I fear, will not permit me to do so."

"Don't attempt it, Jack."

Dick Turpin and Claude Duval now looked out for a quiet spot, beneath which they could place the dead body of their friend, and finally they settled upon a patch of grassy ground, not far from a tree that grew standing by the side of a little stream that was close at hand.

The soil was of a loose and loamy texture, so that there was no great difficulty in displacing it. At first they took off the turfs very carefully and laid them aside, and then as they dug they cast some of the loose mould into the water, where it was washed away, and other portions of it they piled up by the side of the grave; and so, in the course of a quarter of an hour, they had a hollow of about four feet in depth.

The labour to dig so much as that, with the inefficient implements they had, was very great, and Dick and Claude were both glad enough when Jack said that they had gone deep enough.

"No one will disturb him, poor fellow," said Jack, "and if any one should hit upon the spot and feel inclined to do so, it is not with twelve miles in the depth of his grave that will save him."

They then carried the body carefully to the spot and placed it in the grave. Dick laid the hat of the deceased over his face, so that it should be not actually exposed to the pressure of the mould, and then Jack threw the first handful of mould upon the body.

"I don't know any funeral service," said Jack, "or I would say it over him, so he must do without."

"It don't matter," said Dick, "for, of course, he can't help it whether a funeral service is said over him or not, one way or the other."

"To be sure not," said Claude, "so it can't make any difference to him. I'm afraid there would be no funeral service at all but for the fee to the parson."

"Very likely," said Jack.

In this primitive way, then—although certainly the opinions of the highwaymen regarding parsons was rather shocking, as if such pious people could ever care about fees, and tithes, and all that sort of thing! Pah! It is too bad!—Well, they covered up the poor dead landlord, and when they got the ground nearly level they laid the turfs carefully on the top in their proper places again, and made the surface all as smooth and as level as they could, so that by the time they had scattered some decayed leaves upon it, and then some water from the ditch to revive the grass again, nobody would have thought that so near the surface there lay so melancholy a victim of the affray that had taken place at the end of the lane.

"That's over," said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude; "and, now, the sooner we leave this place the better, I think. Don't you, Jack?"

"Yes; but what are we to do, now, with our spare horse?"

"Let him go."

"Very good. A horse cannot be long without an owner in England. He will pick up plenty to eat, too, in the meadows."

Jack, assisted by Turpin, made a gap in the hedge of sufficient width for the horse to go through; and then, divesting the creature of its saddle and bridle, they set it at liberty, and it bounded and frolicked in the meadows, to the great annoyance, no doubt, of the other horses.

"Now, it's off we are," said Dick. "Mount, Claude, and ride quick. We shall soon shake off the depression which the late event has cast upon us."

Claude mounted, and they all three went down the lane at a trot, which did not prevent them from conversing; so Claude, turning to Jack, said—

"Now, I think, you will admit, Jack, that I have shown very great forbearance?"

"In what?"

"In not pestering you with questions about Cicely."

Jack changed colour, and Dick Turpin touched his horse with the spur, and rode on a little in advance.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Claude. "Why do you both appear so disturbed at the question? All I want is to know where she is. That is simple."

"I will tell you, Claude."

"Do so."

"In the grave!"

Duval almost fell from his horse as Jack said this, and, in shrieking accents, he cried—

"Oh, no—no! Tell me that you have this information upon insufficient evidence—tell me that it is mere hearsay—tell me that you do not believe it—tell me anything in the world but that it is true!"

"Claude," said Jack, in a mournful tone of voice, "you never would believe it, although it was hinted to you, and Dick and I made up our minds to say nothing to you about it until you forced us by your questions. I now tell you that it is not mere hearsay—not a mere report—but a truth."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"She is no more."

"Kill me, Jack."

"No, Claude. This is a great shock to you, no doubt, but you must get over it as people do get over great shocks. You must not allow it to knock you down completely. That you should grieve is one of the most natural things in the world, but that you should grieve immoderately is one of the most unnatural things in the world; and you will recollect that Cicely suffers nothing now, and that when she drew her last breath she got to the end of all suffering."

"Jack you may have all the amazement, but I have all the feeling."

"Not all, Claude. I am sure that Dick and I both feel for you very much, but we both know that the misfortune that has happened is one that is not remediable, and we both know, too, that we must all die, and that

'Come it slow, or come it fast,  
It is but death that comes at last.'

Come, be calm and composed."

"I will try—I will try!"

Claude hardly spoke during the remainder of that day, and he left it to his companions to choose a halting place for the night, which they did in a very sweet romantic dell at the foot of an eminence covered with young trees of beautiful growth.

In his vallise Dick Turpin had some provisions, and he unfastened it and

made Claude partake of some; but they could not get him to shake off the gloom that hung upon his spirits.

Poor Jack was very much afraid that he meditated some wild and mad action, but Dick was of a different opinion, as such a crime would be contrary to Duval's usual mode of thought.

The night was now creeping on, and all about the secret spot where the three highwaymen had taken up their abode temporarily was enveloped in shadow. The low, soft notes of a few of the latest-roosting forest birds alone disturbed the stillness of the scene, and such sounds could scarcely be said to disturb it, since they rather added to its tranquil repose, and its calm beauty.

Claude Duval had thrown himself upon the ground, and placed his arm over his face, so that his companions could not see the expression of it; but well they knew that he was brooding over the death of Cicely.

Gladly—most willingly would Jack or Dick have said something to him to stem the current of his grief; but what could they say? Nothing but telling him that she yet lived could possibly rouse him, and to tell him that would be to assert what they knew to be untrue. No; there was no help for it but to let the grief of Claude Duval have its sway.

Jack and Dick left him to himself, and conversed together in low tones at some distance apart from him.

They knew that the time of his recovery from the depression that was upon his spirits would come; but they suspected it would be further distant from the cause of it than is usually the case even with the severest of mental shocks.

And Claude Duval was grateful to his two attached friends that they left him for a time alone with his sorrow, as he knew how incapable he was of conversing with them, and how totally inadequate all ordinary powers of consolation would be in his case.

Jack had already said all that could be said upon the subject.

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## CHAPTER CCCXVIII.

### DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS STOP THE PRINCESS SOPHIA ON WORMHOLT SCRUBS.

THE night stole on, and a white mist rose up from the earth, and the stars, when the few rain clouds that had hovered in the sky about the hour of sunset had blown over, shone out sweetly and serenely.

At length midnight came.

Jack then whispered to Dick Turpin that it was time for them to move from that spot, and that, as Claude Duval had not yet spoken to them, it would be surely better to interrupt him in his gloomy meditations upon the past.

"Yes," said Dick, "I think so, too. You are by far his oldest friend, Jack, and I beg that you will go and speak to him."

"I will," said Jack.

The place upon which Claude lay was protected by the overhanging boughs of a large tree, and Jack approached lightly.

"Claude," he said, "do you sleep?"

"No, Jack."

"Ah, you are better. You speak, now, more calmly and assuredly. You are better, are you not?"

"I am, Jack—much better."

"Thank Heaven! It gives me great pleasure to hear you say so, Claude. I suppose you have been thinking?"

"That is it, Jack. I have been thinking deeply; and although there will ever be a void in my heart by the death of Cicely—you hear that I can now

“speak calmly of that event—yet the result of my thought is, that she is far happier as she is than as if she still lived.”

“To be sure, she is.”

“I knew you would agree with me in that, Jack.”

“Yes, of course, I will and do. I urged much the same thing upon you when first you got the sad news.”

“Did you?”

“Yes; but you were, of course, too much engrossed by the fact itself, no doubt, to know exactly what it was I said to you.”

“No doubt—no doubt. Where is Dick?”

“Close at hand, and he will be well pleased to hear that you think so properly of the past. Dick? Dick?”

“Yes,” said Turpin, stepping towards them. “I am here.”

“Claude has thought over his loss, and, like a wise man, he feels that it is inevitable, and that Cicely is happier far as she is than as if she had still to struggle with the world, and all its dangers and deep anxieties; and so, for the future, he will be himself again.”

“Bravo!” said Dick. “That is right, Claude. It shows that you have sense as well as feeling.”

“We will say no more about her,” said Claude, with a deep sigh. “She is gone, and may she be happy. Now, my friends, I am the same man whom you always knew; and, first and foremost, let me say that I know not how in the world I shall ever be able to express to you what a sense I have of all that you have both done for me in this matter of my escape from Newgate.”

“Oh, pho!” said Dick; “it is nothing.”

“Nothing at all,” said Jack, “because, you see, in the first place, it was easily done; and in the second place, we knew that you would be quite willing to do as much for us at any time.”

“In truth, I would.”

“Very well, then, there is an end of that,” said Dick Turpin. “You know, Claude, that such affairs are either tolerably easy, or impossible; and in this case, with all the arrangements we had been able to make beforehand, the affair was tolerably easy, and, as it turned out, was done quite nicely; and now here we are, all three on the road again, and ready, I presume, for any gift that fortune may throw in our path. Is it not so?”

“It is,” said Jack.

“It is,” said Claude. “Action will be my only course. I must strive to forget the past now, in the bustle and the changes of the present.”

“That is the thing. All you have got to do is to prevent your mind from stagnating for want of something to do!” cried Dick; “and now let us at once put our former resolve into execution. It was to leave this part of the country, and to go westward, so if we are to do so to-night, let us start, or else in two hours time we shall have a young moon peeping up above the horizon, and if the sky keeps as clear as it is now, there will not be shadows enough to hide us as we go across the meadows.”

“Be it so. I am ready.”

“The horses have had a good rest, and as much food, in the shape of hay and grass,” said Jack, “as they can eat.”

“Hay, have they had?”

“Oh, bless you, yes, Claude. In the next meadow to this there are a couple of excellent stacks of prime meadow hay, so I have borrowed a few armsful of it for our steeds, and they have enjoyed it amazingly.”

“Not a doubt—not a doubt.”

The horses had had a rest of upwards of four hours, so that they were in capital condition for active service, and Jack undertook to lead the party across the country to the Edgeware Road, from which they could easily make their way westward.

By the dim, yet beautiful light of the stars, then, they all three set out, and



MAGGS RECEIVES INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE SHERIFF AND GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

Jack went with great accuracy across the meadows. To be sure, now and then they came to rather a serious obstacle in the shape of a fence, which they found it impossible to get over, so they had either to make a gap in it, or go along it till they came to some gate which they could open; but this state of things was not very frequent, and by about half past one o'clock they all emerged into the Edgeware Road, about a couple of miles from Cucklewood.

They then held a consultation as to whether they should go on through the meadows instead, as before, by the high-roads; and as it was a time of night when they were not likely to meet any enemies, and they had got a considerable distance from the part of the country in which it would be believed they were,



they decided upon keeping the road ; so, at a trot which got over the ground pretty quickly, although without any appearance of hurry, they went on in the direction of Kilburn, which they soon reached.

The man at the turnpike came out in his nightcap to let them through the bar, and as he did so, he said—

“ Gentlemen, you had better keep a good look-out, for there’s a highwayman upon the road, they say.”

“ Ah, indeed ?” said Dick. “ Who is it ?”

“ That I can’t tell you, sir ; but they call him the Skeleton Horseman !”

“ The Skeleton Horseman, do you say ?”

“ Yes, sir ; that’s what they call him.”

“ A strange title.”

“ Ah, sir, it is ; but, for my part, I think as it is all gammon. I saw him once, and only once, and then he had a large cloak over him ; so he just, to my thinking, looked, you see, sir, like any other christian.”

“ To be sure ; thank you. Good-night.”

“ Here’s your change, sir. It was half-a-crown you gave me, if you please, sir.”

“ Never mind : keep it.”

“ Well,” said the turnpike man, as he went into his little house again, “ that’s a real gemman, now. How you may know a real gemman in a minute from one as isn’t ! Ah, it’s a comfort to think as there is some real gemmen in the world yet as don’t want the change out of half-a-crown from a poor fellow.”

So much for gentility !

“ This is an odd idea,” said Jack, when they had got a little further on down the road, “ to warn us of a highwayman, is it not, Dick ?”

“ Rather so.”

“ It is all nonsense, I daresay,” said Claude ; “ but if we should chance to meet the fellow, I will put him to the test.”

“ Yes ; and find out whether he belongs to this world or to another,” said Dick, “ for if—Hilloa !”

This exclamation of Dick’s arose from the fact that, at that moment, the sharp crack of a pistol-shot came upon their ears, and then, right over a hedge, which was of considerable height on the road-side, whatever it was on the other, there came a man on horseback.

The leap was deep, and the horse went right upon his haunches for a moment after alighting in the road.

“ Damnation !” said the horseman ; but in another moment the horse was on his feet again, and he added—“ Right—all right,” and off he went, like the wind, country ways.

“ This is an odd start,” said Dick Turpin. “ Who the deuce is that, I wonder ? Here comes some others, though.”

“ Stop him—stop him !” cried a voice from the other side of the hedge.

“ Stop thief—stop him, I say !”

“ Hilloa !” cried Claude Duval. “ What’s the matter ?”

“ There he is—there he is !” shouted the voice again. “ Over with you all, gentlemen, and we will have him.”

With various degrees of success, now, four persons on horseback jumped over the hedge, and alighted in the road close to Claude Duval and his party, Claude and Dick both thought that their policy was to remain where they were, but Jack was of a different opinion. However, he gave in to the majority that were against him, and he, too, staid.

“ What’s the matter ?” cried Claude again. “ What is all this disturbance about ?”

“ Who are you ?” said the voice.

“ A magistrate,” said Claude.

“ Then, sir, you are the very person whom we wanted to get at, of all others, for you can decide what is to be done. We have pursued a highwayman across

the fields for the space of two miles, and very much fear now that he has eluded us at last."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. It seemed to us as if he jumped over the hedge."

"He did do so—or, rather; I should say, that a man on horseback did jump the hedge; but, of course, I have no evidence before me that he was a highwayman. If I had had such evidence, I and my friends would, of course, have at once stopped him."

"Plague take the evidence," said another of the mounted men. "I wish, sir, you had stopped him, and looked for the evidence afterwards."

"That would have been contrary to law, sir."

"Oh, perhaps it would; but if I come within pistol-shot of him I will have another try at his head, whether it is contrary to law or not."

"Of course, sir," said Claude, who kept up the character he had assumed with the most admirable gravity—"of course, sir, you will do what seems to you right, but you commit an act of that description entirely upon your own responsibility, let me tell you."

"I know that, sir."

"Very good. Perhaps you can tell me who this highwayman is?"

"That, indeed, we cannot, except that he is commonly called the Skeleton Horseman. He has only made his appearance during the last fortnight or so, and he has in that space of time succeeded in pretty well terrifying the whole of this neighbourhood. We very nearly caught him to-night."

"But why is he called the Skeleton Horseman?"

"Because they say that under the large cloak he wears, and which wraps him up from head to heel, he is nothing but a skeleton, and that he has shown himself to be such at times to people whom he has stopped upon the highway, and who have nearly fallen dead with fright at the sight of him. These gentlemen and myself were asked, if we could, to put an end to the delusion by catching the rascal; and, I am sorry to say, he has avoided us successfully."

"He went towards the country," said Claude; "but as soon as I get to London, I will send a party of horsemen on this road, with orders to take him, dead or alive."

"Much obliged, sir," said another of the gentlemen. "The rascal stopped my wife and her sister, and nearly frightened them both out of their lives; and my coachman, who was with the carriage, was so terrified, that he absconded from it, and ran off, and has never been heard of since."

"I will do my best to find him, gentlemen," said Claude; "and were it not that I am engaged just now on some very important business for the Secretary of State, I would turn my horse's head in the direction the fellow went, and try to hunt him up at once."

"Thank you, sir. Good-night."

"Good-night, gentlemen."

"Oh, by-the-bye," said one, "has anything been heard of Claude Duval, who escaped from Newgate, they say, last night?"

"He did escape, sir, and in the most audacious manner; and I can inform you that he is not captured yet, nor is there any likelihood that he will be either."

"Well, I don't see much good in Newgate if it can't hold a highwayman when it once gets him. Much obliged, sir, for your kindness; and so, good-night again."

The four gentlemen rode off along the road in the direction that the Skeleton Horseman had taken, and Claude Duval, with his two friends, jogged on in the opposite direction.

"You ought to be a magistrate, Claude," laughed Dick Turpin, "for, I must say, your tone and manner are quite magisterial."

"I hope not," said Claude. "But can either of you give a guess as to

who this can be who is upon the road, in what we may call an opposition to us?"

"Not the least," said Dick.

"It's one of the new hands," said Jack, "I take it; don't you think so, Claude?"

"Probable enough. I cannot call to mind any one who would or who could successfully play such a part as this fellow assumes. It is a curious as well as a bold assumption, the character of death."

"It is; and I should like nothing better than to come across him," said Dick. "We may have that luck some of these days. It would be a good job if he were to stop us, would it not?"

"It would, indeed."

They now trotted on till they emerged at Tyburn Gate. They all three looked askance at the spot which had been the last look that many of their profession had taken of this world, and they did not exchange a word till they got to Shepherd's Bush, and turned down Wood Lane, which, at that time, led to Wormholt Scrubs, and may still, for all we know to the contrary.

It was just as they emerged from the lane on to the regular road that leads right across the Scrubs, that they saw, about half a mile off, a great flashing of lights, and by their movement, and the slight noise that came upon their ears, they felt certain a carriage was rapidly approaching them across the Scrubs.

"Who can that be, so well attended?" said Dick.

"Let's ride on and see," said Claude. "I don't know how you feel, my good friends, but I am rife and ready for any adventure."

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## CHAPTER CCCXIX.

### THE PRINCESS SOPHIA THREATENS CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS.

NEITHER Dick Turpin nor Jack felt that craving for occupation that now beset Claude Duval; but still they were far from being disinclined to follow him.

As regarded Duval, he knew that it was only by filling his mind with more cares and more perils that he could at all hope to banish from it the fearful remembrance of his loss; and therefore was it that, totally heedless of the consequences, he struck across the Scrubs in the direction of the advancing carriage.

Before he had gone far, though, reason came to the aid of Claude, and he began to feel how selfish and unfeeling a thing it was to drag his friends into enterprises that partly they might have declined, just because he fell in a despairing and a desperate frame of mind.

With this idea he drew up.

"Jack and Dick," he said, "pray pardon me."

"For what?"

"I assumed that you are both of you as sick of life as I am, and so off I came to meet the carriage, which seems to be well attended by mounted men. It by no means follows that, because I feel disposed to run myself into great danger, that both of you should feel so, likewise. My griefs make me selfish, but my reason has come to me in time; and so I beg of you both to use your own discretion and feeling in this matter, without consulting me at all."

"Don't speak in that way, Claude," said Jack. "Where you go we are willing to follow."

"But I have no pretensions to lead you."

"You have, if we like to admit them," said Dick Turpin; "but the fact is, there is no question of either leading or following. You feel disposed, Claude Duval, to stop that carriage, and I feel disposed to help you, and Jack feels dis-

posed to help us both; so don't let us say another word about it, but come on to the enterprise at once."

"That's it," said Jack.

"On, then—on!"

"With me," said Jack. "if I might be so bold as to have my way in this matter, it would be anything but on."

"What would you do, Jack?"

"Wait for the carriage just at the corner of the lane, and then pounce upon it at once before it had fairly got into the lane. By that means, as the lane is narrow, one half of the escort will be in the way of the other half; whereas, upon the open Scrubs, if they have any judgment, they would, upon our making the attack, spread themselves around us, and in such a case I wouldn't give much for our chance."

"Jack is right," said Dick.

"He is," said Claude. "My judgment must have forsaken me when I left the secure corner of the lane to come out here into the open country. We will go back at once."

They all three turned, and galloped back to the lane. At the speed they made, it did not take them above three or four minutes to get there; for they had not got far upon the heath when Claude had pulled up to speak to his friends.

The carriage seemed to be coming on now at rather a slower pace than before, or they fancied it, because they were themselves no longer advancing towards it, and they could see that it was surrounded by some half-dozen mounted footmen, who carried links in their hands.

"Somebody of distinction," said Dick.

Jack was gazing earnestly in the direction of the carriage, and then he said, suddenly—

"Why, it's the royal livery!"

"Indeed?" said Dick.

"Surely not the king?" said Claude.

"Oh, no—no. There are no guards."

"But it is one of the royal family, I suppose?"

"Of that there can be no doubt," added Jack, "and it remains now to be decided what you both mean to do."

"Just what we would if it were any one else," said Dick.

"To be sure," said Claude.

"Well, but," interposed Jack, "to stop one of them will so exasperate the government against us, that it may do us more harm than good."

"Never you mind about the exasperation of the government," said Dick, "my dear fellow. We have nothing to hope or expect from the government but a rope when they can put it round our necks. The intense interest and excitement about our capture is so great, that if we were to stop the king himself, and rob him of his very coat, they could not do more than they are doing now."

"That is true," said Claude.

"They might increase the rewards very much," said Jack.

"And if they did," added Dick, "what then? The rewards for us, now, come to somewhere about a thousand pounds we will say. Do you think, Jack, my boy, that that sum is not quite enough to make the officers do their utmost to catch us?"

"Well, perhaps it is."

"And if it is, as we all know well that it is, I would ask you what more can people do than their utmost?"

"True—true."

"And, besides, my own opinion is, that the greater the reward offered for us the safer we are."

"The deuce we are!" said Jack.

"Yes, for this reason. The cupidity of the officers is so strongly awakened

upon the subject that they get quite mad with jealousy at each other about it, and those who can't catch us throw every obstacle in the way of the others who have a little chance. Do you think that the officers are so fond of each other that they will put such a sum as a thousand pounds in each other's way?"

"No—no," said Jack.

Claude smiled.

"Are you converted, Jack," he said, "to the opinion that the higher the reward offered for us, the safer we are?"

"Upon my word, I don't know, but Dick Turpin puts it so clearly, that it sounds like the fact, whether it is or no, and I suppose there is something in it."

"A great deal," said Dick. "But the coach will be here in a few minutes, and so now we can have a good look at it."

The carriage that was rapidly advancing towards Wood-lane, with the evident intention of passing down it, and so emerging into the high-road, was a great lumbering vehicle, such as was considered highly fashionable and exquisite at that period.

It was quite large enough to hold eight people comfortably, and it was drawn by four long-tailed, heavy-looking Flemish horses, such as would not have disgraced a brewer's dray.

Upon the seat in front sat a great red-faced man, in a full wig, and three-cornered hat, and an immense scarlet coat. Two footmen in similar livery held on behind, and six mounted men with links trotted along, three on each side of the carriage.

These six men were in the royal livery; but they were by far too fat and bloated, with idleness and high living, to make any effectual resistance to an attack, although they were armed to the teeth.

Who were in the royal carriage could not, to Claude Duval and his friends, be even a matter of conjecture; for to conjecture at all about anything you must have some data to go upon, however insufficient, and in this case they had none at all.

It may be supposed, that with such cattle, and such a great, swaggering, lumbering load at their backs, the speed of the royal cortege was but slow; and such, indeed, was the fact, while every now and then, as the wheels encountered a rut or a hillock on the road, the vehicle swung about at such a rate, that it more clearly resembled a ship in a gale of wind than a carriage.

The route across Wormholt, or Wormwood Scrubs, as the tract of barren land bearing that name was differently called, was not very often used by people who had anything to lose, particularly at night; but it was a near way to and from a lodge that the royal family used, a mile or two out of town, so that it was well known that at times some members of that illustrious, by courtesy, race of German auxiliaries to the taxation of the country sometimes used the route.

But now, having given this brief description of the carriage and of the road that it was on, we return to the highwaymen, who were waiting its appearance upon the spot they had chosen for the encounter.

It will be observed that the three highwaymen had no less a number than nine men to encounter, including the coachman, and not including any one who might be in the carriage, and who might or might not be inclined to show fight upon the occasion.

This was rather long odds.

"I say, Jack," cried Turpin, "the four horses will give us the most trouble, if they begin kicking, so that let it be your task to release the two leaders, if you can."

"I will do it," said Jack. "A touch of a knife to the harness will soon set them at liberty."

"Good; and now what are we to do first, Claude?"

"I will call upon them to stop, and if they fire at us, we must fire at them;



but I should say fire over their heads first, and if that don't make the fat lackeys fly, I know nothing of such folks."

"Very well—we will try it."

It so happened, that the bit of road exactly at the head of them, emerging into the open heath, was very soft and miry, so that upon reaching that part, the horses had rather a struggle to get the carriage on at all, and its rate of progress was very much decreased.

That was a very favourable circumstance for the attacking party.

As Jack had anticipated, the lane was much too narrow for the carriage and horsemen on each side of it to proceed in, as they had done on the Scrubs. That is to say, it was possible enough, if they had all been able to keep on a straight line, that they might have got along, but in the dark, and with four horses harnessed to the vehicle, and such a vehicle, too, no mortal coachman could have undertaken to say that he would keep the whole affair exactly in the middle of the lane.

The slightest deviation to the right would have pushed the horsemen into a ditch that was there, and the slightest deviation to the left would have jammed them up against a high bank.

It was not likely that the royal escort was going to place itself, for the whole length of Wood-lane, upon the horns of such a dilemma as that, so two of them went on before, and the other four kept behind, and on went the cortege.

Claude waited till the horses and the carriage had fairly got into the lane, and so blocked out the four horsemen who were behind it, and then he sprang forward to the two who were in advance, and cried, in a loud voice—

"Hold!"

The horsemen pulled up, and the coachman tugged at the reins till he brought all the four carriage-horses to a stand.

"The slightest opposition," said Claude, "will involve the destruction, within the next five minutes, of every one of you."

A scream from the carriage immediately succeeded this announcement, and the coachman began lashing his horses. The two men in advance hastily fired their carbines, with which they were provided, at Claude, and then set off at full gallop, with a pistol-shot after them, that Claude discharged. Jack sprang upon the two leading horses of the carriage, and by a stroke or two of his knife released them from their harness, and off they went, lumbering along the lane, terrified at the banging of a cross bar against their haunches.

"Hilloa! What is it—what is it?" shouted the men who were behind the carriage.

"Murder!" bellowed the two footmen, and one of them scrambled on to the roof in his fright. The coachman sat with the reins in his hands, and his great red face turning of a purple hue.

"Fire at those fellows behind the coach," cried Claude; and Jack and Dick at once discharged their pistols, which had the effect of so terrifying the four mounted men that they turned round, and galloped across the Scrubs again as hard as they could go.

"Victory," said Claude, as he sprang from his horse, the bridle of which Jack took. "They are all gone now, and we will see who is in the carriage."

"Be careful, Claude," said Jack.

"Oh, yes—yes. It's all right."

Claude Duval advanced to the door of the carriage, and at once opened it. He lifted his hat, and bowed, for there was no one there but a young woman, who, although fat, and coarse, and vulgar in her appearance, he had no doubt, from her features, and the richness of her dress, was one of the daughters of the king.

In fact, this was no other than the Princess Sophia, who was then in her nineteenth year.

"How dare you?" she cried, speaking with a lisp, as if her tongue were too large for her mouth. "How dare you, you wretch?"

"Madam," said Claude, "I have the honour to ask you who you are?"

"Help—help!" she cried.

"I really am not aware that anybody is meddling with you," said Claude.

"Pray what is the matter with you?"

"I will have you hanged."

"Hark you, madam. I am a man of few words, and now I will trouble you for that watch you have just hidden under the cushion of the seat, and for that gold chain which is round your neck—for those rings that are upon your fingers, and which, I assure you, they don't become at all—and those diamond ear-rings, which make you look like some fat savage."

The reply to this, was a rather heavy vinaigrette being flung at Claude's head, and which narrowly missed him.

"Now let me beg of you," added Duval, "not to give way to your odious temper in this manner. If you are not quick in handing to me the articles I require, together with your purse, I shall be under the necessity of taking them."

"Wretch, do you know who I am?"

"No—but I can guess."

"Who, then, monster, am I?"

"Some kitchen weach, in the disguise of a princess, I suppose."

The rage of Her Royal Highness at this was so great, that she took the watch from under the seat of the coach, and flung it at Claude, and so she continued with the other articles he required, pelting him with them, one by one, to his great amusement; but the rings would not come off her fat, swollen fingers, and the ear-rings she did not attempt to remove from her ears.

Among other things, though, she had thrown him a well-filled purse, and a pocket-book; so that Duval was inclined to forego the rings and the ear-rings.

He was mightily amused, too, at the manner in which she had taken the attack upon her property.

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## CHAPTER CCCXX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE IN GREAT DANGER; BUT SAVE THEMSELVES BY BOLDNESS.

JACK and Dick hearing the racket of the things being flung at Claude Duval, could not, for the life of them, make out what was being done, and Jack called out, at last—

"Claude, what is amiss?"

"Oh, nothing," said Claude. "Her Royal Highness is quite delighted to have fallen into such good company."

"No—I am not!" screamed the princess.

"But I say you are."

"But I am not!"

"Oh, then, if you are not, I shall make you come out of the coach at once, and kiss all my comrades, amounting to twenty-six men. Some of them have not been shaved for a week; but that don't matter."

"Oh, will nobody come and save me from this wretch? I will take care that all the police go after you to-morrow, and you will be hanged; for my father says that everybody ought to be hanged who takes anything that don't belong to them."

"Your father is a king," said Claude Duval; "but that does not prevent him from being an idiot, with strong passions and little mind, and so, as a natural result, vindictive and blood-thirsty."

"Take that!"



MAGGS AND DICK RESCUING CLAUDE FROM HIS CELL IN NEWGATE.

The only thing the princess had left to throw at Claude, was one of the cushions of the coach, and that she flung at him with such a vengeance, that it went right over the hedge.

Duval laughed.

"I assure you," he said; "that I have not been so amused for a very long time. Can you dance?"

"What is that to you, wretch?"

"Not a great deal. But as I feel disposed for a minuet, and as my friend, Sixteen-string Jack, can whistle the tune to perfection, I will trouble you, as I know you are disengaged, to favour me with your hand for a measure."

"I will die first!"

"Oh, no—you will not. I will take care that not only shall you not die, but that no harm comes to you. You are too amusing for that, by a great deal. Now, miss, pray alight, if you please."

"I won't!"

"Very good. Then I must help you to do so."

"Murder—murder! You shan't! Murder!"

Although Claude Duval handed the princess out of the coach in the gentlest manner in the world, she made such a racket, that Dick came up, and said—

"Hilloa, Claude! Can't you let the girl alone?"

"Take that," said the princess, dealing Dick such a box on the ears that his eyes flashed fire again.

"Thank you humbly," said Dick. "It serves me right for interfering. I might have expected it."

"Jack," called out Claude, "come and whistle us a minuet tune, old fellow, will you?"

"Allow me," said Dick; and in an excellent manner he commenced the tune, and Claude Duval, with much grace, began the dance. He took good care that he would not let go the hand of the princess, or, no doubt, she would have ran off; but he made her go through the figure of the dance, whether she would or not. To be sure, every now and then she gave him a cuff on the side of his head, or a blow over the shoulder; but he did not care a straw for such little pains, and, finally, he bestowed upon her lips a hearty kiss, as he said, in a laughing tone—

"You will not say that Claude Duval either lost his temper, or said or did a rude thing to-night, so far as you are concerned."

"Oh, then, you are Claude Duval, the highwayman, that is so much talked about?" said the princess, in a milder tone.

"I am."

"Did you stop the Duchess of Kingstown in the Edgeware-road, once?"

"I did."

"Well, then, I can tell you that she went out on purpose to be stopped by you; and she said you were the handsomest man, and the politest, she had seen for a long time."

"I am very much beholden to the duchess," said Claude Duval, "and if I could only induce you to think the same I should be perfectly content."

"Oh, go along."

Claude laughed, and as he handed the princess into the carriage he kissed her again, which she seemed as if she had not noticed, for she did not make the slightest opposition or the least remark about it.

"Now," said Claude, "if there be anything among the articles you desire to have returned that you set any particular store by, only say so and it shall be at once returned to you."

"No, there is nothing."

"Then I have the honour of bidding you good evening, and of hoping that this little meeting has been productive, after all, of more amusement than alarm."

"I am not alarmed now, and—and I shall not say anything about it, so you will not be hanged."

"I am infinitely obliged."

Claude kissed her again, and then she added, in a low tone—

"You had better write to me if you get into prison, and they are going to hang you. I will do what I can to save you. You might be rude and you are not, which I feel grateful for."

Claude bowed, and closed the carriage-door. Then calling to the coachman, he said—

"You can go on now, the princess is ready."

"Eh? The Lord deliver us!" cried the coachman.

"Go on, I say."

"Our Father which art in——"

Claude fired a pistol just past the ear of the coachman, and that so startled him that he set his pair of horses that were still in the carriage to a trot, and then to a gallop, and the royal carriage was soon completely out of sight of Claude Duval and his two friends.

It was then that Claude burst into a prolonged fit of laughter, and when he could speak at all, he said—

"They are all alike—all alike—princesses or dairy maids—they are all alike!"

"What do you mean, Claude?" said Dick.

"Why, just this, that a little flattery—a kiss or two—a good figure, and a not so bad face, will do anything with any woman. The princess began with rage, and ended by almost devotion."

"You must not fancy that all are alike, though, Claude," said Jack. "This female whom you just let go is probably rather more of an animal in her thoughts and feelings than many."

"Well, it may be so."

After all, what Claude Duval had gained by this adventure was very insignificant, considering the time that it had taken up; but it had had, at all events, the effect of withdrawing his thoughts from more painful subjects of contemplation, and that was much.

They all three went down the lane, now, back to the high road, and shaped their course towards Ealing.

Claude spoke hastily as though some painful thoughts had come across him that he was desirous of driving away, and he said, addressing his two companions—

"Let us make one of our old compacts, that is to say, let us agree to stop and rob the next six passengers, or vehicles, or horsemen, be they which they may, that pass along this road. Will you do so?"

"Willingly," said Dick.

"And you, Jack?"

"I'm agreeable," said Jack, "and after that I should advise that we go to the Old Hats Inn and put up for a little time."

"Agreed."

This was an old kind of agreement which the three had frequently made together, and which had at times been productive of a good deal of amusement if it had failed in the production of all its pecuniary results which they had looked to and hoped to derive from it.

"When they agreed, though, to this sort of thing, they did not exactly anticipate that the first object on the road that they, in accordance with that agreement, were bound to stop would be a mail-coach full of passengers, and well guarded by a man with a blunderbuss on the roof.

Such, however, was the fact.

Jack first heard the low reverberation of the wheels, and the steady tramp of the four horses, and turning to Claude and Dick, he said—

"I don't mean to say that we shall do so, but it is just possible that we may catch a tartar here, don't you think? It's a mail-coach."

"Never mind," said Dick, "they will pull up, and then it's all plain sailing enough. If they wanted to avoid such as we are, they ought to drive slap on at as good a pace as possible, and then we should find it no joke to stop them."

"They always do stop, though."

"Yes, the surprise of the moment makes them do so, and then they feel how hazardous it would be to go on again with a pistol bullet or two about their ears."

The mail-coach now came on at great speed, dashing along the road, and its



lights flashing amid the trees and hedges, while the scarlet coat of the guard was plainly visible.

"Shall we, or shall we not?" said Jack.

"Yes," said Claude.

"Yes," said Dick.

Jack said no more, but prepared himself for action. A few moments sufficed for them to arrange what they should do. To Jack it fell to keep at the horses' heads, and hold the coachman in check—to Dick the task was assigned of holding the passengers generally, and the guard, in a kind of surveillance, while Claude Duval was to request the ladies and gentlemen who were inside the vehicle to give up their property of portable value.

The pace of the coach was rather great, so Claude Duval adopted a course to stop it, and called out, just as it was about to pass them at a swinging pace—

"A passenger! Hilloa! a passenger!"

"Ay, sir, yes!" shouted the coachman. "Wo-a! That's it."

The mail was stopped.

On the moment, then, Jack and Dick dashed forward, and the former, holding a pistol to the head of the coachman, cried out—

"Stir hand or foot, and you are a dead man."

"D——n!" cried the guard.

"Hilloa, you fellow with the blunderbuss there, you had better try to eat it than present it at us. We won't be trifled with!"

"Fire away!" said the guard, as he seized his blunderbuss. "I'm not going to be frightened, at all events, out of doing my duty. Fire away, if you mean to do it."

"No," said Dick, "I don't want bloodshed, if it can be avoided."

"I ain't so particular," said the guard, as he drew the trigger of the blunderbuss, and discharged the whole contents right at Dick Turpin.

"That's enough to blow him to atoms, horse and all," said one of the outside passengers.

"Rather," said the guard.

The report was terrific of the blunderbuss, and it created a complete cloud of smoke; but to the surprise of everybody when the smoke cleared away, there was Dick Turpin in exactly the same position he had before occupied, and he said in a calm tone of voice—

"If I were an angry man now, I should shoot you; but as you are a bold fellow I won't. Only don't be coming a second dose of that infernal machine this way, as it might hurt some one by accident."

"The devil!" said the guard.

"Well, I expected that," said a woman who sat on the top of the coach, "for you were paying so much attention to the young lass by me, when you loaded your blunderbuss, that you quite forgot you put nothing but powder in it."

"How do you know my good woman," said a passenger, "that he put nothing but powder in it? For a lady, you seem to be a wonderful judge of fire-arms."

"I am a soldier's wife," she replied.

"Oh," said the guard, "then that accounts for your knowing all about it. But I only wish you had told me, ma'am, at the time."

"You were otherwise employed."

"Oh, well, perhaps I was; but yet I would have blown that fellow, horse and all to the devil."

By the time this little confabulation had got to the point to which we have brought it, Claude Duval had reached the side of the coach, and placing the barrel of a pistol upon the ledge of the window, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, you need not be at all alarmed, as I shall not blow any one's brains out, unless they are provokingly slow in handing me their property."

A general scream from three ladies inside the coach followed this not over-

pleasant command from Claude Duval. There were a few half-suppressed oaths from a gentleman, after which a voice said—

“Who are you?”

“Can you ask, sir?” said Claude. “Really, if you had only half a grain of sense, you might know who I was by my mode of address to you.”

“Don’t aggravate him,” said an old lady.

“Oh, ma,” said a young one, “I do think I shall faint right away.”

“Let me beg you will not,” said Claude, in a soft, low voice. “If you feel, however, a little faint, pray come out into the open air. It will revive you.”

“Certainly not,” said the old lady. “I don’t want my daughter to get out of the coach because a highwayman asks her to do so.”

“Money—watches—rings—pocket-books, and brooches!” said Claude Duval, as he rapped the barrel of the pistol against the ledge of the window.

“Oh, don’t—don’t,” said the young lady. “I will not put up with this.”

“What is the matter?” said Claude.

“He is trying to hide himself among our feet,” she replied.

## CHAPTER CCCXXI.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE AT A FUNERAL.

“MURDER!” said a voice; “do you want to sacrifice my life? Oh, have mercy upon me!”

“Who is *he*?” said Claude.

“A young gentleman, Mr. Highwayman, if you please,” said a lady’s voice. “He has annoyed all the lady passengers of this coach, and now he is actually trying to hide from you under their—Hem!—I mean, about their feet.”

“I’ll have him out,” said Claude.

Opening the coach door, Claude put his hand in, saying—

“Let me only get hold of him. Oh, this is his leg, I do think. Come, sir—come out, if you please.”

“Help!—Fire!—Murder!” screamed a voice, as Claude dragged a rather diminutive specimen of humanity by the leg right out into the road.

“Pho!—pho!—pho! sir,” said Duval. “I don’t see what you need make such an uproar about. I am only showing you to an outside place, that is all.”

“Oh—oh! Fire—fire!”

“Be quiet, sir. Who are you?”

“Margetts is my humble name, sir, I assure you. I am a professional man, too.”

“What profession?” said Claude.

“He is a lawyer’s clerk, Mr. H.,” said another lady from the coach.

“Oh, is he? But what makes you call me Mr. H., ma lam?”

“I thought that more polite, sir, than calling you Mr. Highwayman.”

Claude could not help laughing at this odd way of showing him respect and politeness; and then turning to the lawyer’s clerk, he said—

“Now, sir, I shall trouble you to remain exactly where you are till I come back to you.”

“Yes—oh, dear, yes!”

That learned individual was lying on his back in the road; and there, with a wholesome dread of what the vengeance of Duval might be inclined to inflict upon him if he stirred, he remained gazing upwards at the night sky, and fully expecting that the dreadful adventure would be sure to terminate in his melancholy decease.

Claude was at the coach door again in a moment; and then he found that the passengers were prepared to hand to him their valuables.

Duval never instituted any very scrutinising search to find whether they gave him all or not. He was satisfied that he got something worth his while; so he just took what was handed to him.

The young lady was crying, and Claude heard her.

"What is the matter, my dear?" he said. "Don't be frightened, I beg of you. There is no danger."

"It's my little watch, sir," she said. "My pa, who is now no more, gave it to me. I don't like to part with it."

"Keep it, by all means."

"But you have got it."

"Have I? Why didn't you keep it? Stop, though; if I have it, I will soon find it."

Claude hastily dived his hand in his pocket to look for the young lady's watch; and at the moment that he did so, he heard Dick Turpin call out—

"Warehawk!"

"Ah, what is amiss?" said Claude.

Turpin was by his side in a moment.

"Duval," he whispered, "there is a troop of light cavalry coming down the road. I heard the tramp of the horses' feet, and rode on a little, and met a man who told me that the Princess Sophia had been robbed, and they were sent from Bayswater barracks to apprehend three highwaymen who were upon the road, and of whom he begged me to be ware. I thanked him, and came back no quicker than I could to tell you."

"Does Jack know?"

"Yes, I have warned him."

"We must be off at once, then. But wait only a moment. I am looking for something."

"Look afterwards, Claude."

"No—no. Only a moment."

"All's right, Duval. We won't go without you, you may depend; but, still, for your own sake as well as for ours, let me tell you that there is no time to lose."

"I know it. Ah, here it is."

"What is it?"

"A little watch. My dear, here is your watch. I have great pleasure in returning it to you."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, sir. Will you take this little brooch as a gift from me for your kindness?"

"Certainly I will, and wear it, too."

"And take that as a gift from me," said the guard of the coach, as he snapped his blunderbuss again at Claude; but this time it didn't go off at all.

"D—n it," he said. "What is the matter with this confounded wretch of a blunderbuss?"

"Ah," said the soldier's wife, "you are a nice boy for a row, you are. I watched you well, and this time you put in no priming, though you did the loading part of the affair right enough."

"I'm an ass," said the guard.

"That's true," said the soldier's wife.

"What is all that about?" said Turpin. "I thought I heard the click of a gun-lock."

"It's nothing, sir," said the guard. "I was only looking at my blunderbuss, that's all, and feeling quite happy that when I fired it at you there was nothing but powder in it."

"You may congratulate yourself upon that fact," said Dick. "Are you ready now, Claude?"

"Quite."

"Off, then. Jack—Jack?"

"Here you are," cried Jack, as he rode up to them.

"Away!—away! We don't want a bout with the soldiers, if we can help it."

"By Jove, I hear them," said Claude.

They all three set off at full gallop, and as they had certainly the start of the troop of light cavalry that had been despatched with such expedition to lay hold of them, they did not at all despair of distancing them.

A very few minutes, indeed, brought Claude and his friends to Hanwell, through which village they dashed at speed, and then Jack called out—

"Listen, Claude. Your ears are younger than mine. Do you hear anything of these fellows?"

"No, Jack."

"Let's stop a moment," said Dick Turpin. "It is as well to know what we are about; and, for all we know, they may not be upon our track at all."

Upon this, they all three drew up, and for the space of about a minute, any one who could have seen them might have supposed them to be three statues of men on horseback, so perfectly still were both horses and riders during that space of time.

"Nothing," said Claude.

"Hark!" said Dick. "Don't say that."

"Ah, no—I don't say it now. I hear the clank of military accoutrements. Something is amiss."

"They are upon this road; but coming on with great caution. It seems to me that they have divided their force, and, in all probability, they are now in twos and threes, scouring the country all about this place."

"That is it. On—on!"

"Let us leave the high-road," said Jack. "About half-a-mile further on there is a little turning that leads on to the banks of the Brent river. We can jump it at that part, if it is not swollen by rains, and if it be, there will be no difficulty in swimming the horses across it. When we are on the other side we can get across the fields to some other road, and so baffle our pursuers."

"Granted. That we can," said Dick, "provided we cross the Brent, which is not so easy sometimes as it looks. But come on, we can but try."

They now trotted on, but by no means put their cattle to their utmost speed, for they wanted to reserve their power as much as possible; and as it was evident to them the soldiery were not attempting a vigorous pursuit, but were rather attempting to enclose them in a circle of scouts, they did not see any necessity for distressing themselves by hard galloping.

They soon reached the spot which Jack had mentioned as being pretty close to the bank of the Brent; but the sight of the little muddy river showed that it was much more swollen than they had thought it was likely to be.

Their experienced eyes told them in a moment that to attempt to jump it would be madness.

"It cannot be done with a leap," said Turpin. "The effect of such an attempt would only be to come with such force into the water a few feet from the opposite bank that, in all probability, the horse would stick in the mud, and not be able to extricate himself."

"Shall we try it a little higher up?" said Jack.

"If you like."

They pursued the bank of the little stream now for some distance; but just as they were about to make up their minds that if they were to cross it at all it must be by swimming the horses over, they heard the sudden clank of the military accoutrements very close at hand indeed, and a loud voice called out—

"Halt!"

"By Jove, they have stolen a march upon us," said Jack.

"Fire!" said the voice again.

They all three immediately stooped in their saddles till their heads were level with their horses' manes, and a rattling discharge of three or four carbines immediately ensued.

"All's right," cried Claude. "Nobody hit?"

"All's right," cheerfully answered Dick and Jack; and then Claude dashed at once into the water.

The others followed him at the moment, and they all three swam over the Brest, and landed on the other side just as the soldiers, who were three in number, and under the command of a corporal, reached the bank which they had left.

"Fire!" said the corporal again.

"It's our turn next," said Claude.

Simultaneously with the ringing discharge of the soldiers' carbines, Claude and his friends each fired a holster-pistol at their foes; and then, without waiting to see if they had done any damage or no, but quite satisfied with the fact that they were unhurt, they turned, and sped across the fields at a great pace, leaping a ditch and a couple of hedges that they came to in good style.

At the pace they were going at, it was not possible to hold anything like an animated conversation, and they each thought that they had nothing to do but to keep on at such speed and they would soon distance the soldiers, if, indeed, they were upon their track at all.

The best seeming calculation concerning the affairs of man is, however, at the mercy of some little cross accident, which may scatter all the results to the winds; and now it so happened that Claude Duval and his friends were the prey of one of those little accidental circumstances which alter the whole condition of affairs, and necessitate a totally contrary course of action to that which they thought of pursuing.

Jack's horse stepped into a hole in the ground and fell, throwing him partly over its shoulder, and then rolling on to him. The horse struggled to its feet again, and stood still, trembling; but Jack lay apparently dead, or insensible, upon the green turf.

Claude, who was a little in advance of Dick, did not see the accident; but Turpin did, and he called out—

"Duval—Duval!"

"Yes?" said Claude, looking round, at the same time that he slackened his pace. "What is it?"

"Jack is gone!"

"Good God!"

The impression of Claude Duval at that moment was, that Jack was shot; but then he recollected that he had heard no more firing; so he at once guessed the true state of affairs to be that his horse had fallen.

"It's the horse has done it," he said.

"Yes—yes. Poor Jack!"

Claude was soon at the spot, and hastily dismounting, and holding the bridle of his horse on his arm, he said—

"Jack—Jack! speak to me: are you hurt?"

"Where am I now?" said Jack, faintly.

"He is not killed, at all events," said Dick. "We must get him into the saddle again."

"Surely, yes," said Claude. "Hold my horse, Dick, while I do the best I can for him."

Dick Turpin held the horse, and Claude Duval lifted Jack from the ground.

"Come, Jack," he said, "how do you feel now?"

"What is it?" said Jack.

It was quite evident from the fall that his faculties were rather in a state of confusion.





THE FOUR FRIENDS WATCHING THEIR PURSUERS FROM THE HILL.

"Why, don't you recollect, Jack? We are running off from the soldiers. Rouse yourself up, if you can."

"Ah!" said Jack.

With this exclamation, he fell across Claude's arm like a dead weight, and it was evident that he had fainted. . Claude was rather in a state of consternation to know what to be at.

## CHAPTER CCCXXII.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE RUINED MILL IN THE HAUNTED MEADOW.

"PUT him on the horse," cried Dick. "You may depend he will be able to ride, and his brains will soon get clear again."

"But he has fainted," cried Claude.

"You don't mean that?"

"Indeed, but I do, though; and it strikes me that we are in a pretty considerable mess, now, Dick."

"We are, indeed. What the deuce is to be done?"

"Anything but desert Jack."

"Certainly. That I never thought of for a moment, I assure you; but it is none the less an awkward accident on that account."

"True—true, Dick. We must get to some place of shelter, and there wait till Jack has recovered. I hope that he is only shaken a little by the fall; but I fear that he is worse hurt than that. Do you know where we are?"

"Not very well. The fact is, Claude, this is not a part of the country that I have been much in, and the fields puzzle me, rather, and it is dark, too."

"Well, then, Dick, all we can do is to go right on. I will ask shelter and help for him at the first farm-house we come to."

"We can do nothing better, I suppose."

It was not a very easy matter to find a mode of carrying Jack, but at last they hit upon one which the docility of the horses only enabled them to carry out.

They placed Jack, insensible as he was, upon the saddle of his own horse, and then they rode one on each side of him and held him up, so that they went all three abreast, and at rather a slow pace, over the large meadow in which they were.

Both Claude and Dick listened with painful interest for any sound that might be indicative of the proximity of their pursuers, but there was none, and certainly, under the circumstances in which they were placed, that was an immense relief.

"If those fellows with their carbines were only at our backs now," said Dick, "they would not find it very difficult to make an end of our career."

"Indeed they would not, Dick. I fancy that just now we are about as helpless as we can very well be."

"We are, indeed."

Probably it was the jolting of the horse and the current of cold air that came across his face which had the effect of partially reviving Jack from the state of stupor into which he had fallen, but he suddenly heaved a deep sigh.

"Ah, Jack," said Claude, "you are coming round again. How are you, now, old friend?"

"Swim the stream," muttered Jack. "There—there—fly—fire!"

"What do you say?"

"Now—now, off again!"

"He is raving," said Dick.

"You may depend, then, the fall has given him a top on the head," said Claude, "for he has not spoken anything very rational since it took place. I'm afraid he is more hurt than is imagined."

Jack did not speak again for some few minutes, and then he said, in a faint voice—

"Claude, where are we now?"

There was something in the tone of his voice, now, which led Duval to think that his senses had really come back to him, and he replied—

"Why, Jack, we are in the fields. Do you recollect what happened to you awhile ago?"

"Oh, yes, I do now. The horse fell."

"All's right; you will do now, Jack. Well, are you hurt much? Can you feel any particular pain?"

"No—no, I—I am only shaken, I think. But I hardly know yet. Where are the soldiers?"

"Far enough off, I hope, by this time. Do you think you could ride without help, Jack, now?"

Even as he spoke to him, Claude felt that Jack swayed heavily against his arm, and as he did not reply it was pretty clear that he had lapsed again into insensibility, which was indeed the case.

"Poor fellow," said Claude, "it's of no use to plague him. He has gone off again."

"He must be seriously injured," said Dick. "But just look ahead, Claude, and tell me what you make of that black-looking object against the sky?"

"It's some building, I suppose."

"Yes, but it is in an odd place rather, in the middle of the field. Surely it can't be a homestead; and yet I don't know what else it ought to be."

"It's too high, and looks more like a tower than a house," said Claude. "It puzzles me, and that's a fact."

"Let us get towards it. We can go as cautiously as we like. I never saw so odd a building in the meadows before."

They now kept the dark-looking object well in view, and went rather carefully in the direction of it. After a little, Claude said, rapidly—

"Why, it's a mill!"

"A mill?" said Dick.

"Yes, to be sure. Look closely at it and you will see that it is. It is some old windmill, without a doubt."

"It is," said Dick. "The idea, now, that so familiar an object as that should not be at once recognised. Of course, it is a dilapidated mill. It is without arms, and that was what made it fail to suggest the idea to us."

"No doubt; but it's a pity Jack is not so far recovered that he might give us some information about it, for, without doubt, intimate as he is with all the suburbs of London, he would be able to tell us something concerning it."

"Call to him," said Dick. "Who knows but he may be able to speak to us again? and he is so used to your voice, that if he will reply at all it would be to such familiar tones."

"Jack! Jack!" said Claude. "Can you answer me, old friend?"

Jack made no reply.

"No, poor fellow, he can't."

"Very well, then let us get to the mill. It will afford us shelter, and him rest. What's that?"

A low muttering sound in the sky attracted their attention; and after continuing for a few moments, it broke into a thunder clap, and the very air seemed s'illed and sultry.

"A storm is brewing," said Dick.

"Not a doubt of it. Ah!"

A flash of lightning so bewilderingly vivid at that moment lit up the scene, that Claude and Dick were glad to close their eyes, and the horses reared with fright, and began to plunge so, that it was with the greatest difficulty Dick and Claude together could hold up Jack in his saddle.

While that brilliant flash of light had lasted, though, they had had a capital view of the old mill and the surrounding country beneath its vivid powers.

Jack appeared now, by the lightning and the thunder, to be more thoroughly recovered than he had been, and cried out in a strange voice—

"The storm rages! the storm rages! Death will be the doom of all!"

"Peace, Jack, peace," said Claude, "there is no danger now. Be calm, I beg of you."

"Calm!" said Jack, "Oh, yes, I am very calm, indeed. I am so calm! When people are in the grave they must needs be calm, surely."

"He raves again," said Dick.

Another flash of lightning now lit up the scene. It was certainly not quite so vivid as had been the former one, but still it was of the same blue and forked character, and dazzled the eyes of the three highwaymen, although it did not have the effect of startling the horses quite so much as the former flash had done.

"Let us get to the mill," said Dick. "Better there than out here, exposed to the storm. Hark! That is indeed terribly like what we may call thunder."

"It is awful!" said Claude.

The clap of thunder that had, at the interval of about sixteen seconds only, followed the last flash of lightning, was truly grand. It commenced with a noise such as one might suppose would be made by the simultaneous discharge of a hundred pieces of heavy cannon, and the reverberations of the sound appeared really as though they would never cease.

By the time, however, that the last distant mutterings of the clap of thunder were dying away in the far-off horizon, the party had reached the old mill, and they now saw sufficient of it, even by the inefficient light that there was, to enable them to come to the conclusion that it was quite a ruin, and had been long since deserted, so far as any useful purpose was concerned.

"This is a miserable looking place," said Dick. "It looks as though such a storm as that which has just begun would scatter it to fragments."

"No doubt, Dick," said Claude, "it has weathered many such, though, and will weather many more. Hold Jack, while I dismount, if you please, Dick."

"I am better," said Jack, faintly.

"That's right. Can you sit without help?"

"I fear not."

Dick supported him, while Claude Duval dismounted, and then he helped him to the ground, but Jack was still too ill to stand without assistance, and Claude and Dick saw that any attempt to make him proceed at that time would be perfectly futile, and would most likely have the effect of forcing them in a short time to put up at some place much more inconvenient than the one they were now at.

After a brief consultation, they resolved upon entering the deserted mill; but they first of all looked out for some shelter for the horses, for a heavy drop or two of rain had fallen, and they fully expected that the storm would end in a fearful shower of hail or rain.

After some seeking, they found at a little distance from the old mill a shed, the roof of which was still in a tolerable state of preservation, and to that they led the three horses. After entering the hut, they found that there was a quantity of litter on the floor of it, consisting of straw, hay, dry leaves, and so on, so that it afforded every facility for keeping the horses comfortable for a short time, at all events.

The great object was to litter them in such a manner that if the storm should increase in violence so as to frighten them it might not have the effect of enabling them to escape; and this, with some trouble, Claude thought he had accomplished pretty well.

The result will show that in that expectation he was disappointed.

They had left Jack partially supported against the doorway of the old mill, but when they came back to him they found that he had sunk to the ground, and when they moved him he groaned heavily.

"Jack," said Claude, "I am quite convinced that you are hurt, and that it is something more than a shake that you have had from the fall off your horse."

"I fear so, too," he said.

"Are you in any pain?"

"Yes, great pain in my side. I fancy I have broke a rib or two."

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick, "and it is the pain that the broken ends of the bone give you when you are moved, Jack, that induces the faint feeling that has several times come over you."

"I don't think I have absolutely fainted," said Jack, "for when I felt quite incapable of speech or movement I still had a kind of idea of what was going on."

"There is no help for it, Jack," said Claude, "you must have rest."

"What place is this?"

"Why, it is an old, ruined, broken-down mill."

"A mill?"

"Yes, Jack."

"Is there a tall tree close to it, with a dead branch at the top of it?"

"There is a tall tree; but it is too dark to see the top of it, though the dead branch may be there for all we know to the contrary. Do you know this place, Jack?"

"I do. It is called the haunted meadow, and the old mill is supposed to be the resort of supernatural beings. No one will venture near it at night, and particularly during the prevalence of any storm; it is said to be haunted by the most horrible forms belonging to another world."

"Well," said Claude, laughing, "we have seen nothing in the shape of life, either of this world or another, except ourselves, yet, Jack."

"But you may."

Claude gave Dick a slight nudge with his elbow, as though he would have said—

"Do you hear how his old superstitious feelings cling to poor Jack?"

"Ah," said Dick. "But you don't mean to say, Jack, that you can believe in such stuff?"

"I don't know," said Jack.

Another flash of lightning now lit upon the old mill and the whole surrounding landscape with surpassing brilliancy, and this time the electric fluid appeared to spread itself out and to linger in the air, so that those who were by the entrance to the old mill could see quite clear for a short space of time the building and every object around it as plainly as if the sun of a summer's day had been shining.

"This is terrible," said Jack. "Why, there is a stream here. You did not tell me, Claude, that there was a stream here."

Duval was about to reply to him, but what he would have said was completely drowned in the clap of thunder that followed that vivid and beautiful lightning flash.

## CHAPTER CCCXXIII.

### THE SPECTRE FUNERAL TAKES PLACE IN THE OLD MILL.

POOR Jack was evidently very much put out of his way at the idea of being in the haunted mill during the continuance of a storm, and without waiting to hear what his friends would say, he spoke as soon as the reverberations of the thunder had sufficiently subsided so that his voice could be heard.

"Let us leave this place at once," he said; "oh, let us leave this place, I implore you both."

"We cannot, Jack."

"Why not? I am better—indeed, I am. Let me suffer what I may, I shall be content, so that I ride away from this place."

There was now a strange rushing noise in the air, and several very large hail-stones fell upon the highwaymen.

"Here it comes," said Dick.



"Yes, and we shall catch the worst of the storm if we don't get some shelter," said Claude. "Come, Jack, let me help you to get under cover. I beg that you will make no objection, but that for our sakes, as well as for your own, you will avail yourself of the shelter of the mill."

Jack said nothing. The appeal that Claude had made to him was one that he could not very well resist, notwithstanding his great and shuddering disinclination to enter a place that had so evil a reputation as that haunted mill.

It is no new thing to the reader, though, to find that poor Jack is infected by superstitious fears. The peculiar incidents of his career had given rise to the feeling, and he could not shake it off, do what he would.

It is a strange thing with regard to superstitious feelings such as those that beset poor Jack, that no experience will ever suffice to rid any one of them. It will be found that in no one instance has this fear been at all resisted by the result of any combination of circumstances; but still, when a new combination arises, the fears still remain.

Of course, if one proof in the shape of an absolute event could ever be brought forward, one would not wonder at the feeling of superstition gathering strength; but when that is impossible, it does seem strange that experience does not dissipate it.

Claude led Jack into the mill.

"How cold it is," said Duval.

"Yes," said Dick; "and the place smells as damp as the very grave. I fancy it has been a pretty considerable time since there was ever a fire in this building."

"Well, it shan't be much longer, then," said Claude, "for I will try if I can't light one somehow."

"No—no," said Jack. "Oh, don't!"

"But you will be as comfortable again, Jack."

"Oh, never mind me."

"But it is you that we do mind. You are hurt, and it's you and your comforts that we must attend to now; so don't say another word about it—a fire we will have. You have some phosphorus matches about you, Jack, now, have you not?"

"No. That is, I think not."

"Stuff; you mean yes. That is, you think you have."

"Perhaps I have."

"Jack—Jack, produce the matches."

Jack did so with a deep sigh, for he thought that the lighting a fire in the old mill argued the fact, that his two friends thought of making some stay in it, which he was most decidedly adverse to.

"Now, then," said Dick, "you collect what dry rubbish you can, Claude, and I will light a wax candle, and we will soon see what sort of a place we are in."

The bit of candle that Dick Turpin produced was soon lit, and after sheltering it from any adverse blast of wind with his hand for a few moments, until the flame had gathered strength, he held it up, and let its little rays illumine the old mill as well as possible.

They all three looked about them now with considerable curiosity, and even Jack appeared to forget some of his fears in the interest that the old place excited in him.

It was well worth the looking at, was the lower portion of that ancient structure.

The area of the inside of the mill was much larger than it appeared possible to be, looking at the building from the outside, and at one time it was evident that it had been fitted up with a much greater regard to personal comfort than such buildings usually were.

The walls were all panelled with oak, and the flooring was well laid down.

At one end there was a large fire-place, and some massive iron supports for billets of wood to be burnt upon.

The roof was one mass of heavy rafters, crossing and recrossing each other in all directions.

The place, too, was not wholly destitute of some rude articles of furniture, and, take it altogether, it certainly presented a very desirable refuge from such a storm as that which was raging without.

That the storm was raging, the three adventurers were put in mind by such a rattle of hail-stones, that it was impossible for some few minutes that they could have heard a word that either of them might have addressed to each other.

Such a fall of hail, however, could not possibly last very long, and it suddenly ceased as if by magic, and all was still.

"It is over now," said Jack, faintly.

Claude had placed Jack in a large, rough-looking, old-fashioned, wooden chair, by the side of the ample hearth, upon which hearth he had then a quantity of rubbish that he found about the floor of the old mill.

"Yes, Jack," he said, "it is over for the moment."

"It is over for good, Claude."

"Don't say that, Jack," replied Duval, who divined his motive, and knew that he wished at any sacrifice still to leave the place—"don't say that. It may begin again, and in my opinion it will, too."

Jack was about to say something in contradiction of this opinion, when, as if Claude Duval's words had been prophetic, down came the hail again with greater clamour and speed than before, and so much of it found its way down the old chimney, and bounced into the apartment, if it might be called such, in which they were, that Jack was silent, and Claude found that the task of lighting a fire was for the moment out of the question.

"This is hail, indeed," said Dick, as he took up a large mass of ice from the floor.

"It is," said Claude; "but the storm will, in reality, be over soon, I fancy, now. These hail-storms are generally brief enough, and the appearance of the hail is the end of the storm."

"Yes," said Jack, "and we can go then."

Claude made no answer to this; but taking the light from Dick, he placed it among the rubbish he had collected in the ample fire-place.

A dense-like smoke rose, and for a moment or two came out into the room, and half choked them.

"We shall be forced to go," said Jack.

The chimney in a few moments then began to do its duty, and the cold air being forced out of it, there was a strong and steady draught, and the smoke ascended at a great rate, and a bright flame rose from the mass of material upon the hearth.

"That will do," said Dick.

"Ah!" said Claude, "how cheerful a thing is a fire, after all! Now, Jack, only look about you, and own, old fellow, that we are infinitely better off here than in the murky meadows outside. The flame imparts quite an air of comfort even to the old place."

"But our pursuers," said Jack. "It would not be very comfortable to have them pop in all of a sudden."

"I agree with you there," said Dick; "and so, while you look after the fire, Claude, I will go out and take a good look about the place, as well as listen if I can hear any sound that may indicate the approach of the soldiers."

"They are off our track," said Claude; "so if they come here, it will be by accident only."

Dick went out; and then Claude said to Jack—

"Come, now, Jack, don't let Turpin think that you are the slave of every ridiculous superstition that you have ever heard of. For my credit's sake, as

well as for your own, let me beg of you to make an effort to shake off such foolish fears."

"I will, Claude."

"You will? Well, then, if you will, it is as good as done; for superstition loses its power over us as soon as we have the courage to dispute it. It is like all other miseries, Jack, only powerful in so far as we choose to submit to it."

"I feel," said Jack, "that it is foolish to give way to such fancies; but as regards this place, there is, I assure you, a very fearful story told."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, Claude; and when Dick comes back, if he should report that all seems to be safe, I will let you know it."

"Do so, Jack; and here he comes: Well, Dick, how do you find affairs outside?"

"Up to your knees in wet and muck."

"And no news of our foes?"

"None, whatever. It strikes me very forcibly that they won't at all fancy taking to the meadows in the sweet condition they are in at present. The horses, too, are all right, and don't seem at all put out of the way by the hail-storm."

"Very good; and see how the fire burns."

"It is quite a cheering sight."

"Jack says he will tell me why this place is called the haunted mill."

"Drive on, then, Jack, and let us know all about it."

Dick brought himself a seat, of which there were several in the room, and Claude having likewise provided himself with one, they both looked at Jack to begin; but just as he was about to do so, Duval said—

"How about the broken ribs, though, Jack? It's too bad to set a fellow to story telling in such a state."

"Why," said Jack, "I am inclined to think that after all it is only a sprain, for it is better, and I can use my arm, at all events, more freely; but there is a deuce of a lump on the side of my head."

"That was what confused your faculties a little, Jack."

"No doubt of it."

"Well, the story—the story," said Dick.

"You must know, then," said Jack, "that a murder has been committed in the mill. The fields all round this spot, and the mill, and a large mansion that is not far off, all belonged to a family named Wingrove. There were two sons of the proprietor of the place, and when he died he left all to the younger of the two, to the exclusion of the elder; but if the elder should survive the younger, the property was to go to him, as the old man said that if such should happen he hoped the elder would have acquired wisdom and virtue by years, which he did not then possess."

"Rather harsh, that," said Dick.

"It was, and it appeared that the elder son was in some foreign land, but hearing that his father was dead, he came to England and sent a letter to his younger brother to visit him here at this mill, for he set forth in the letter that he had committed acts that made it impossible he could show himself publicly in this country.

"Well, they met in the mill, and the elder murdered the younger in the upper floor of this very building, and cast the body down a trap-door in the ceiling."

"A trap-door in the ceiling? I wonder if it is really here still," said Claude, rising.

"Don't look for it," said Jack.

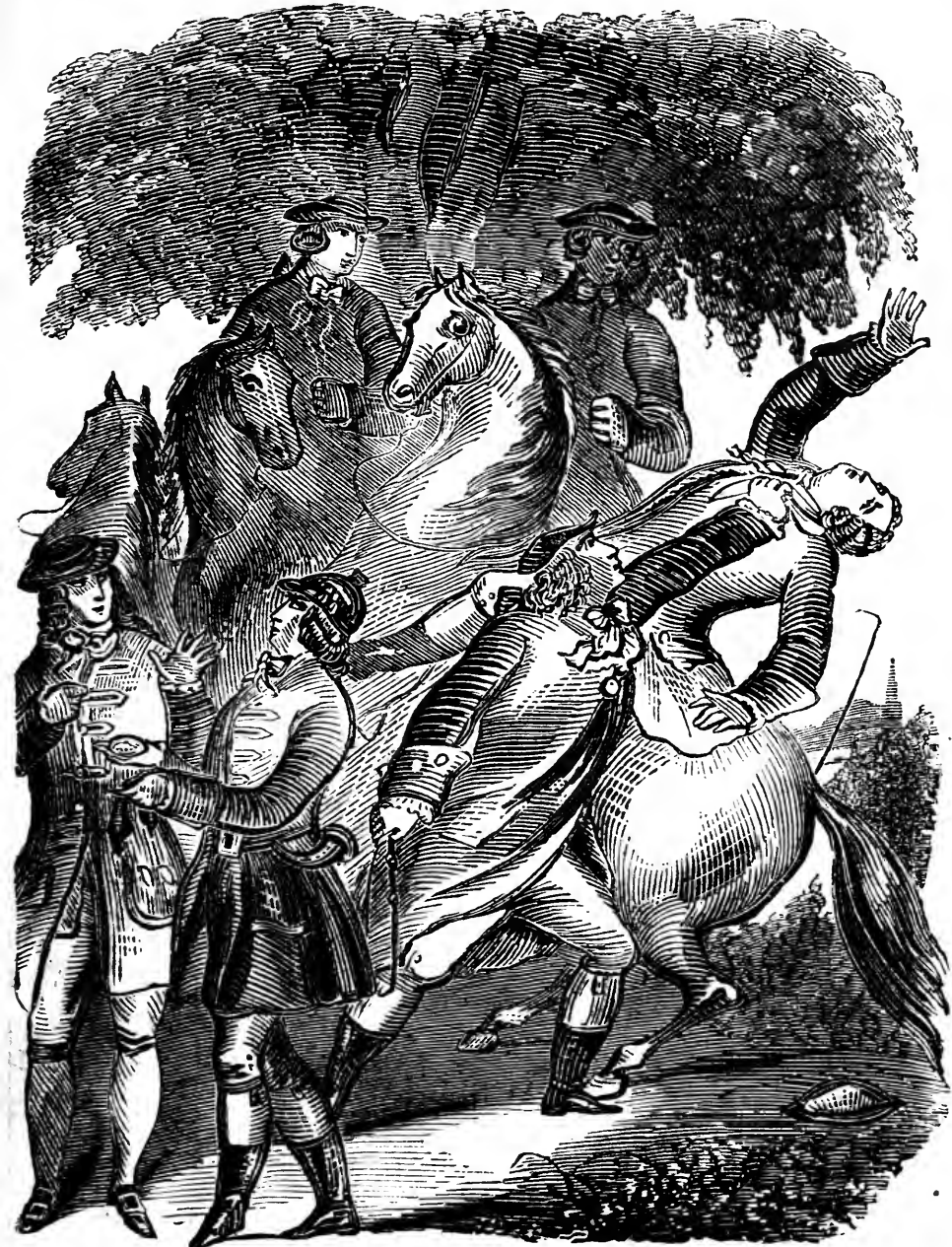
"Oh, why not? Stuff and nonsense, Jack. Why not? If I really find it, I shall place much more reliance upon your story, and if I don't I shall place none at all upon it."

Claude got a lighted brand from the fire, and held it up towards the ceiling, until at last he cried—

“Here it is.”

“Well, then,” said Jack, “I hope you are satisfied, that’s all.”

“I am so far.”



DICK TURPIN CHASTISES MR. MILLS FOR ATTEMPTING TO SHOOT HIM.

A strange howling noise was now heard, as if from the upper chambers of the mill, and then there was a lumbering sound just above the very trap-door of which Jack had so recently made mention.

“What the deuce is that?” said Claude.

Dick and Jack had both risen; but the latter did not feel himself well enough

to take any active part in what might ensue; so he sank back again into his chair with a deep groan.

The noise had entirely ceased; but that something had taken place in one of the upper chambers of the mill there could be no doubt; for as they had all heard the noise, it could not be by any possibility ascribed merely to imagination.

"Go on with your story, Jack," said Claude.

"Perhaps I had better not," said Jack, faintly.

"Oh, nonsense! Let us know it all."

"Well, the elder brother buried the younger under the floor of this part of the mill; but as he was taking his way to the house after the deed of blood, and fancying that all would be his, there came on a storm, and he was struck dead by the lightning."

"Serve him right."

"He was buried here in the grave he had made for his brother, whose remains were removed to the family vault; but the ashes of the murderer moulder beneath this flooring, and the funeral took place at the dead of the night, being attended by some of the old servants of the family, and since then the mill is haunted by the ghosts of both the brothers, and once a year by the spectre funeral."

#### CHAPTER CCCXXIV.

##### THE SOLDIERS FIND THE MILL TOO HOT TO HOLD THEM.

"The spectre funeral!" said Duval; "what sort of a ghost can that be, Jack?"

"Ah," said Dick Turpin, "I should like to know. I have heard of many ghosts; but the ghost of a funeral cortege must be something rare. I wonder how the ghost of a coffin looks?"

"You may laugh as you like," said Jack, mournfully; "but it is a fact, I assure you."

"What is a fact?"

"Why, that on the evening of the murder at midnight the spectres of all who buried the dead body of the murderer here appear, and go through precisely the same ceremony then, that they did originally; for they say that his spirit cannot rest, as it lies in unconsecrated ground, and that those who buried him can have no peace till some clergyman comes upon one of the anniversaries, and reads the burial service over the old bones that lie beneath our feet."

"Oh—oh!" said both Claude and Turpin; "you do not really and truly, now, Jack, expect us to swallow that?"

"You can believe it not, as you please," said Jack. "I only tell it to you as it was told to me, and I always thought it rather a fearful story. I don't feel well enough to contend with your unbelief; but I do think that even if you were to see the spectre funeral, you would not believe it, then."

"You are quite right, Jack."

"Oh, then, don't ask me to tell you anything else."

"Yes, we will, Jack; but we need not believe it for all that, you know."

"Hark!" said Turpin. "What is that?"

Three distinct knocks came upon the floor of the apartment above that which they were in, and then a strange, smothered scream burst upon the night air.

"There, there," said Jack. "I knew it—I knew it. Oh, let us get away from this place. I tell you it is haunted, and it cannot be a good thing for a living man to mingle with the spirits of the dead. Come away—oh, come! Ah, I—fear I cannot."

Jack made an effort to rise from the chair upon which he was sitting; but



he sank back in it again on the moment, for the hurts he had received from the fall of his horse so disabled him, that he was in anything but a fit state to carry out his own advice to fly from that haunted mill.

All was still again in the upper part of the mill.

"Claude," said Turpin, in a tone which showed how deeply his curiosity was excited, "what do you really think is the meaning of all this noise above here?"

"He cannot tell you," said Jack, rather pettishly.

"Well, I think I can. Some one or more persons are there, and they think they have a better right to the old mill than we have, and so they want to get rid of us."

"Oh, no—no."

"Yes, Jack, that is it, old friend; but they won't succeed while such a night as this is outside, I can tell them."

The same kind of noise now sounded from above; only now instead of the three knocks succeeding as though they were all upon the trap-door, they appeared to go over the floor, and to be in three very different parts of it.

Jack groaned aloud.

"Oh," he said, "I would not be here on the night when the spectre funeral appears for a trifle."

"What night is it, Jack?" said Turpin. "I might feel inclined to come just to see the sight."

"The third of August," said Jack.

"What?"

"The third of August."

"Why, Jack, do you know what you are saying, old fellow? This is the third of August! Why, you will forget your own name next, Jack. Don't you know that this is the very date you mention? Why, Jack—Jack, you are having a joke with us."

"It's no joke to him," said Claude. "I think he has fainted. I will raise a flame in the fire."

By giving the fire rather a vigorous stir, Claude Duval succeeded in getting up a flame in it, by the aid of which he saw that Jack was looking very pale, but had not absolutely fainted.

"Why, Jack," he cried, "rouse yourself from this torpid condition. I never knew you so completely overcome by superstitious fears before. Come—come, old fellow, laugh it off."

"The very day!" said Jack, faintly. "There is some fatality in this."

"Ha! ha! Well, what then, Jack?"

"What, then, do you ask, Claude Duval? I dread to think what then! I dread to ask myself the question."

"I don't, then. Do you, Dick?"

"Not I."

Jack raised his hand.

"There," he said—"there again. Do you hear that, both of you?"

"What?—what?"

"A voice singing. I hear it. Don't make me think that I am mad, and that I hear things that you do not. There it comes again. It is a voice singing something in a low, wailing accent."

"I do hear it," said Claude.

"And so do I," said Dick Turpin. "The noise gets louder, too, each moment. There it comes again. Where the deuce is it?"

"Hush!—hush!"

From a very low, weak voice that could scarcely be heard, the tones of some one singing a plaintive air became quite clearly perceptible, and in a few minutes more, although they were all rather at a loss to say whether the voice came from above or below, or from some room upon the same level with the one they

were in, they could all three plainly hear even the words of the song, if song that strangely chanted melody could be called.

Those words were as follows :—

“ The blood of a brother  
 Will seek not to rest  
 When shed by the hand  
 That should shield the loved breast.  
 The cheek that is pale  
 From the guilt of the heart,  
 Will never know peace  
 Till the world shall depart—  
 Till time is no more—  
 Till the seas cease to roar—  
 Till sunk is the shore,  
 And the world to its core  
 Crumbles into the dust.”

Three frightful shrieks concluded or put a stop to this strange rhapsody, which, towards the latter part of it, was articulated in a most singular fashion.

“ Help!—help!” said Jack.

“ What’s the matter?”

“ Oh, I know not; but I feel—as if I were choking in this place. For the love of Heaven, let us go. Let us go, I say! What is the time? Is it near to midnight? I tell you both that the spectre funeral will be here to-night, as sure as we are living men!”

“ Stuff! Be quiet, Jack.”

“ I cannot. I implore you to go from this place.”

“ Jack,” said Claude, “there are several reasons why we cannot comply with your request, and one of them is, that to do so would be to give way to superstitious fears, which neither Turpin nor I feel at all inclined to do.”

“ Certainly not,” said Turpin.

“ But you cannot fight against facts, Claude.”

“ No; but I don’t see the facts yet.”

“ Those noises—those terrible shrieks, and that unearthly singing. What call you all that?”

“ Nothing more, Jack, than I could do myself at a very few moments’ notice, if there was any occasion so to do; but if Turpin is of my mind, he will take good care not to leave this place without some sort of solution of the mysteries connected with it.”

“ I am of that way of thinking,” said Turpin, “and am quite willing to accompany you, Claude, in a search through the old mill.”

“ Come, then, I don’t suppose that our foes, the soldiers, are likely to trouble us here, so suppose we try to discover what we can of the secrets of this place.”

“ And what am I to do?” said Jack.

“ If you think yourself unsafe, Jack, we will not leave you; but I must confess I see no cause for such a feeling upon your part.”

“ Nor I,” said Turpin. “ Besides, of course, if we are in the mill we shall be near enough to you, Jack, to hear you if you see occasion to give any alarm.”

“ Go—go!”

“ Take him at his word,” whispered Turpin to Claude Duval. “ He must be cured, if possible, of these strange fancies that possess him, and which really have the effect of warping his judgment and making his life quite miserable.”

“ Yes, I would do anything to give his imagination a different turn, but I much fear that it is too late to do so.”

Poor Jack now looked at them both with a gloomy kind of intent as they made the preparations to get to the upper part of the old mill. A very brief examination assured them that there had been in one corner of the rather large apartment in which they were a staircase, or rather a set of open steps leading

to the upper rooms of the building, but they were there no longer, so that there did not appear to be any mode of reaching the rooms above, except through the trap-door in the ceiling.

"That will be our way," said Claude, pointing to it.

"Assuredly," said Dick Turpin.

Jack merely held up his hands and gave his head a slight toss, as much as to say—"Can it be possible that they are mad enough to put their heads through that trap-door." They observed him, but they took no notice of his rather expressive pantomime in disapprobation of their course.

Claude dragged a table under the trap-door, and then mounted it. As he did so, a deep hollow voice of the most unearthly cadences, suddenly said—

"Beware!"

"Eh?" said Claude. "What?"

"Beware!"

"Oh, thank you. I mean to keep a good look-out, and to take all the care of myself I can."

"Beware!"

"That will do. I heard you say that before."

"Oh!" cried Jack, "this is truly terrible. Three times he has been told to beware! and he treats the warning with the most shameful levity. Claude—Claude, the beings of another world will not be trifled with in such a manner."

"I beg your pardon, Jack, but I really think that I have more grounds of complaint than they have. They are trifling with me, for they keep telling me to beware! but they do not have the kindness to say what of."

Jack shut his eyes. He was truly shocked at the mode in which Claude Duval spoke of the supernatural world, and he would not encourage him by saying another word.

Claude nodded to Turpin, and then said—

"See that your pistols are in order, and follow me, Dick. We will, at all events, place ourselves in a position to form a clearer opinion of affairs in this place than we can do now. Follow me as closely as you can, Dick."

## CHAPTER CCCXXV.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE HAUNTED MILL ARE RATHER ON THE INCREASE.

By standing on the table which he had placed in the middle of the room, Claude Duval found that he was of sufficient height to command the trap-door easily.

Dick Turpin sprang up on to the table by his side.

"Is it open, Claude?"

"Not yet, I am trying it."

The trap-door appeared to be quite fast, and situated as Claude Duval was, of course he could not bring much force to bear against it, so that a trifling fastening on the other side would have the effect of holding it tolerably closely down.

"We must get something to force it with," said Claude.

"Suppose you tried a pistol-shot through it."

"I don't like to do that, for, after all, we don't know who may be on the other side, and a chance shot if it hits any one, generally hits the wrong one."

"Well, there is truth in that. But I will get one of those spare pieces of wood that are in yonder corner behind where Jack is now sitting, and by its aid we shall soon succeed in forcing the trap-door.

"Do so—do so."

Dick Turpin jumped off the table to get the piece of wood he spoke of, and then there came the mysterious taps from above upon the trap-door.

"That will do," said Claude, "I hear you."

"Rash mortal," said a void, "once more beware. Desist from this wild attempt to penetrate the mysteries of beings that are not of this world. Mortal, be warned, and depart in peace."

"Thank you," said Claude, "for the caution; but I feel quite a curiosity to have a look at you, and as I do not come to you with any mischievous intent, I really don't see what you can have to complain of."

"Oh! oh!" said Jack.

"D—n it!" cried Claude, suddenly, "what is that?"

He sprang from the table, and then they all saw descending from various little crevices round the trap-door small globules of blue light, each one of which as it fell shot up from the table into a little flame of brilliant blue.

A loud yell then came from above, and Jack sprang up from his chair as though he had not been hurt at all, and shouted out—

"There—there is one of them!"

"One of what?" said Claude.

Jack gave the fire a plunging kick with his heavy riding-boot, which made it shoot up into a flame again, and then they all three saw reaching down from the trap-door, which was opened about six inches to allow of it passing, a hand and arm, but a perfect skeleton.

There were the long bony fingers, and the double bone of the fore arm, yellow with the marks of decay. Not a particle of flesh was upon that arm.

"Clutch me," said a voice, "and come to the dead."

The hand waved to and fro as if seeking for some one whom it might lay hold of below.

Now, without being superstitious at all, any one might be rather surprised at such a little incident as this, and it was no wonder then that both Claude Duval and Dick Turpin continued to look at the strange sight before them without getting upon the table again.

Dick appeared to be the most thoroughly astounded of the two; and the hand, after making as it appeared several ineffectual grasps to try and get hold of somebody, was withdrawn, and the blue lights went out.

Claude drew a long breath, and then he said—

"Dick, old friend, what is your opinion of all this?"

"I have," said Dick, as he sneezed terrifically, "a very powerful opinion regarding the blue lights. They owed their origin to brimstone, I can swear."

"I thought I smelt brimstone."

"You only thought you did? Oh, well, it is possible that some current of air sets this way, and so brings the greatest quantity of it to my nose; but I doubt if I shall smell anything else for a week to come."

"But the hand, Dick—the skeleton hand? What do you think of that?"

"Ah—what!" groaned Jack.

"Why, nothing."

"Nothing can come of nothing, Dick. You do not think it was anything supernatural?"

"I think it was a real skeleton hand, but I suspect that there was no skeleton body attached to it. Nothing could be very well easier than to probe a skeleton hand and arm through the trap-door, and to wave it about."

"That is true."

"But a mere supposition," groaned Jack.

Claude Duval appeared for a moment or two buried in thought, and then he said, sharply—

"I will not give way to this delusion—I will not leave this place with even the doubt upon my mind concerning the character of these sights and sounds. I will know that they are explainable by natural and human means, or I will further have grounds for believing that they belong to the supernatural."

"Oh, Claude, you don't know your danger," said Jack. "What if the supernatural beings who may be above in this mill do you an injury?"

"I don't believe they can, even if there be such. Things that have no substance cannot injure my body surely; and as for my soul, they cannot harm it—

'Being a thing immortal as themselves,'

as the man in the play says; and, therefore, I will not hesitate."

Claude Duval now set about making his way through the trap-door, and certainly by so doing he displayed an amount of courage which very few in his situation in that ill-omened and ill-reputed place could possibly have commanded.

Dick had already provided himself with rather a thick piece of the trunk of a tree, and Claude Duval now took it from him and sprang upon the table again. With such an example before his eyes, Dick Turpin did not scruple to follow at once.

Claude then spoke in a loud voice—

"Hark you!" he cried. "I address you who are above there. We are well armed, and upon the slightest attempt to attack us or to do us any injury, we are likely to retaliate in a way that will be more energetic than pleasant."

All was still.

"I may add, too," said Claude, after the pause of a moment or two. "I may add, if it be of any importance to you to know that much, that we are in no way connected with the constabulary or the law."

Still no reply.

"Now for it, then," said Claude.

The piece of wood made a most powerful kind of battering-ram even in the awkward position in which Duval stood to use it; and after the third blow with it upon the trap-door it burst open with a crash.

"All's right," said Claude.

"I have my pistols ready," said Dick.

Claude did not think that anything was to be gained by delay, so he caught hold of the sides of the trap-door and drew his head and shoulders through the opening into the upper apartment of the mill.

"A light, Jack!" cried Dick. "There is a bit of wax candle. Light it, and hand it up to me, here."

Certainly the state of affairs was now such as might well have aroused every latent feeling of superstition that might be in the minds of Claude Duval and Dick Turpin.

It is not in human nature to entirely divest itself of such a feeling; and an imagination that would be free of all such sensations would be a phenomenon such as the world has not yet ever seen.

Jack lit the piece of wax candle that Dick Turpin threw to him, and held it up towards the trap-door.

"Take this, Claude," said Turpin. "I suppose it is dark enough up there, is it not?"

"As pitch," said Claude.

"Oh, come down," said Jack.

"Not just yet. Rather, do you come up."

"I will," said Turpin, and he scrambled up in the same way that Claude Duval had done.

"Hold the light higher, Claude."

"Yes—yes. Oh, God! what is that? Look, Dick, look! What do you make of it, eh?"

They both crouched down by the trap-door, and at about twenty paces from them they saw by the dim light that the piece of wax candle gave them a tall figure in a dark-coloured kind of mantle, standing in the middle of the floor, and regarding them both with a fixed and stony gaze.



It was impossible that any one could look at the face of that figure for a moment and believe that it was human.

"There is more in this than I thought," said Claude. "Dick! what—what is it?"

"By heavens I know not."

"I will speak to it. What are you? Speak if you can, and dare do so."

All was still.

Claude drew a pistol from his pocket, and levelling it at the figure, he cried out—

"I swear by my life that if you do not give some token of who and what you are, I will fire!"

The figure did not move, and Claude fired direct at its chest.

The concussion of air put the little light out, but there stood the figure as it had stood before, with a strange blueish kind of halo of light about it, as if it extended from its surface.

"It is not human," said Dick.

The figure vanished.

"A light—a light!" cried Dick. "We must not be in the dark here!"

"Hilloa—hilloa!" cried Jack from below. "Claude—Claude! Dick, I say, Dick!"

"It is the voice of Jack," said Claude. "Something has happened below. What is it, Jack?"

"The soldiers!"

"The what?"

"The soldiers are close at hand. I have been to the outside of the mill. It is coming down it torrents, and they are coming rapidly across the meadow, in this direction. They are certain to take shelter here, and we are lost."

"Not so; you must come up here, Jack."

"But—but—"

"Hang it, this is no time for buts. As yet, if that be what you want to know, we have seen nothing more than ourselves up in this loft, so don't hesitate, old friend, I beg of you."

Jack, notwithstanding all his superstitious fears, could not help feeling that his only safety from the clear and tangible dangers below, was by scrambling as well as he could through the trap-door. This he succeeded in doing pretty well, with Duval's assistance; and that he did so without putting himself to much inconvenience, was a pretty good proof that, however he might have been shaken by the fall of his horse, no bones were broken.

It was very satisfactory to Claude Duval to see Jack better.

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## CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

THE SOLDIERS ARRIVE AT THE MILL, AND JUST MISS THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THE rain had, some short time before the period when Jack had called up through the trap-door to let his friends know that the soldiers were at hand, ceased in a great measure, and the friends had been led to believe that the most of the rain was over.

That belief, however, turned out to be completely fallacious; and in so desperate a climate for changes as ours, it is no wonder at all that it did so.

He would need be a bold man who in England would take upon himself to say what the weather was about to be, from what it appeared at any moment.

Now the rattle of the shower upon the top of the old mill made such a racket, that although Claude Duval and his two friends were yet one story removed from it, they could hardly for a few moments hear each other speak for the tumult.

That state of things, however, did not last very long, for although it still rained very fiercely, the wa'er came down in smaller particles, and did not strike so forcibly against the building.

"Oh, but the trap-door," said Jack; "shut it at once, or we shall be seen by the soldiers."



THE ATTACK OF THE OFFICERS UPON THE BARRICADE.

"Are you sure now, Jack, that they are really coming?"

"I saw them."

"Well, that is proof positive, and down goes the trap-door."

"Stay," said Dick Turpin. "It will be a very easy thing to leave it open just so far as to enable us to hear what is going on below, and yet not so far

that it can be supposed to be otherwise than shut. Allow me, Claude. That will do it."

Dick placed a little piece of wood that he found in the mill-loft in such a position that it held open the trap-door to the extent of about half an inch, which was quite sufficient for the purpose of reconnoitring through, or listening to the occurrences below, but yet was so narrow an opening, that by looking from the room beneath upwards it was quite out of the question that it should be observed.

All was now complete darkness in the loft, with the exception of an occasional fitful gleam of light, that made its way through the small space that the trap-door was open when a flame would shoot up in the fire that they had kindled below.

"Oh, Claude," said Jack in an agitated whisper, "you have seen something here, although you will not tell me that you have. Is it not so? Tell me truly, I beg of you."

"We have."

"I knew it! I knew it. Ha!"

"There it is again," said Dick.

The same figure that they had before seen, and which was evidently proof against a pistol bullet, now presented itself to their notice, at the farther end of the old loft.

Jack sank down almost to the floor with terror, and his teeth chattered in his head, as he gazed at the awful spectacle. Claude and Dick, too, began to think that it must indeed be some being of another world, however unwilling they were to yield to such a fancy.

"Past! past! past!" said a deep, hollow voice.

Then there came one of the strange and terrible screams, such as they had before heard with feelings of alarm, and the figure vanished.

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Jack, "save our reason. It is said, that it is not possible for aught human to look upon a being of another world, and still preserve that reason which belongs to the inhabitants of this earth; and now that we have looked upon such a spectre, we shall go mad—mad!"

"I beg your pardon Jack," said Claude. "You may go mad—mad, if you like; but I don't intend to do any such thing, nor I don't think Dick will join with you in such an intention."

"Certainly not," said Dick.

"Hush!" said Claude. "Here is some tangible danger at last. Jack was right about the soldiers. The soldiers are at the door of the mill."

"There is a light here, my men," said a voice below. "We may find some one who can give us shelter till the weather clears a little. March!"

The tramp of feet in the lower part of the mill now proclaimed the fact that the soldiers who were in pursuit of the highwaymen were there, and then a little sharp voice cried out—

"It's quite clear to me, Mr. Sergeant, that the rascals cannot be very far off; and I hope you will resume the search for them as soon as this pelting rain is over."

"Plague take them!" said the sergeant.

"So say I," resumed the voice; "but as I am a professional man, I assure you, Mr. Sergeant, upon my reputation, that you could not possibly in anywise, notwithstanding, do a more acceptable service, to society as aforesaid than by catching these thieves."

"Ah, you are a lawyer, Mr. White," said the sergeant, "and it's all in the way of your business; but we don't like it."

"There's no one here," said the corporal, who had attentively examined the room; "but there wouldn't be a fire unless some one had been here recently. It's a shelter, at all events."

Claude peeped through the small opening in the trap-door, and he saw the soldiers below, and a little meagre-faced man dressed in black, and whose

clothes shone very much with the rain, who he rightly conjectured to be the Mr. White mentioned by the sergeant a few moments before.

The soldiers were drying their accoutrements by the fire, and swearing dreadfully at the duty they were upon.

"We must get out of this," whispered Dick.

"Yes, but how?" said Claude.

"Well, I don't know just yet; but there is one proposition that I think will be pretty evident, and that is, that if we do not make the mill too hot to hold the soldiers, they will make it too hot to hold us."

"True enough; but yet I own that I am rather puzzled to know what to be at. Where is Jack?"

"Here," said Jack, faintly. "It has gone."

"He can think of nothing but that ghost," said Dick, "It is of no use to say anything to him, Claude. What are they doing below now? They are making a great noise."

"They are breaking up the old chairs and tables, and heaping them on to the fire. They don't seem very particular about how they get up a good blaze, I must confess. I wonder Mr. White's professional feelings are not outraged by such proceedings."

One would almost have thought that the attorney, for such he evidently was, had heard Claude, for he said at once—

"You will excuse me, I am sure, in what I am going to say to you; but I cannot help remarking that this conduct is very illegal—I may say, strikingly illegal—Hem!"

"What conduct, Mr. White?" said the sergeant.

"What conduct? Why, the breaking up of people's furniture to feed a fire. I can assure you that an action could be opened, and you, as the defaulters, would find that you had no defence."

"Stuff!" said the sergeant.

The fire blazed freely in the old chimney of the mill; and then Dick Turpin whispered to Claude Duval—

"I say, Claude, I have thought of a plan, if we could only manage to carry it out, which would make the stay of these fellows below in the mill as short as possible."

"What is it?"

"If we could only stop the draught of the chimney, they would soon be half smothered. I can smell the odour of wet straw which they are now heaping on to the fire-place."

"It might be tried. There is one other story above this, and if we could get there, there would be do great difficulty in reaching the top of the mill, surely. It is worth making the effort."

"It is, surely. What are they about, now, Claude?"

"Ah, one of them has lit a torch, and they are are proceeding to make a careful examination of the mill. If we are to do anything like what you have suggested, it ought to be done at once."

At this moment a tremendous uproar ensued in the lower part of the mill, and the soldiers who were clustered round the fire all started up on the moment, and ran to where they had piled their firelocks. The fire was nearly extinguished, and the apartment was filled with smoke and soot. A large portion of the wall just above the fire-place fell right out with a crash, and the greatest confusion prevailed in the place.

The mill appeared to be shaken to its foundations.

"What on earth is all that?" said Dick.

"God only knows," said Claude, as he hastily withdrew the piece of wood that had held the trap-door a little way open and let it close cautiously.

"Don't do that, Claude," said Dick, "we can neither hear nor see now. Open the trap again."

"We shall be smothered by smoke and soot if we do. It was coming up this

way in dense volumes. Wait a little until it has cleared somewhat, and then I will open the trap again."

Notwithstanding that the trap-door was shut, they could hear tolerably distinctly the noise of the soldiers below. The little cracked tones of Mr. White, too, came pretty plainly to their ears.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" he cried. "What is all this about? What is taking place, now, I should like to know? The blessed mill is certainly falling down, and no mistake."

For a few moments even Claude and Dick, who neither of them lost their presence of mind, were rather at a loss to account for the sudden noise and confusion that had occurred; but Dick, after a few moments' consideration, said—

"Claude, that was an explosion of gunpowder, I feel quite certain. There can be no mistake about it now; I smell it quite plainly."

The state of affairs was now anything but very pleasant to any of the parties in the old mill. That some gunpowder had, by some means, been lodged in the chimney, and had suddenly exploded by the aid of the large fire that the soldiers made with the chairs and tables, appeared to be a proposition concerning which there could be no doubt.

The unmistakable smell of exploded powder pervaded the whole structure.

Such an odour was not likely to escape the practised noses of the soldiers; and after the first surprise had gone off, the sergeant cried out—

"Why, it's powder, my men. We have hit upon a mine. I suppose we shall be all blown to Jericho soon if we don't look out."

The men seized their muskets and mechanically formed in line; but as there was no appearance of any enemy, they could only look at each other with inquiring eyes by the light of one of the links they had with them, and which had withstood the concussion of air caused by the explosion.

After all, the principal part of the concussion had expended its fury up the ample chimney of the old mill, or, no doubt, it would have done some very serious damage to those who were assembled in the room so immediately contiguous to the scene of it.

Mr. White, though, the attorney, who was with the soldiers, and who had been compelled to accompany them by a magistrate to whom he acted in the capacity of clerk, was in the most abject-state of fear, now, and considered that his life was scarcely worth a moments purchase under the then exciting state of things.

"Oh, goodness gracious!" he said, "do come away out of this place. It's only a question between fire and water, and if you don't prefer the latter, I don't know what you can possibly be thinking about. Oh, come—come, my good fellows; isn't it better by far to be carried up outside than to be blown up inside?"

"It's all over," said the sergeant.

"Oh—oh! is it? You don't say so?"

"Yes, I think it is, by Jove!"

"Then, good-bye," said Mr. White, who by the words "It's all over" of the sergeant thought he meant that there was no hope for them in this world; and as he knew that, being a lawyer, there was no hope for him in the next, he gave himself up quite to despair, and fell flat on his back in a corner of the room on a great heap of damp straw.

## CHAPTER CCCXXVII.

### THE SPECTRE FUNERAL ACTUALLY MAKES ITS APPEARANCE.

If the situation of himself and friends had not been quite so critical as it was, Claude would have been rather amused than otherwise at the abject fears of Mr. White; but he felt that he had other things to attend to of more importance than the ludicrous agitation of the attorney.



After what had happened, it was quite clear that the soldiers would not be content to sit down so quietly in the place as they were before. The sergeant soon confirmed such an opinion.

"My lads," he said, "this little bit of an explosion has done no harm, as it happens, to any of us; but it shows us that there is something else in the place but old tables and chairs and rats—gunpowder don't get into a chimney without hands; and it is just possible we may find something worth looking for if we bestir ourselves, for we ought not to forget that we are promised fifty pounds among us if we bring in the highwaymen, dead or alive."

The soldiers expressed their assent to this proposition, and Mr. White, looking faintly up, said—

"What was that you said about fifty pounds, sergeant? If there is any money going, don't forget me, Abraham White, Esq., an attorney of the Courts of Westminster."

"Go to the devil!" said the sergeant.

"Oh, I feel that I am going there," sighed Mr. White, as he sank back again upon the wet straw.

"My lads," added the sergeant, "in such an affair as this, I know you will do best without precise orders when you know what you have to do; and so, I say, search the mill right through, and let us see if we cannot find these gunpowder gentlemen."

"Ah, we will have them!" said the soldiers.

"Hold!" said a deep, hollow voice, that was of such tremendous violence as regarded sound, that it might have come from a giant of awful proportions.

Claude and Dick both started, and looked around them, but all was quiet and solemnly dark in the loft, and yet the sound seemed wonderfully close at hand. As for the soldiers, they all paused, and remained in precisely the same attitudes in which the sound had caught them, as though it had had the faculty of turning them suddenly to stone.

Mr. White pulled some of the wet straw right over his face, and kicked convulsively; for now, indeed, he thought that his time was surely come, and that Old Nick himself had taken the trouble to fetch him.

"Hold!" said the voice again, and then it died away in rumbling echoes through the old mill.

"The devil!" said the sergeant.

"That's it," groaned Mr. White.

The soldiers handled their muskets, and looked now at each other with doubt. Each one sought to gather from the face of his neighbour some explanation of the strange sound that had seemed to come from no mortal lips.

"Sergeant," said the corporal, "what do you take that to be?"

"Some trick of the enemy," said the sergeant, as he drew his sword, "and I don't intend to let it scare me from the mill. I am only the more convinced that we shall not have come here in vain, though it was accident that led us to this place."

"Very well," said the corporal. "I'm willing and ready for anything."

"Will you all follow me?"

"We will, sergeant," said the men—"we will."

"Come on, then."

The sergeant turned round three or four times, now, and seemed rather puzzled to know where to lead the men to, now that he had got their consent to follow him. He seemed rather to have assumed than been at all really aware that there was any mode of leaving that apartment of the mill except the one by which they had entered it, and which led out into the open air again, and that was not where they wanted to go.

"Hilloa!" he said, "I don't see any way up stairs."

"Nor I, either," said the corporal.

"The deuce take it!"

Mr. White groaned and kicked again, as he murmured—

"They are speaking about him again. I heard him say something about the deuce. I'm an undone lawyer!"

"Let's have a good look about the place with the aid of the link," added the corporal. "There is surely some way of getting to the upper story of the mill."

The link was held high up, and then several of them saw the trap-door at once, and the corporal cried out—

"Here's the way. There's a door in the ceiling, and it isn't very high; so we shall easily enough get up to it."

"Come on, then," said the sergeant. "On with you, my lads, as quick as you can."

Now, Claude and his friends heard all this quite plainly, and they felt that it was time for them to make some sort of movement in the matter, if they did not want to come into actual collision with the soldiers, which they certainly did not.

"This won't do," said Dick. "This place will be too hot to hold us in a little time, Claude."

"Yes, we must get out of it; but how I really know not. You must light your wax tapers, Dick, and see if there is any ladder or trap-door into the loft above."

"Yes, that is it."

Dick lit a taper, and held it up as high as he could; and then in one remote corner they saw a something hanging from the ceiling; but it did not look like a ladder.

"There is something," said Dick. "Come on."

"No," said Jack, suddenly laying his hand upon Dick's arm. "The soldiers will be here through the trap-door before we can determine what to do. I can hear them, now, piling up furniture, so as to get up to it; and if they had not so wantonly knocked to pieces the table by the aid of which we got here, they might have been with us by this time; but they have used that for fire-wood."

"What is to be done?" said Claude. "We have no means of making the trap fast, that I can see. If it had now but a couple of good bolts, it would give them some little trouble; but, as it is, we cannot hold it down."

"Yes, we can," said Jack. "I will soon show you how. You and Dick can hold down the trap, while I go and look for some means of leaving this place, if such are to be found."

As he spoke, Jack came to a pile of wood, that was in one corner of the loft, and returned with a long flat piece, which he laid over the trap-door. It extended some three feet over it on each side.

"Now, Claude," he said, "do you stand on one end of this piece of timber, and you, Dick, on the other; and I will then defy any force that they have below to move the trap."

"Good," said Claude, as he stood upon one end of the piece of wood. "I rather think you are right enough there, Jack. The pressure they will have to contend against will be immense."

Dick took possession of the other end of the timber, so that the trap-door was held down by a power equal to their united weights—and they were neither of them very light men. The piece of timber was quite thick enough to put any doubt of its being broken quite of the question.

They could hear the soldiers making of the broken furniture below some sort of platform to stand upon, to open the trap-door from; and the sergeant called out—

"Now, my lads, I think that will do. Up with you."

There was a general scrambling, and then the corporal called out—

"It's as fast as a rock."

"The devil it is!"

"I knew it!" said Mr. White. "He says, 'The devil it is!' Oh! oh!"

The soldiers paid not the slightest attention to the condition of Mr. White, nor to anything he said or did. They were too intent upon the work they had set themselves.

"It can but be bolted above," said the sergeant. "A blow with the butt of a musket will open it."

Bang! bang! came two heavy blows with the brass-bound butt of one of the muskets. But, although the trap-door creaked and shivered, it did not open.

"Why, it's got a house a top of it," said the corporal.

"Shall I send a bullet through it?" said one of the men.

"Ah, do."

Bang! went the musket, and crack through the trap-door came the bullet, and lodged in the ceiling of the loft.

Dick and Claude did not utter a word; but they looked rather anxiously for the return of Jack, to tell them if he had found any means of reaching the upper floor of the mill. It was just after the musket-shot had been fired, that Jack came back. He spoke in a whisper—

"Come," he said, "there is a rope hanging from the edge of an opening in yonder corner, that leads to a small oddly shaped loft above. There is no difficulty in getting up."

"All's right."

"Stop," said Dick; "if we leave this place they will open the trap."

"No. They will rest contented with the ascertained fact that it is too fast to move. Let us go."

Dick and Claude stealthily stepped off the piece of timber, and followed Jack to the corner of the loft, where the rope hung.

"It is quite fast and strong," said Jack. "I have been up."

"That will do. We will follow you."

"No—no; I will follow you both."

"This is no time to dispute about precedence," said Claude, as he laid hold of the rope, and with great quickness drew himself up into a very curiously shaped little chamber—a loft at the very top of the mill. Dick followed him; and then came Jack, who drew up the rope after him, and cut it from the iron hook to which it had been securely fastened.

The soldiers were now in deep consultation as to the best mode of forcing open the trap-door, which they thought to be so fast, but which in reality would now have opened with a touch.

It was quite ridiculous to think how they must be eyeing it, and shaking their heads, and wondering what held it so powerfully, for no bolts could have resisted the attack they had made upon it.

"Now for a light, again, Dick," said Claude, "that we may see where we are. It seems an odd place, rather."

Dick re-illuminated one of the little bits of wax candle that he had with him, and then they saw the loft that they were in. The sides of it were nothing but what is called weather-boarding; and the top was the centre of the mill. Some sliding panels of wood at the sides, something in shape like the port-holes of a ship, let in air; and when Jack opened one of them, he found that it let in a great deal more than air, for he was nearly smothered by a terrible quantity of smoke, that came puffing into the loft.

A little examination let them see that the top of a chimney was just at that spot; and as the fire in the lower room was the only one in the mill, they could come to no other conclusion than that the chimney before them was the one communicating with it.

Jack shut the sliding shutter quickly enough, and Dick opened one opposite to it, which soon let out the choking vapour that the other had let in, owing to the wind being in that quarter. The rain was still coming down.

Indeed, what had appeared to be a mere storm and which would have been expected to be soon over, now seemed to have altered its character, for the night was

as black as pitch, and the rain came down with such a steady pelt that it promised continuance for an unlimited period of time.

Yet they all three were glad to lean out at the port-hole, if it may be called such, in the wall of that uppermost story of the mill, and breathe the cool fresh air, which, loaded with moisture as it was, was yet very refreshing and invigorating to them.

The soldiers, in the meantime, were not idle.

By the advice of the corporal, four of them brought their muskets to bear upon the trap-door in the ceiling all at once, and they gave it such a blow, thinking that it was of course as fast as it was before, that when it suddenly yielded, as it of course did, and flew open, they all four outstretched themselves, and down they fell off the tables and chairs they had piled up on to the floor of the lower room.

"Murder!" cried Mr. White.

"What's the matter, now?" said the sergeant.

The coporal, who was one of the four who had fallen, sat up and rubbed his head, as he said—

"The devil's in the trap-door! Why, it yielded this time to a touch, and flew right away as if it had never been fastened at all. I can't make it out."

The others who had come down with such a crash looked at each other rather ruefully, and felt anything but composed by the circumstance.

## CHAPTER CCCXXVIII.

### THE CONFEDERATES MAKE THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE HAUNTED MILL.

CLAUDE DUVAL and his two friends, in the uppermost story of the old haunted mill, heard that something had gone rather amiss with their foes upon the basement by the noise that had come upon their ears; but what it was that was so much amiss they had no means of exactly coming at.

"You may depend that they have had a fall," said Dick Turpin, "or they would not make all that noise."

"No doubt of it," said Jack, "and I only wish it had been from the top of the mill to the bottom of it, for then they would get rather sick of the job of hunting us in the way they are now doing."

"We will sicken them," said Claude, "in a quicker, but yet, I doubt not, quite as effectual a way, as if they had the fall you talk of, Jack."

"How so, Claude? I can't exactly see how you are to get at them from here."

"Then I will show you, Jack. In the first place, I think that with a very little trouble we might get out of one of these openings—or windows, I suppose we may from courtesy call them—and get right on to the top of the old building. When there, I don't think it is at all likely they will see us, or even suspect that we are there."

"Well, that will do for one thing; but if they take a fancy to stay till daylight in the room below, why, then, I fancy they will be able to see us."

"That I don't at all intend to let them do, unless they are more independent of ordinary comforts than I think they are. What do you say to smoking them out?"

"Smoking them out?"

"Yes, Jack. There is the chimney top, within arms-length of us; and it strikes me that if we stop it up, the smoke will make its way anywhere but up here; and that the soldiers will find it not the most pleasant sort of atmosphere to breathe in. What do you say?"

"Do it."

"And you, Dick?"

"Anything to annoy the enemy. If they are at all prudent, even, they will go



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after such a smother as they will soon find themselves in. Let us now set about it."

They commenced looking about the old loft of the mill to see if they could find anything that would answer the purpose of stopping the chimney; and after awhile, Dick said in a cheerful voice—

"Here are the means all capitally at hand. Now, I have lit upon a heap of old corn sacks. They are so damp by lying long here, that they quite stick together, and are as mouldering as it is possible to conceive them to be. They are the very thing."

"Hush!" said Jack; "I hear our enemies in the room below this. Be careful how you move and speak."



They all three listened now attentively, and they heard the voice of the sergeant say—

“Come on, my men. There is nobody here. Come on. You must have loosened the trap before, and that was what made it give way so easily now. Up with you.”

“They come,” said Dick. “Quick, Claude! Open the casement opposite to the chimney top, and I will lower the sacks into it. Quick! quick!”

Claude opened the shutter that closed the opening by the chimney, and a puff of horribly thick smoke from the wet straw that the soldiers had imprudently flung on the fire, came in their faces.

Dick held his breath for a moment or two, and then he thrust one of the sacks into the chimney; but it disappeared.

“Down it!” said Dick; “that’s gone down.”

“All the better, Dick. It will carry with it a capital dose of soot and smoke. Place another over the top.”

“It is done. Fuff! what a smother! Ah! it is clearing off from us, now. I will warrant that no more of the smoke will get out this way.”

A current of clear cold air set now in at the open casement, and it was very grateful to the senses of Jack, and Dick, and Claude, after the terrible smother of smoke that they had had to endure for the few moments before.

The effect upon the soldiers of sending all the smoke into the mill, instead of up the chimney, now had to be waited for; but it was quite out of the question that many minutes must elapse before it took place.

The next object that Claude and his friends had was to follow up their plan of operations, and get out at the top of the mill, so that when the top most loft should be searched, they should not be found.

It was not a very easy thing to do in the dark; but yet there were many places for the foot to get a firm hold, and for the hands to gripe; and if there had been but a gleam of light sufficient to enable them to see what they were about, they would have found the task to turn more easy.

As it was, however, there was no time to think of difficulties, and they set about it with right good will.

They all three felt that their only chance of safety lay in the fact that the soldiers did not know they were there; however their sergeant might suspect such a thing to be possible. If they were once seen, of course there would be no hope of escape, for the soldiers would set about their destruction or their capture in such a professional manner, that one or the other of such contingencies would be certain.

“Let me go first,” said Claude. “I am a pretty good hand at climbing, and I will take the rope with me, what we cut away from the iron hook at the entrance to this loft. I may possibly find some place to fasten it to, so that it will be of the greatest possible assistance to you both.”

“Do so, Claude,” said Turpin, “and be quick, whatever you do.”

Thus urged, not that indeed he wanted any urging at all in the matter, Claude Duval got out of the window on the opposite side to where the chimney was situated; and then he found, the moment he got on the outside, that there was a rude kind of railing there, by the aid of which it was an easy enough matter to reach the top of the mill, where there was a flat space of about eight feet square, likewise protected by a railing.

“Dick! Dick!” he said.

“Yes, Claude?”

“You and Jack can come up at once; it’s as safe as anything can possibly be. Indeed, it is a little too safe, for our foes may take it into their heads to have a look here.”

Dick followed Claude, and Jack came after him, so that in a few moments, without any danger at all, they were on the top of the mill; and as their eyes got accustomed to the dim night light, they could see with what facility the post which they had chosen might be reached, and they felt that if there was to

be a real search of the building, they had hardly bettered their position by getting where they now were.

"This won't do," said Claude.

"Not at all," said Dick. "If they choose to come after us, why they can; and when they can find us they have nothing to do but to go down below and pop at us with their muskets till they hit, or until we give in and let them take us."

"That they shall not," said Claude.

"Stop a bit," said Jack. "It is that bit of railing that makes it so easy to get up here."

"It is."

"Then I will put an end to that pretty quickly. It is as rotten as it can be, and I thought it would have given way with me."

As he spoke, Jack sat down on the extreme verge of the roof of the mill, and when in this position, he could just with the heel of his boot reach one of the principal supports of the railing.

"Now," he said, "one kick and it is gone."

"Do it," said Dick.

Jack gave the kick, and the railing, although it did not go, only hung on by a small portion of the fastening. The weight of a cat would have sent it down in one mass.

"Hush! Jack," said Claude. "that noise will betray us. Don't do that again, you can't think how that will sound in the mill. Be quiet, whatever you do."

"I did not think of that," said Jack. "I will not touch it again, but it will be no help to any one; for woe be to him who trusts to it."

"Come back, Jack," said Turpin, in a low voice. "I can hear the soldiers in the loft quite plainly."

They now all three crouched down on the top of the mill, so that they could not have been seen against the night clouds, and they watched the course of events with no small degree of interest.

Upon the occurrences of the next ten minutes hung the question to them of life and death—for capture was death, and escape only was life.

The soldiers, in the meantime, had recovered from the panic that the fall from the trap-door had occasioned them, and had followed the sergeant into the room above; but there, although they brought a lighted link with them, they found no traces of the men whom they sought.

The sergeant called to the attorney—

"Mr. White—Mr. White, I say."

"Yes, if you please," groaned the attorney, "I am here. Don't put me in a very hot place, I beg of you."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, dear, good Mr. Devil, you know what I mean well enough. I mean that I am a professional man, if you please—I mean that. Oh, dear, have the goodness to spare my feelings. If I can give you any advice at any time I'm sure I should be most happy, my dear sir. I am not absolutely on the grill, now, in a manner of speaking, but I am quite warm enough, I beg to assure you, sir."

"The fellow is mad," said the sergeant.

"He thinks," said the corporal, "that it's all up with him, and that he has gone down below to a certain old gentleman's dominions, and nothing will root it out of his head."

"Then let him be where he is."

"Yes, it's the best thing."

"Now, my men," said the sergeant, "I don't mean to go so far as to say that those rascals we are looking for are in the mill, but that there are some persons here, I think, we have heard enough to feel pretty well convinced, and, at all events, we will search it. Hold the light higher, and let us look about us."

The soldier who carried the link held it high up above his head, and it cast a livid and uncertain glare over the whole chamber.

That room was of the same size as the one below it, for it was not until the building got higher than that that it began to taper towards the top. One of the walls, however, was off the perpendicular considerably, so that it seemed as if that side of the mill were built very much inwards.

"There's nothing here," said the corporal, as shading his eyes with his hand from the too great glare of the link, he looked carefully about him.

A deep, hollow groan, coming as if from some one actually in the room, now filled up the pause immediately succeeding the corporal's brief remark.

They all started.

"What is that?" said the sergeant.

"None of us," said the soldier with the link. "The groan seemed to come from over in yonder corner."

The sergeant drew his sword, and stepped boldly forward, and made a thrust at the wall.

"Now, you cowardly rascals," he said, "come out, if you are hiding here anywhere—come out and show yourselves, and don't be trying any of your mountebank tricks upon us."

A shriek of terrible laughter rang through the place, and the soldiers looked at each other with dismay, while he who held the link stepped two steps towards the trap-door, as though he meditated making his escape from the place.

"Halt!" said the sergeant.

The men all stood perfectly still.

"Why, my men," he then added, "you are not quite so foolish, surely, as to believe that there is anything supernatural in this mill, I hope? All these are but tricks to scare us from our pursuit."

The corporal coughed and wiped his eyes, and the men began to breathe with difficulty, and then one of them said—

"Why, the place is filling with smoke as fast as it can. I am half choked." 1

## CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

### CLAUDE DUVAL MAKES MR. WHITE VERY USEFUL IN AN EMERGENCY. 3

THE effect of the stoppage of the chimney was now beginning to be but too apparent to those who had to endure it. The atmosphere was becoming impregnated with dense volumes of smoke, that not only impeded the breath by its acrimonious nature, but affected the eyes of the soldiers very sensibly.

Mr. White, who still lay upon his back in the room below, escaped much of the effects of the smoke that was now coming out of the fire-place in volleys, because it had a tendency, of course, to ascend, and the open trap-door acted almost like a flue, in drawing it up to the loft.

"What the deuce is all this?" said the sergeant coughing, and holding a handkerchief to his mouth. "Is the mill on fire?"

"I shouldn't at all wonder," said the corporal. "That explosion of powder in the chimney, I daresay, has done it."

"Ah, no doubt—no doubt. Run down and see what it is."

The corporal hastily went to the trap-door, but when he tried to descend by it, he was met by such volumes of dense smoke, that he found it impossible to get through there, and he was half smothered in the attempt to do so.

The soldiers were all coughing.

"It's coming in faster than ever," said one.

"Let it out," said the sergeant, and he took a musket from one of the men, and commenced hammering away at one of the walls of the mill. Several of the soldiers followed his example at the same spot, and they soon broke a hole in the side of that loft, through which the smoke forced itself in a dense volume.

This had the effect of relieving them a little, for a regular current now set in

from the trap-door to the hole in the wall, and that carried by far the greater portion of the smoke with it. The sergeant pointed to the opening in the roof leading to the upper story, and cried out—

“We must get up this way now, and I suppose that is as high as we can get.”

“Come on,” said the corporal.

“Hold!” cried one of the soldiers. “What is that?”

They all looked in the direction he pointed, and they saw standing a few paces from one of the walls a skeleton, with one hand outstretched, and the other resting upon its head.

A feeling of horror came over them all as they looked upon this figure, which shed around it from its festering, yellow-stained bones a kind of phosphorescent light. It was profoundly still, but there was no mistake in the fact that there it was.

“Who sees it?” gasped the sergeant. “Do—you—all?”

“All—all!” said the soldiers. “It is death.”

“No—no.”

The soldiers made a hasty rush towards the trap-door, but the corporal cried out—

“Stop! halt! Are we to be scared from our duty by such a sight as this here? I, for one, will not. A musket—give me a musket one of you.”

“Here,” said a soldier. “It is loaded.”

The corporal placed the musket to his shoulder, and pointed it at the skeleton figure.

“I swear,” he said, “be you angel or devil, that I will fire at you if you don’t speak and let me know why you come here. I don’t pretend to say that you are alive, because that don’t seem possible; but you have not come here without a purpose. Speak!”

“Beware!” said a deep, hollow voice.

“Beware of what?” said the corporal. “Of what would you warn us to beware? Speak again, I charge you!”

“Hence—hence—hence!” said the figure, apparently, although they could see no movement of its fleshless bones.

“Fire upon it!” cried the sergeant.

“Shall I?”

“To be sure. That will try it.”

Bang! went the musket with a tremendous uproar in that confined space, and when the noise a little subsided, and the soldier with the link stepped forward, and held it, although with trembling hands, in the direction of the figure, it was gone.

“Gone!” said the corporal. “I have scared it off by the shot, that’s quite certain.”

“No,” said the sergeant—“no. Look!”

The figure appeared again in precisely the same spot that it had before occupied; but it was only for a moment, and as if for the purpose of showing how futile had been the musket-shot, for there came a peal of the same yelling laughter that before had broken upon their ears with such a stunning effect, and then all was still, and the spectre vanished.

Even the corporal, who certainly had the most courage upon the occasion, rushed back, and grounded the musket, with a look of consternation and horror upon his face.

“I don’t know,” he said, “what to say to this exactly.”

“Nor I,” said the sergeant.

The men crept towards the trap-door, and one of them said—

“I don’t see any good in staying here. Let’s go.”

“Yes,” said the others. “The rain has all but given over; let’s go. Our horses are out in the open air, and will be all the better for a canter. Let’s go at once, sergeant.”

"Hold!" said the sergeant. "We ought not, my men, to think of what we had rather do, or not do just now; but of what we shall have to say about this affair to others. When the question is put to us of 'Did you search the old mill?' and we have to reply that we had meant to do so, but were frightened out of it by a ghost, we shall look rather foolish."

"Rather, indeed," said the corporal, "and, for my part, I will go all over the building, if I go alone."

"I will be with you," said the sergeant, "of course."

The men wavered; and then one said—

"We will all do our duty."

"Yes," said the others; "we obey orders, sergeant."

"No, my men," said the sergeant; "this is not by any means regular duty, so I will not order you upon it; but if with good will you will all follow me, do so."

"We will—we will."

"Come on, then. I don't suppose that there is more than one room or loft above this one that we are in, and when we have fairly looked at that, I think we may take upon ourselves to say that we were not frightened from searching the place."

They now advanced to the opening in the roof, through which Claude and his friends had made their way by the aid of the rope; but as rope there was none now, it did not seem so easy as it might have been to ascend to it.

The soldiers were tall men, though, and one of them proposed to stoop down and let a comrade stand upon his back, and so scramble up, when the next could do the same for him, and so on, until one was only left below, who might be considered as on duty there in the capacity of sentinel.

This was a proposition at once so feasible and so easy to carry out, that they all acceded to it. The only little difficulty consisted in who should ascend to the unknown loft above first; but the corporal put that at rest by proposing his willingness to do so; and, accordingly, one of the men went on all-fours, and the corporal, when he stood upon his back, found that he could just reach the sides of the hole in the roof, and drew himself up by his hands, which his military exercises enabled him to do with considerable ease and dexterity.

"Is all right?" said the sergeant.

"Yes. Nobody seems to be here; but it is very dark. Come on with you, and bring the torch."

"Yes; coming."

In the course of a few moments, now, the whole of the party, with the exception of one man who remained below on guard, was in the upper part of the old mill.

Several of them crowded to the window, or opening in the wall, through which Claude and his party had made their way to the roof of the building, and they did so more from the satisfaction they experienced from getting a mouthful of fresh air than for any other cause, for the atmosphere of the mill was full of smoke, notwithstanding they had by making an outlet from it succeeded in letting a sufficient quantity escape to make the air just endurable.

The soldiers were now so close to Claude Duval and his friends, that they might have touched each other; and then the corporal said—

"There seems to be a kind of balcony with rails outside here, is there not?"

"Yes," said the man, with the link. "One of you hold the light, and I will get out, and have a look about me at what sort of a place it is."

The corporal took the light, and the soldier scrambled out of the window; but the moment he let much of his weight rest upon the little balcony, and its light railing, down it all went with a crash to the ground—a depth of nearly fifty feet.

This would certainly have been a fatal accident, to the soldier, had not the corporal caught him by his belt and held him by it against the ledge of the



window till three or four of his comrades got a good hold of him and pulled him in.

"A narrow escape that," said the corporal.

The soldier looked quite white, and was for some few minutes unable to speak. Then with a shudder, he said—

"I thought I was gone, corporal. I owe you my life."

"Pho—pho! Don't mention it."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, stuff. These things always happen in service, you know. All I wish of you is, that if you see me ever going in the same way, you will hold tight, my man, that's all."

"Indeed, I will."

The corporal had dropped the torch in the anxiety to save the man, but it had not gone out, and one of the soldiers, by waving it in the air, got it into a flame again.

The nearly fatal accident that had occurred had had the effect of damping the ardour of the soldiers a little; and after satisfying themselves that there was no one in the loft, they proposed to get away again as quickly as possible, which the sergeant did not oppose.

"I don't see," he said, "that we can do any more good here. We have searched the whole building."

"We have," said the corporal. "Let us leave it now. The smoke that cannot get out at the hole in the wall seems to find its way up here, and the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Come on, then."

The men were not at all sorry to leave that loft, and they sprang down one by one into the room below very quickly. The sentinel reported that he had seen nothing, but that a rushing noise of something on the outside of the mill had rather startled him. They let him know that it was the fall of the little balcony and its railings that had produced that noise, and then they hurriedly walked to the trap-door to descend to the basement story of the place.

"I say," whispered the sergeant to the corporal. "It's an infernal old den, this, and worth nothing."

"Not a mag."

"Well, then, it's only a harbour for such fellows as those we have been after, and there is but one way to prevent it from being such in the future. Do you throw the link into a corner among the straw when we come out, and the confounded place will be burnt down before the morning, and all the ghosts along with it."

"It wouldn't really be a bad thing to do so."

"A bad thing! It would be a good thing, I tell you. Come, mind you do it now."

"I will."

"That's right. You needn't say anything to the men about it. I will march them out, and as you follow you can do it. They won't know what you have done with the link, you know."

"All's right, I'll manage it. It will make a nice bon-fire, at all events, if nothing else. I will do it, you may depend."

The sergeant was quite satisfied with this ready acquiescence of the corporal in the idea of setting fire to their enemy's quarters before leaving, and he ordered the men to march out of the mill. They obeyed him with all the readiness possible, for they were by no means enamoured of that place, and were glad enough to get out of it.

The corporal remained last, and then he threw the link into a corner of the room, saying as he did so—

"I sincerely hope that it will soon burn down the old den, for I don't know when I have had such a fright as that skeleton ghost, if, indeed, it were such, gave me, though I did manage to fire at it."

He then left the mill, and it may be here remarked that they all, either unintentionally or wilfully, it is rather hard to say which, forgot that there was such a person as Mr. White, attorney at law, lying upon his back in the lower room of the old building.

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### CHAPTER. CCCXXX.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE IN GREAT PERIL IN THE MILL, AND SO IS MR. WHITE.

WHILE all this was going on, Claude and his two friends were snug enough at the top of the mill, but they little suspected the nice little design that the sergeant and corporal had concocted between them.

They, the highwaymen, had thought of smoking out the soldiers, but in a much more effectual manner the latter had thought of burning them out by setting fire to the building.

Claude did not think it exactly prudent to say anything for some little time after the soldiers had left the upper loft, for neither he nor his friends could possibly take upon them to be quite sure that that was not a mere *ruse*, or that they were really gone.

After about a quarter of an hour more had lapsed, and when by the most intense listening nothing could be heard of any one in the narrow apartment immediately below the roof of the mill, they began to conclude, as was the fact, that their foes had really gone.

"Jack," said Claude, "where are you?"

"Here, all right."

"And you, Dick?"

"I am here, Claude," said Turpin, "and I do think those fellows are gone at last."

"So do I."

"Be careful, though, yet," said Jack. "They may be lurking about, and we must not throw a chance away."

"Certainly not. Ah! what is that below? I see some figures, and I hear voices, too. They are tired of it, and are leaving the mill."

From the position he occupied, Claude could see pretty well over a ledge to the meadows below, and, dark as it was, he saw that the little troop of soldiers were on the move from the spot. The rain still came down; but it was only in a light, scattering kind of way, now; so that beyond the great discomfort that the wet state of the meadows would be sure to inflict upon them, there was nothing in the condition of the weather that could be any valid excuse for the soldiers seeking further shelter, merely for the sake of shelter.

Their horses had been picketed close to the mill, under cover of some trees, which had in some measure, though not to a great extent, protected them from the storm. The saddles and housings of the steeds were saturated with water; but the soldiers set about drying them as well as they could with such means as were at their disposal.

Situated as the highwaymen were, the sounds of the voices of the men below came quite clearly up to them, and they had no difficulty in hearing every word that was uttered. Indeed, the sounds came to them in quite a startlingly distinct fashion, as if they had been close at hand.

"Who can lead to the high road by a short cut?" said the sergeant. "We shall be up to our necks in these meadows soon, if we don't get out of them."

"I know the way," said the corporal. "It is directly past yonder clump of trees, and then we are on level ground."

"Come on, then," said the sergeant. "We have done all we can; and so I shall make away to head-quarters again."

The soldiers followed the sergeant and corporal, and as they went, they swore dreadfully in their anger at the whole affair; for they looked forward to the serious job it would be in the cleaning line on the morrow after the dragging ride



CLAUDE AND THE PRINCESS DANCING A MINUET,

through those meadows before they could present themselves for inspection to their officers. Moreover, several of them had rather serious bruises from the fall they had experienced during the attempts to open the trap-door.

"They are gone," said Claude.

"The devil go with them!" said Turpin.

"Well, I think you are mistaken there," added Claude, "for I don't see the lawyer anywhere; and the old gentleman you have mentioned is more likely to stay behind and keep him company."

"But where can the lawyer be?" said Jack. "Surely nothing has happened to him in the mill?"

"There is no saying just yet," said Claude; "but the most likely thing is, that when he found there was likely to be anything in the shape of danger, he ran off, and left the soldiers to encounter it alone. He was certainly not with them when they came up so nearly to us just now."

"Do you think not?"

"Certainly; he would have said something if he had been. I am glad, by-the-by, that the soldier was saved from falling from top to bottom of the mill along with the balcony and its appendages."

"So am I," said Jack.

"And I, as it has turned out," said Dick; "although I doubt if they would have said as much concerning us. But what is that odd crackling noise that I hear? Just listen to it, Claude."

"A crackling noise is it?"

"Yes. There it is again."

"Ah, I hear it now quite plainly."

"And I, too," said Jack; "but I cannot think what it can possibly be."

They all three now listened with the most marked attention to the odd crackling noise that seemed to come from the lower part of the mill, and it is just possible that they might have listened to it for a still longer period than they did, without being able to come to anything like a just conclusion concerning it, but that a circumstance took place that had the effect of opening their eyes, both literally and metaphorically speaking, to the exact truth of what was going on.

A dull red light began to show itself in the air, and to impart a strange radiance to the old mill.

It was Jack who exclaimed—"Why, that is fire!"

The moment he pronounced the one word "Fire!" it gave to Claude Duval and Dick Turpin a clue to the whole mystery of the strange crackling noise that had so much puzzled them, and they cried out with one voice—

"The mill is on fire!"

This was a state of things that required the most prompt and decisive action, and Claude was upon his feet in a moment.

"We must get out of it," he cried, "as quickly as we can. It is all wood, and will burn like a match."

"Yes; but how?" said Jack, who, after leaning over the side of the roof they were on, rushed back coughing from a mouthful of dense smoke that he had inhaled.

"How?" cried Claude. "Why, the way we got here, to be sure."

"Always forgetting," said Jack, "that the little balcony and railings that helped us up here are now gone."

"But you don't mean to say, Jack, that we are to stay up here and be roasted in this infernal mill?"

"It would be a hard case."

"Rather," said Dick, "and one that I don't intend shall be mine if I can possibly help it."

"Never mind," said Claude. "Where is that rope that we brought with us? Who has it?"

"I have it," said Jack, "and four or five yards more to add to it, if they are at all likely to aid us; but if your idea is to descend by its aid, I think you will find it to go about half way, that is all."

"Half way is something."

"Yes, but not enough, Claude. I must confess, that I think we are rather in what may be called a fix here."

There was at this moment a loud crash, and from one side of the mill that had taken light, there came rushing up a monstrous flame, hissing and crackling against the wet wood-work.

"Here it comes," said Jack.

"It does indeed," said Dick. "I can feel the hot glow of it even now upon my face. Claude, what do you propose now?"

"Escape."

"Escape, is the word, but it seems one more easy to utter in the present state of affairs, than to carry out. I don't seem at all to like the position of things here."

"We are lost," said Jack.

"Not so," cried Claude. "I have tied one end of the rope securely to a strong iron ring that is here. Now, Jack, produce the supplementary piece of cord that you spoke of. Is it strong?"

"Here it is," said Jack. "I had it round my waist, in case of an emergency, as at times a bit of cord is of inestimable value and as for its strength, it would hold us all three."

"Good."

Claude took the rope, and firmly tied it to the end of the piece he had already.

"That," he said, "with the other goes about half way down."

"How consoling!" said Jack.

"So that it leaves," added Claude, "only twenty five feet, or thereabouts, below the end of it."

"Ah!" said Jack, "a pleasant drop."

"Dick?"

"Yes, Claude. I know you have some idea of saving us all. What is it?"

"Lend me your coat!"

"My coat? Oh, to be sure. Yes—yes, my coat tied to the cord, and your coats tied to mine, will go the distance, or so near to it that the drop will be nothing at all to speak of. All's right! By Jove, we shall get the better of this bout. Jack, off with your coat, man, and I'll warrant we shall be on the ground, safe, in another five minutes."

There was not, in good truth, much time to spare now in the matter, for the flames had fairly laid hold of one side of the mill, and were roaring and crackling at a fearful rate. If there had not happened to have been such heavy rain recently, the whole building would, as Claude said, have blazed up like a match; but it took some time for the heat generated by the fire to dry the weather-boarding, of which the external sides of the building were composed.

It was to that circumstance alone that Claude and his two friends upon that eventful occasion owed their lives.

"Quick! quick!" said Jack.

"Yes; steady and safe! All is well. Your coat, Jack."

"Here."

"That's it."

"Oh, Claude, I can feel the mill shake."

"The devil you can!" said Dick. "I didn't think that it had come to that just yet. How are you getting on, Claude?"

"Well."

Claude Duval would not allow himself to be hurried in tying the coats together. He felt how much would depend upon the ability and security with which he performed that part of the business; and he was resolved to do it well. It would be of little importance to gain a few moments in time, and to lose, as a consequence, everything in the inefficiency of the apparatus of escape.

Claude tied the coats together by the arms, and he found that he could do so with a feeling of perfect security, and then he flung them over the roof of the mill.

"Now, Jack," he said, "go."

"No."



"What do you mean by no? We will follow you."

"No; I will follow both of you."

"This is no time for nonsense," said Dick Turpin. "While you two are settling which shall go first, I will go; and when I get to the ground I can perhaps help you."

Dick, without another moment's hesitation, descended, and found that the coats brought him within a few feet of the damp ground by the side of the mill. Jack was firm in being the last, so Claude called out to Dick—

"Is it all right?"

"Quite," said Dick; and then Duval himself descended; and, although one of the coats tore a little, and he thought that the mill itself shook, he did reach the ground in safety; but he was much alarmed for the safety of his friend above.

"Safe! safe!" said Jack.

"Don't cry out till you get of the wood," said Claude; "or rather out of the mill."

"Well, but all is well now."

"I hope so. Come on, Jack. I have hold of the coats. Come steady, now, old friend. Slow and steady."

Claude Duval really had the greatest apprehensions that poor Jack would never reach the ground in safety, and yet, what to do in the world to aid him he really knew not.

There were two dangers to guard against.

In the first place, after the passage of himself and Dick down the rope and the coats, Claude Duval did not think they were anything so secure as they had been; and in the second place, he felt as certain as possibly he could be that the mill itself shook, and showed some symptoms of tipping completely over. Should such a catastrophe as that happen, it would be likely enough to involve him, Claude, in destruction, as well as Jack. It was, truly, a moment of fearful suspense.

Jack came sliding slowly down.

"Steady, Jack!"

"Yes, Claude; yes. The rope is—is——"

"What?"

"Only cracking."

Even as Jack spoke, the rope parted and down he came; but Claude was resolved to save him, and with great dexterity he, without actually catching him in his arms, broke his fall; so that what with the coats and that friendly interposition as well, Jack reached the ground without sustaining any injury at all.

"You are safe, Jack!"

"Quite. Thanks to you, Claude, otherwise I had been a dead man."

## CHAPTER CCCXXXI.

### THE FUNERAL CORTEGE ARRIVES JUST A LITTLE TOO LATE.

SCARCELY had Claude and his friends time to congratulate each other upon reaching the ground in safety, when a most singular spectacle met their eyes, and for a time transfixed them to the spot with astonishment.

Turning just round a corner of one of the outhouses belonging to the barley mill, came one of the most singular cavalcades that they had ever seen—a cavalcade, too, which at such a moment was of strange and significant moment.

First there came two men in long black clothes—such as are worn at funerals—and with hat-bands hanging down their backs, after the absurd fashion of undertakers' men. Immediately following them came one man, with a white cravat, similarly attired to the others; and then came four supporting a coffin, with a pall over it.

Following the coffin there were six mourners, who, if one might judge at all

from their appearance, were in a great state of affliction, for, according to the most approved mode among mourners, they each held a crumpled up white handkerchief to his mouth; for, strange to say, mourners at funerals always do hold their handkerchiefs to their mouths instead of their eyes, thus leading to the idea in some cases as though they were trying to smother their laughter, instead of stem the current of their grief for the departed.

Where on earth such a cavalcade as this had sprung from was the mystery, and in the dim light, cast by a lantern that was placed upon the coffin near to the head of it, they certainly looked extremely spectral and mysterious to Claude Duval and his two friends.

"Good gracious!" said Dick Turpin.

"This is surely our last moment," said Jack.

"Confound it, don't be frightened at a funeral," said Claude.

"The devil!" said Dick.

"If it be his funeral it's a good job, Dick, so don't put on such an appearance. Where are they all going, I wonder?"

The funeral cortege did not pause nor appear as if its members saw or paid the smallest attention to Claude Duval and his friends, but on it went past the door of the mill with a slow and solemn step, and then took a course towards one corner of the meadow.

The solemn and slowly moving figures—the dim spectral kind of light, and now and then an odd wailing noise that came upon the ears of the listeners, all combined to render the scene striking and picturesque in the extreme, while it invested it, too, with an aspect of terror, and was significant of thoughts of another world.

No doubt if it had depended upon Jack or Dick to stop the cortege of death, neither of them would have done so; but Claude was there, and he was really not a likely person to allow such a mysterious cavalcade to pass unquestioned.

"They are going," he said. "Let us follow."

"Oh, no—no!" said Jack.

"Well," said Dick, "I hardly know what to say."

"But I do," said Claude. "I hate to have anything to think about afterwards to puzzle me. I will follow them, I tell you. You can come with me both of you or not, as you feel inclined."

"If you go," said Dick, "I go."

"No—no," cried Jack again.

"Then you stay here, Jack."

"But, Claude—"

"Nay, Jack, I know as well as possible what you would say. All your superstitious fears are fully awakened in this matter, and you who would look upon possible danger as nothing, would shrink from interfering with yonder cavalcade; but I have made up my mind to it."

"Come on," said Dick.

"I will; and be they ghosts or living beings like ourselves, they shall find that I am not one to be trifled with with impunity."

As he spoke, Claude Duval dashed forward, followed closely by Dick; and Jack, rather than be left alone probably, likewise followed them.

When Claude Duval got a little nearer to the funeral procession, he called out, in a clear, bold voice—

"Halt! Stop, I say. You do not pass on unquestioned."

No attention was paid to him, and the funeral passed on at the same solemn pace.

Claude would not be baffled, but passing the cortege, he turned abruptly and faced the two men at the head of the procession with a pistol in his hand, saying as he did so—

"Advance another step and I will test the vitality of some of you. I am a man of my word."

The procession stopped, and the two men held up their arms in an attitude

deprecatory of his interference with them. One in a deep hollow voice spoke—  
 “Rash man, forbear! The valour that would be great as against those who are mortal as yourself is useless when directed against us. Depart in peace!”

“Not till I know who and what you are.”

“Beware—beware!” said the other man, and in that deep and solemn voice Claude could well imagine the one who had uttered the same word at the old mill.

“Thank you, my friend,” he said. “I heard you say ‘Beware’ once before, and I don’t know that anything came of it; so I don’t mean to let you go on.”

“Nor I,” said Dick.

“Unless,” said Jack, who by that time was by the side of Claude and Turpin. “Unless you declare who and what you are.”

“There is one who may declare it,” said the one with the wand, as he slowly advanced, “but we may not. Let the dead declare the secrets of the dead to these men. If they survive not, it is not the fault of our erring souls. That will not sit heavy upon our frail natures. Let the dead speak!”

Those who carried the coffin now set it down, and one lifted the lantern from it. Then as Claude and his friends looked on with interest, and Jack at least of the three with alarm, there was a strange commotion under the pall.

Jack stepped back.

“Hold!” said Claude in a whisper. “Don’t let them see fear or hesitation, Jack.”

Jack advanced again, but he shook with agitation as he looked upon what was passing.

The pall became each moment more and more agitated, and those who had been bearing the coffin shrunk down almost to the ground, as if they dreaded what was about to take place, while the others forming the funeral procession knelt down upon the moist grass and uttered low wailing sounds.

The man with the wand spoke.

“The body of the murderer cannot rest,” he said. “It lies in unconsecrated earth, and till the great day when the sons of man shall arise and look again upon the light of day, will his frail dust agitate the folds of the covering that should hide it from mortal view. It is in vain that, chased through a world, the skeleton form is brought to a resting-place. It cannot rest—it cannot rest.”

The agitation beneath the pall still continued.

“Claude?” said Jack.

“Well.”

“This is the spectre funeral.”

“You don’t say so?”

“Oh, Claude, do not oppose this fact, for it is one. The body that lies in that coffin is, without doubt, that of the brother who killed his brother. The body of the fratricide cannot rest. Oh, let us away from this dreadful scene. I implore you to fly from it.”

“Not yet.”

“But, Claude—Claude, and you, Dick, too—only consider!”

“Only do you consider, Jack, if you please, that I am really very much interested, and if you will do so, I am sure that you will not ask me to leave this place. Come—come, be quiet, that is all I ask of you.”

Jack saw that it was useless to contend with Duval upon this point; as he had made up his mind to stay, so he only retired a step or two, and in a crouching attitude, awaited the result of the extraordinary scene.

“You see,” said the man with the wand.

“Oh, yes,” said Claude.

“Depart, then, in peace.”

“Thank you. I would rather stay.”

“Oh, fool—fool!”

"Upon my life, you are very complimentary. Allow me to return it, by saying that in my opinion you are an ass."

"Ah! Dread my vengeance!"

"I won't."

The agitation in the coffin under the pall increased each moment, and the pall itself was shaken violently to and fro. The man with the wand raised it in the air, and muttered some words that were not intelligible to Claude, and then he touched the coffin with the end of it. The mourners raised another wailing cry, and the curtain of the pall began to rise up, and it was quite clear that some figure in the form of humanity was rising from the coffin and taking the pall with it as it did so.

The scene was rather an exciting one, and had it not been that terror really at the moment deprived him of the use of his limbs, the probability is, that Jack would have justified all that could have been expected from the affair, and taken to flight.

Neither Dick Turpin nor Claude Duval, though, were so affected.

"Beware! beware!" said the man with the wand—"beware! No mortal eye has ever looked upon this sight and left the brain of the sad spectator free from the wild madness that such a spectacle must produce."

"Very good," said Claude. "This is a fellow of some education, Dick. He uses very tolerable language."

Dick was silent. Without affecting him as it had done Jack, the scene certainly did in a manner take a hold of his imagination, and, perhaps, it did the same in a lesser degree to Claude, only he would not show it.

The figure in the coffin still rose up under the pall higher and higher; and being carefully covered by the black velvet of that funeral covering, it was left entirely to the imagination to conceive what it could possibly be like, and the effect of it so rising was truly shocking.

Up—up it went, till it had got to such a height, that the pall on its edge rested upon the ground, and finally upon the coffin, and then it paused; and the man with the wand said—

"Oh, enough—enough! Rest—oh, rest, perturbed spirit! Sufficient of thy awful presence is now apparent. Rest—oh, rest!"

"I beg to differ from you, my friend," said Claude Duval.

The man with the wand looked sternly at Claude.

"Mortal, begone!"

"Oh, dear, no. That gentleman under the pall has quite roused my curiosity, as he raised himself, and I don't intend to go till I have had a good look at him; so, as it is beginning to rain again, the sooner he indulges me the better."

"Claude, are you mad?" said Jack.

"No, Jack; but you be quiet."

"Let me speak to you in kindness," said the man with the wand. "Pass on, and do not further interfere with this awful ceremony. It can lead you to no good, be you what you may; and it is possible that to your dying day you would repent of a foolish obstinacy in such a case."

"I am very much obliged to you for your kind advice; but I am one of the most obstinate fellows living."

"He is—he is!" said Jack.

"And," added Claude Duval, "when I take a thing into my head, there is no such thing as getting it out again."

The man with the wand muttered a curse, and then he called out—

"Arms—arms!"

The six mourners upon this advanced along with the men who had borne the body, and Claude saw that they had pistols in their hands; so he stepped back a pace or two, as he said—

"So—so, it has come to this, has it? This is the very first time that I ever

heard of ghosts who used gunpowder; but if you have a mind for anything of that sort, I and my two friends here are well armed."

"D—n it!" said a voice, "I'm nearly smothered!" and then the figure under the pall suddenly threw it off, and sprang out of the coffin, exhibiting to the eyes of Claude and his friends a very ordinary-looking man in his shirt sleeves, and with a very red face.

"It's all up," said the man with the wand. "One word—Are you officers?"

"Officers?" said Claude. "To be sure not."

"Then what the devil are you?"

"Permit me, first of all, as your conduct and appearance is much more mysterious than that of me and my friends, to ask you that question."

"Smashers!" said the man with the wand.

"Oh, coiners of base money?"

"Not at all base when it goes; but base enough when any one won't take it. So now you know all about it, and, perhaps, you will say who you are?"

"I will. In the first place, my name is Duval!"

"What, Duval the highwayman?"

"Well, they do call me a highwayman, I rather think."

"Hilloa, comrades! it's all right. Oh, my eye! if we had but known this before, what a trouble we might have spared ourselves! Why, it's Claude Duval, the great highwayman, after all!"

The strange assemblage crowded round Duval, and looked at him with interest.

## CHAPTER CCCXXXII.

### DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE AT BERRYMEAD PRIORY.

JACK was now so thoroughly ashamed of the fears that he had shown in the matter, that he quite shrank back, and Duval had to call him to persuade him to appear at all.

"Come—come, Jack, come forward, and you, Dick, too."

"I'm here," said Turpin. "Upon my word, this is a good joke."

"And who may you be, sir?" said the man with the wand, who was evidently the chief or leader of the party.

"They call me Richard Turpin!" said Dick, as he slightly raised his hat, and bowed.

"Dick Turpin!" shouted the coiners. "Then who is the other?"

"Sixteen-string Jack, at your service," said Jack, advancing, and putting on as good a face as he could on the matter.

"Yes," said Claude, "and you did manage to frighten Jack."

"No, I was only pretending."

"Oh! oh!" laughed everybody; and Claude and Dick looked at each other and laughed; but Jack pretended now, if he had not before, for he affected not to be at all aware that what he had said had been received with any degree of incredulity, although it was so apparent that such was the case.

"I can assure you, gentlemen," said the man with the wand, "that if we had had the least idea such illustrious visitors as yourselves were in the mill, we should have tried to do the honours of it better than we did; but we mistook you for three officers from Bow-street."

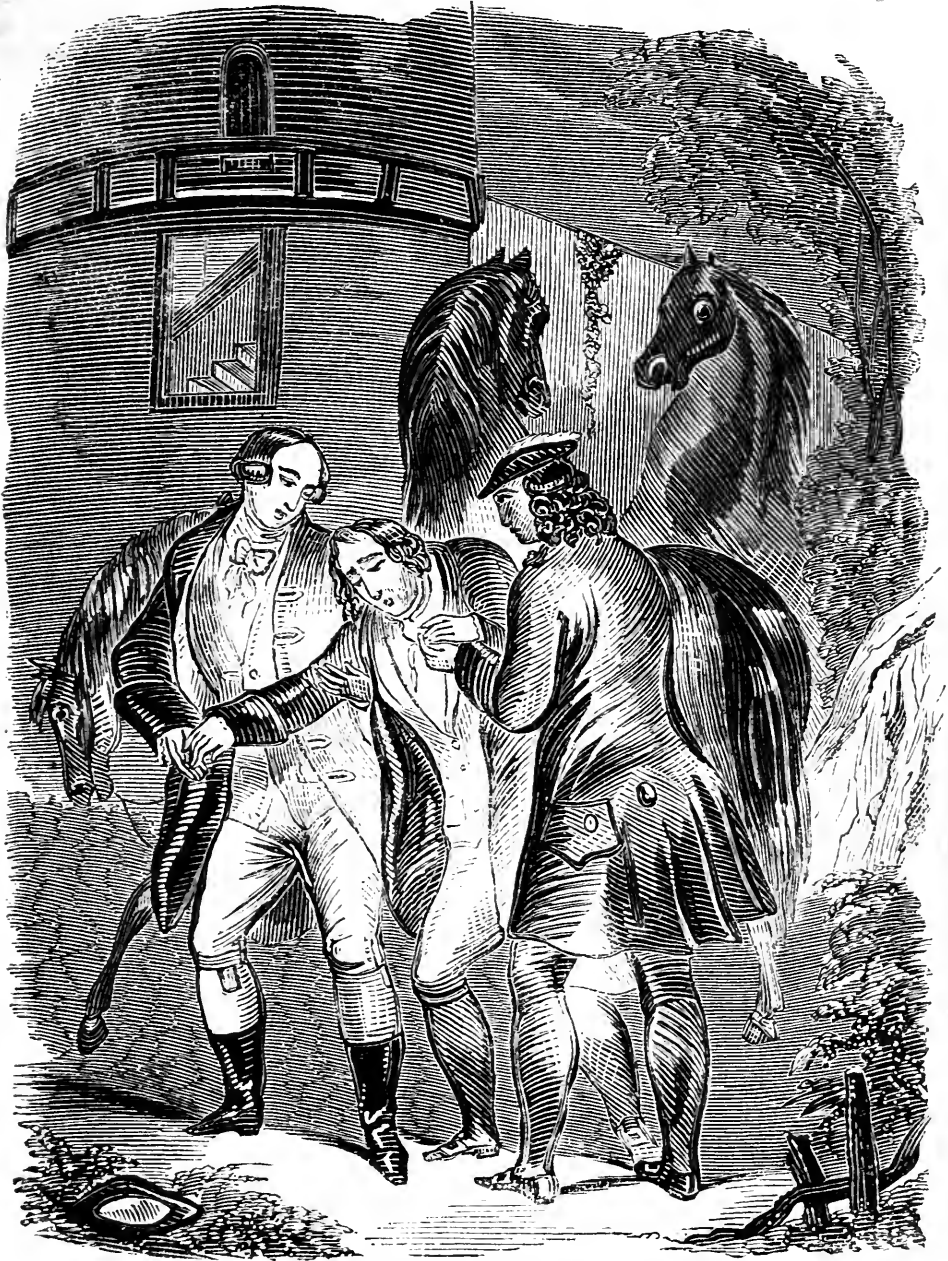
"Nothing could very well," said Claude, "be a greater mistake than that, I take it. But I suppose now that the mill is doomed?"

"As how, sir?"

"Why, it is burning."

"Oh, no. We put that out. As soon as we found that the flames were get-





THE TWO FRIENDS BEARING JACK INTO THE DESERTED MILL.

ting to a height, we managed to quench them, and the old mill is safe enough now. It is stronger a great deal than it looks. And now, as the rain is coming down again, let me beg of you to come back to it, and we will try what we can do in the way of hospitality."

"Well," said Claude, "I am willing, for, to tell the truth, there are some matters connected with what we saw and heard in the place that I cannot understand. Of course, we know that all was delusion, but we don't know how the delusion was managed."

"You shall know all."

"Thank you; I and my friends much wish it."

"Of course, we have no secrets from you now, Claude Duval, nor from your friends, Turpin or Jack ; and we will show you our magic-lantern."

"Your what?"

"Magic-lantern, by the aid of which we can easily produce the appearance of what kind of ghost we like."

"It is all explained, then," said Claude. "If that was the way it was done, you need not say another word about it. Do you hear that, Jack?"

"I do."

"And you, too, Dick?"

"Oh, yes ; and I may say that I suspected it before. The effects that so surprised us could very well be produced by such means ; and I do believe that a great many of the capital ghost stories that we hear are to be accounted for by the powers which those who are acquainted with science, and who are in possession of scientific apparatus, have over those who are ignorant of such subjects, and who have no such means by them."

"No doubt."

"But still," said the man with the wand, "I hope you will re-enter the mill, although there is nothing now to explain to you."

"Yes ; lead on. But what, in the name of all that's troublesome, made you hit upon this affair of the funeral?"

"Why, the fact is, we had a great quantity of coined money in the mill, and our object was to get it away without suspicion ; and when we got up this funeral set out, we still had our doubts about whether we had put out the fire or not. Those doubts are now resolved, and the mill is saved. We thought that you had set it alight to burn us out."

"No. It was the soldiers."

"Oh, we can easily understand all that now ; but our suspicion was that you were Bow-street officers, and that you had a magistrate with you, who had procured the assistance of a company of soldiers, in case we should feel inclined to resist you."

"We have been all, then, going at cross purposes it seems."

"It does, indeed."

"But there was a skeleton hand and arm," said Jack. "I saw it myself appear down the trap-door. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, this is it."

The man dived his hand into his pocket as he spoke, and produced the very hand and arm that Jack mentioned, and held it so close to him, that the long bony fingers appeared to clasp his, Jack's, wrist.

"Murder !" said Jack ; "murder ! Don't put it near me."

"Oh, well, I didn't know you were afraid of such things."

"I ain't afraid of them. But—but—"

"But he don't like them," added Claude.

"Many people share with you the dislike," said the man with the wand, as he replaced the hand and arm of the skeleton in his pocket. "I suppose it had a pretty good effect from below?"

"Very good, indeed," said Claude. "But you must not judge of my old friend, Jack, by what he says or does now, for he has had a serious fall from his horse, and has been very much shaken, indeed ; and is, I have no doubt, now struggling against the pain of his hurts upon that occasion."

Jack felt grateful to Claude for saying this much, as it in a manner saved him from the reproach of cowardice, which, otherwise, might to some degree have been attached to him.

They all now re-entered the old mill, which, although it had had a good warming from the flames, had yet in its principal parts escaped the destruction that at one time had really seemed to be inevitable.

"There is a story connected with this mill," said the man with the wand, "which enables us easily to frighten any of the country people who come to it."

"We know all about it," said Dick. "It is of the two brothers, one of whom murdered the other here?"

"It is so. And so, every now and then we take care that such sights should be seen here, and such sounds be heard, as shall keep up the delusion that the place is haunted by the spirits of the murderer and his victim."

"Then it is not so haunted?" said Jack.

Claude gave him a nudge with his elbow, as he whispered—

"Don't ask such questions, Jack."

"Why, no," said the man; "you did not suppose it was, did you, now, really?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Of course not. Confound these fellows of soldiers! they have not left us a table or a chair in the place, I declare. And how it does smoke, too. Fuff! It is enough to smother one. What on earth have they done to the chimney? The explosion of the few ounces of gunpowder that were put into it could not have stopped it up. It ought, on the contrary, to have cleared it."

Claude laughed.

"You have us to thank for the condition of the chimney," he said. "We tried to smoke the soldiers out of the mill by stopping it up with some old sacks from above, but they can easily be moved."

The man laughed, as he cried out—

"You, Jem Brown, go up and clear the top of the chimney. You hear that it is stopped with some sacks."

"Yes, Mister Blue," said the man.

"What an odd name," said Jack to Claude. "His name is Blue."

"That is to show that I'm anything but green," said the man, who overheard Jack's whisper.

"Excuse me," said Jack, "I meant no offence."

"And none is taken. Of course, Blue is not my name; but a man must call himself something; so that is short, and answers the purpose here quite as well as any other; so you will be so good as to know me as Mr. Blue."

"Very well," said Claude. "Ah, I can see the smoke going up the chimney again all right. The mill will soon be clear enough."

"It will," said Mr. Blue; "and in the meantime allow me to offer you such refreshment as I can command. Come, my men, do the best you can in honour of our illustrious visitors upon this occasion."

Thus urged, the coiners, for whose society, however, Claude Duval by no means evinced the greatest longing in the world, set about propping up, as well as they could, one of the broken tables, and then they spread the pall upon it by way of a cloth, which made Jack look rather askance at it, for he did not exactly like the idea of eating or drinking on such a funeral-looking emblem as that.

From a concealed cupboard, then, the coiners produced various good things in the eating and drinking way, so that the table was soon well spread; and then Mr. Blue said—

"I'm afraid I cannot say sit down, for those fellows of soldiers have broken all the chairs, but we must just manage the best way we can. Ah, that will do—that will do."

One of the coiners had managed to lay a flat piece of board across two of the broken chairs, and so to extemporise a very tolerable form, upon which Claude and his friends could rest themselves with ease, and they at once did so, and fell to work upon the eatables and drinkables before them.

Mr. Blue called to his gang of coiners, who seemed to be completely under his control, to come to the table, and the whole party was soon quite jolly and as friendly as if they had known each other for twenty years at the very least, instead of only half an hour.

"It gives me great pleasure," said Mr. Blue, as he rose with a glass in his hand. "It gives me great pleasure to propose to this highly talented and

honourable company, the health of our illustrious visitor, Claude Duval, whose name in the annals of adventure must be familiar to you all as one who, under all conditions——”

“Amen!” said a voice.

Mr. Blue dropped the glass that he had been holding by its rather slender stem between his thumb and fore-finger, and looked around him in surprise.

“What is that?” he said, “oh! what is that?”

The coiners all looked at him, and so did Claude and his friends, and then Jack said, in rather a tremulous voice—

“I don’t see any good, now, in playing off any of your tricks to try to frighten us.”

“It is not with my good will,” said Mr. Blue, “that anything of the sort is done.”

“But, there was something.”

“Yes, there was. Somebody said Amen!”

“Amen!” said the voice again.

They all now sprang from their seats, and Mr. Blue, in a very angry voice, cried out—

“Which of you is playing this foolish trick? I won’t have it!”

“It’s none of us,” said the coiners all in a breath. “It’s none of us.”

Mr. Blue himself looked a little put out of the way, but he managed to get over his surprise in a few moments, and then he said—

“Well—well, I suppose it is nothing, after all.”

“We all heard it,” said one.

“And so did we,” said Claude.

Dick smiled, and Mr. Blue looked rather suspiciously at him, as he said, in a tone of reproach—

“Ah, Turpin, so it was you who, after all, was playing us this little trick?”

“Not I.”

“Then, I don’t know what to make of it. But come what may, I will finish the toast that I was about, with another glass, as that one is broken; so now again I say, that if the devil himself——”

“Oh, lor!” said the voice again.

The coiners looked at each other with apprehension, and it was quite evident, from the expression upon their faces, that they had nothing to do with the sounds that disturbed the harmony of the feast.

“This is quite inexplicable,” said Mr. Blue. “I cannot make it out. Where did the noise come from?”

“There!” cried half a dozen voices, and as many fingers were all at once pointed to one corner of the spacious apartment, in which there was a quantity of straw. “There!”

Dick laughed again.

“Ah, Turpin,” said Blue, “you know something of this, I am certain.”

Dick Turpin made no answer to this supposition, but Mr. Blue at once went to a corner of the room and got a toasting-fork that hung there, which he brandished over his head, saying—

“If any one be crouched there among the straw, I will give him a hint to come out.”

With this, Blue stepped up to the straw, and gave two or three such well-directed thrusts with the toasting-fork among it, that a voice yelled out—

“Murder! Oh, don’t! Murder! Oh—oh! Put me in some cool place, do, and I will give you lots of advice for nothing. Oh, murder!”

There was a great commotion among the straw, when Mr. White, the lawyer, who had been completely forgotten by Claude Duval, rolled on to the floor.

“Oh, spare me!” he cried. “Oh, dear—oh dear! If you are the devil, pray recollect that I have done your work for a good many years in this world, and you ought to have some mercy upon me.”

## CHAPTER CCCXXXIII.

MR. WHITE MAKES RATHER AN IMPORTANT REVELATION UNKNOWINGLY.

WHEN Claude Duval and Jack saw the attorney, and heard how he bawled out his appeal for mercy, they joined Dick in a roar of laughter, in which the coiners soon joined, when they saw there was really no danger.

"Laugh—laugh, ye fiends!" cried the lawyer, as he discombered his face from the straw, "I appeal to your master, the devil, himself."

Upon this, they only laughed more, and Claude, turning to Dick, said—

"You recollected this fellow, but really I did not."

"Oh, yes," said Dick. "The moment he said, 'Amen' I knew his voice again."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. White, "allow me to remark, that, although even in such a place as this, to which I have been blown by a very unexpected explosion of a quantity of gunpowder, I yet hope that you will feel disposed to treat me with liberality and respect."

"Certainly," said Mr. Blue. "Who are you?"

"John Doubleday White, Esq."

"And what are you?"

"Well, I suppose, these questions are matters of form in these courts, for, of course, you know very well, gentlemen fiends, who and what I am; but I do not at all wish to be contumacious or unpolite, so I admit at once that I am an attorney."

"A lawyer!"

"Yes, commonly and vulgarly called a lawyer, which, I suppose, accounts for my being here, though I must confess I never believed there was such a place at all till now, as there was no evidence of the fact that I could ever find concerning it."

"And, pray, where do you suppose yourself to be, Mr. White?"

"Don't mention it; but it is commonly considered to be a very warm place, that is, down below—Hem!"

"Why, you don't mean to say you take this for—Eh?"

"I—do—Hem!"

Another roar of laughter from the coiners awakened the echoes of the old mill, and Mr. White said, with a dubious look—

"You don't mean to tell me that I am mortal, do you? Laugh—laugh, you finds! Oh, dear, no!"

"Certainly not," said Blue; "you are quite right, sir."

"Ah, I knew it; but still I must say that, considering the place has the reputation of being rather a warm climate, I don't find it very oppressive just now; and if it should be no warmer, I—oh, lor!—oh, murder! Don't do that again. Oh, dear!—oh, dear!"

One of the coiners, upon finding that Mr. White conceived himself to be in a certain place of a hot description, had crept behind him with a lighted piece of stick, and held it against his lateral anatomy until the flame reached his skin, and caused him to give a most alarming jump, and to utter the exclamatory expression we have recorded.

"Who, in the name of all that is odd," said Blue, "is this person?"

"We know but little of him," said Claude.

"And that little," added Dick Turpin, "is, I am sorry to say, not at all to his advantage."

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear! Good devils, have some sort of consideration for a poor fellow, who, although he always—"

"Be quiet," said Blue.

"Yes, sir, if you please; but I was going to tell you all."

"Perhaps," said one of the coiners, "it would be as well to let him go on with his tale?"



"Oh, sir," said White, "I beg your pardon. I have not got that length yet. Your own tale, I suppose, sir, you mean, humbly. I am only an attorney, sir, if you please, and not a devil."

Claude and his friends had to turn aside to conceal their laughter upon this occasion, for it was quite evident that poor Mr. White was in a very sad state of mental confusion with regard to his whereabouts in particular, and things in general. The explosion of gunpowder in the chimney of the old mill, which had prostrated him in the first instance, had so thoroughly and confusedly impressed him with the idea that he had gone direct to that region where such as he are supposed eternally to luxuriate, that nothing of an ordinary character sufficed to get him rid of the rather extraordinary notion.

The coiners were excessively pleased with the state of mind that Mr. White was in, and they consulted with each other, not as to the means of awakening him to a sense of his real position, but as to the best way of thoroughly strengthening him in his delusion.

Blue whispered to Claude.

"I suppose it is in pursuit of you, and not of us, that this lawyer came here?"

"Precisely so."

"Well, then, you can do as you please in the matter. Only say what you propose, and my men will assist you in it."

"Very well, do so, and I will take care that if he should prevaricate in any way, some means shall be resorted to to convince him that that is a policy which here brings with it rather a prompt and, perhaps, uncomfortable retribution. Leave that to me."

"I will."

Claude now stepped up to Mr. White, and Blue, with a look of gratification, whispered to one of his gang of coiners, who went to a corner of the room, and after some seeking, returned with a pair of iron nippers, or pincers, which he handed to Blue, who then stationed himself exactly behind Mr. White, who had been lifted from the floor and placed upon a chair, to which the coiners had bound him tightly.

Claude spoke to him in a deep, clear, distinct voice.

"Your name is White, and you are an attorney?"

"I—I am. Oh, dear! I am."

"Silence!"

"I only——"

"Peace, I say, or else it will be the worse for you."

"A great deal the worse," said Blue, as with the pincers he gave Mr. White a rap that made him jump again.

"I am a dead man!" said White.

"I know that," said Claude. "Now tell me. Whom came you to seek to the old mill?"

"Claude Duval, and the other thieves," said Mr. White.

This was a sincerity of expression that Blue would have rewarded by a rather severe pinch, but Claude motioned him not to do so; and as Mr. White saw him, he thought that it was some conjuration that was being practised against him, and of which he would soon feel the effects, and he groaned accordingly.

"You say you came here in search of Claude Duval and others. Who are the others?"

"One is Dick Turpin."

"And who else?"

"There is another, most gracious gentleman fiend, but I don't know who he is, so I cannot tell you. You, however, know, without a doubt."

"I do."

"Of course you do. But situated as I am now, that is all past, and there is no further interest in the affairs of the world that I am upon and have belonged to."

"None whatever. Have you any papers or documents about you?"

"Yes, a few."

"Give them up."

"With great pleasure. I—I—that is, if you please, of course I will give them up. Here is a little packet of letters and other matters, only interesting to those whom they may concern. Hem! I have nothing else."

From the manner of Mr. White, the man who had the rather odd name of Blue, thought that he had something else that he wanted to conceal, so he gave him a nip with the pincers, as he said—

"Liar and slave! You need not attempt to deceive us."

Mr. White gave a yell of agony, and would have bounded up from the chair only that he was tied tolerably firmly to it, and then, while the tears came to his eyes, he said—

"Oh—oh, you might as well have said that you wanted to see young Mr. Beachem's letter, without pinching a piece out of the small of my back at the same time. Here it is. Oh—oh, here is the letter."

Claude Duval had not the remotest idea of what Mr. White meant by an allusion to young Mr. Beachem's letter, but he did not let him see that the name and the existence of such a letter was to him perfectly new, so he merely held out his hand, saying—

"Give it to me."

"It is here, worthy sir—it is here; and there is my memorandum of private instructions, likewise, if you please."

Claude Duval took the memorandum, and read as follows—

"Mr. White,—You will have no difficulty at all in finding Berrymead Priory, as it used to be called, in Acton. It is now, as I told you, a nunnery, and there you will find Alicia. The letter that you have, you will give to the Lady Abbess, who will find from that that we entirely trust you in the matter, and that if you say that the deed is properly signed, we shall be satisfied. After that, she has her further instructions regarding Alicia.

"It is very probable that you will be introduced to Father Garvey, and if so, you will find him a very amiable, pleasant man, indeed. He is the confessor of the young ladies at the nunnery, and quite in our interest, as he is to get a thousand pounds wholly to himself.

"As soon as you have successfully carried out this affair, you will be so good as to come to London again, and let me and my father and mother know, when the reward that we promised you will be paid to you without fail.

"Till then, believe me to be yours truly,

"B."

When Claude Duval had read this letter through, he was not much wiser than before, but he could well understand that some villany was intended; and he said, in a cold, severe tone to Mr. White—

"You must tell all."

"Yes, gracious dev—I mean, sir, I will tell all. You see, Miss Alicia Horton is the niece of Sir John Beachem, who is a catholic baronet, and because she will not marry his son, Henry Beachem, they popped her into the nunnery; and there they intended to force her to sign a deed conveying half her property to the nunnery and the other half to themselves, as she will be of age directly; and the abbess assists them, of course, and so does the confessor, and the only person they are afraid of is young John Field, who is in love with her, and whom she loves, and who is a gentleman, although not a rich one."

"How much money has the girl, Alicia Horton?"

"About fifty thousand pounds. Her mother was Sir John's sister, and she married an officer in the Indian army, who was poor at that time, but to whom a rich relation left that sum. He was killed in battle, and the mother died of grief for his loss, leaving her child, Alicia, to the care of her uncle and aunt, Sir John and Lady Beachem, and their whole object has been to force her to marry their son, Henry; but she loves John Field, and so refuses, and, therefore, they are trying what I told you."

"But——"

Before Claude could say more, two of the coiners who had been keeping watch on the outside of the mill came in, dragging with them a man, whom they had made prisoner, and who, in a strongly marked Irish accent, called out—

“Och, then, murder, you villains! Bedad, an’ what is it myself has done that I should be kilt entirely any way, and my young master murdered in cold blood?”

“What is this?” said Blue.

“We found, sir,” said one of the scouts, “two men lurking about the meadow, and thinking them spies, we tried to frighten them away, but one of them knocked down Joe Ellis, so we hit him with our cudgels and he lies outside. This is the other.”

“Lies outside, does he, you spalpeen?” said the Irishman. “It’s yourself that lies inside, Oh, the poor master, who is only looking for the nunnery and lost his way, to be took up for a spy!”

“The nunnery?” said Claude. “What nunnery, and who is your master?”

“Bedad, then, I’m Dennis, his man, and me master is Mr. Field, and he is looking for the nunnery, where the swate darlint, Miss Alicia, is after being smuggled up.”

“Is this possible?”

“It’s myself that can’t say that, but by the holy poker it’s true.”

“Follow me, some of you.”

Claude and Dennis and his friends and some of the coiners rushed out into the open air, and there, by the aid of a torch, they found a young man, elegantly dressed, lying in a state of insensibility on the ground.

“This deeply interests me,” said Claude Duval, “I fear that, quite unwittingly, we have stopped one whom we would readily have permitted to proceed upon his course; and yet, after all, it may be for the best, for all we know to the contrary.”

“It is so,” said Jack.

“I am of the same opinion,” said Turpin; “and if we can but rouse this young man to a state of consciousness, we may be able to do much more for him in the furtherance of his object than he could by any possibility have done for himself.”

“We will try it, at all events,” said Claude. “Come, Mr. Dennis, you be so good as to hold your master from the damp ground, and we will get some water and dash it in his face.”

“Bedad, it’s myself will do that same.”

Claude Duval was much afraid that young John Field, as the attorney had named him, was severely injured, and so, taking him right up in his arms, he carried him into the mill.

“It’s a strong chap that, by gor!” said Dennis, “for the master, though he isn’t as fat as a piece of bacon without any lean, is heavy enough.”

Mr. White looked at all that was happening with the dreamy look of a man who is only half awake, and when he saw Claude Duval come in with the insensible form of young Field, he said—

“Oh, dear, there’s another! I wonder if that’s a professional man that they have caught this time. Oh, dear—oh, dear!”

Claude asked for some wine, and Mr. Blue, from the mysterious cupboard, which really seemed to contain something of everything, produced some, and a little had the effect of reviving Mr. Field, who opened his eyes and looked about him.

“Are you a professional man?” said Mr. White.

“Be quiet,” said Claude. “Ask no questions.”

“Bedad, then, he ain’t quite dead, though he is kilt,” said Dennis. “It’s how do you feel yourself now, Mr. Field?”

“Field—Field?” said Mr. White. “Oh, dear, who would have thought of his coming here!”



THE ADVENTURERS ALARMED ON BEHOLDING THE SKELETON HORSEMAN.

#### CHAPTER CCCXXXIV.

TAKES A GLANCE AT BERRYMEAD PRIORY, ACTON, AT EARLY DAWN.

It was quite evident that Mr. White, attorney-at-law, thought every one who was brought into the mill were consigned to the keeping of a certain elderly gentleman in the infernal regions.

Hence was it that, although the name of Field had struck him as not exactly belonging to his party, he thought he, too, had found a home in the infernal regions for some act or acts of which he, Mr. White, was not cognizant.

"Do you mean to say, sir," he said, addressing the young man, who was now fast recovering from the state of stupor into which a blow upon the head with a bludgeon had thrown him. "Do you mean to say, sir, that your name is Field?"

"It is."

"John Field?"

"Yes, John is my name."

"Oh, dear, then perhaps you are the very individual who was looking after a certain Miss Alicia Horton, as aforesaid?"

"Alicia Horton!" cried the young man, starting to his feet. "What have you to say of her? If aught that it will give me joy to hear, speak quickly; but—but if your news be sad, it is better that you speak it not at all."

"Well, it don't much matter to either of us, now, sir," groaned Mr. White, "does it?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, situated as we are, you know, sir—oh, dear, in such a place as this, you know, sir, where, if you are fond of a good roaring fire, I suppose it may always be had—eh?"

"Are you some madman?"

"I don't think so, but I believe sir, we are both in——"

"Silence!" said Claude, who had only allowed the attorney to go this far, in order that he might be certain of the identity of the young gentleman as the lover of Alicia. "Silence, Mr. White; you are not yet permitted to speak, except in answer to a question."

"Yes, but——"

"I warn you. You will find yourself in the centre of the lake of burning brimstone, if you don't be quiet."

Upon this, Mr. White was so deeply affected, that over he went backwards, chair and all.

Young Field looked at Claude inquiringly, as much as to say, "What is the meaning of all this strange talk?" and then Duval said to him, in too low a tone to reach the ears of Mr. White—

"Sir, are you sufficiently recovered, do you think, to take an active part in any enterprise?"

"Oh, yes, if it concerns Alicia Horton."

"It does so."

"Then, I pray, sir, that you may consider me as quite well."

"Stop a bit. How came you in this neighbourhood at all?"

"I will tell you presently. I received an anonymous note, saying, that Alicia was a prisoner in Berrymead Priory, which is at the corner of a lane close to Acton, and I set off at once for the place, and my servant, Dennis, here——"

"That's myself," said Dennis.

"He thought that by going across the fields we should save a great extent of road; but, as is commonly the case when people try to take a near cut to any place where they are not well acquainted with the country, we lost ourselves, and were attacked in the fields by two men, one of whom struck me on the head. I know no more."

"Sir," said Mr. Blue, "allow me to say, how deeply I regret that my men should have made the mistake of thinking you an enemy."

"Your men? Who and what are you?"

"That, sir, permit me to say, is a secret that I must still keep to myself, for the present, if you please."

"Pardon me. Nothing can be further from my intention than to seek to intrude upon your secrets."

"Not a doubt of that, sir; and I can only add, that if this gentleman," alluding to Claude, "thinks proper to interfere in your affairs, or is of opinion that any effectual assistance can be rendered to you, I shall be most willing to aid him to the extent of my abilities in the matter."



"I am deeply obliged."

"I do think proper," said Claude. "From what I have heard, I think that it is our duty to aid you, sir."

"What, in the name of Heaven, have you heard?" said Mr. Field. "All this so amazes me, that I may well doubt, even now, if I am in my right senses. For Heaven's sake, sir, tell me if you know anything concerning Alicia Horton, for it is to her your speech seems to refer."

"Small blame to me," said Dennis, "if I don't think so too."

"Peace—oh, peace!"

"Peas is it you are after wishing for, sir? Bedad, me grandfather, who was one of the ould rale stock, and descended from the ould kings of Munster, had as illigant a crop of peas as you would wish to see, and one day he—"

"Dennis, I wish to hear this gentleman," said Mr. Field.

"Oh, well, I—oh!"

Dennis was silent, and then Claude said—

"You love Alicia Horton. Her aunt and uncle, she being an orphan and possessed of considerable property, wish her to wed their son, and her cousin, Henry Beachem; she loves you, and, therefore, refuses to wed him, and they, in revenge, and being solely actuated in the whole matter by the grossest cupidity, have placed her in a convent."

"Yes—yes, all that is true."

"Well, your object is to get her away from it."

"It is."

"And to marry her."

"Delightful thought! Oh, if I could but call Alicia mine, I should be the happiest of human beings; and I think, too, she would be happy in my care, for I would strive to make her so."

"No doubt of it."

"But, believe me, sir, whoever you may be, that I am not actuated by any motive connected with the property. If she had not one farthing in the world, she would be as dear to me as she is now, and I should still consider her as a priceless treasure."

There was such a tone of heartfelt sincerity about the young gentleman as he spoke, that it would have been quite impossible to doubt him for a moment, and Claude replied to him—

"Sir, it is an accident which has brought down privations upon her. That Alicia Horton is possessed of money, but that it has nothing to do with your affection for her, I can well believe; and yet I am glad that she is so well endowed, for money may be a great good, if in proper hands."

"That is true, sir."

"Well, read this, and it will give you some further insight into the affair in which you are so deeply interested."

Claude Duval handed him the letter of instructions which had been given up by Mr. White, and Mr. Field read it through with contempt and indignation. Then turning a melancholy gaze at Claude Duval, while the letter trembled in his grasp, he said—

"Are you—that is—am I to believe that——"

"That what, sir?"

"That this letter was addressed to you, and that you repent of—of the part you——"

Claude laughed, as he cried out—

"Oh, dear, no! I have not the honour of being a confidant of the Beachem family, I assure you. There is the gentleman from whom I got the letter, and to whom it was addressed."

Claude pointed to Mr. White, who, with his eyes fast shut, and his hands crossed upon his chest, was lying on the floor, with his leg over the chair, expecting each moment to find himself in the brimstone lake that had been mentioned, and the horrors of which had taken a firm hold of his imagination.

"That the man?"

"Yes, Mr. Field, that is the lawyer."

"His name is White?"

"It is."

"The rascal! Why, I can assure you, sir, that there is not a more cold-blooded, thorough scoundrel than this man, White, in the whole profession to which he belongs."

"I can very well believe that, Mr. Field; but it is quite a fortunate circumstance that we have got hold of him, and got possession, too, of his despatches. What do you say, Dick? You have heard all this affair. Do you feel inclined to assist Mr. Field in it to recover the Lady Alicia from the hands of those who hold her in bondage?"

"Indeed I do," said Dick.

"And you, Jack?"

"Command my best services."

"Then I have to inform you, Mr. Field, that we three will assist you, and I do think that, with your own resolution and our aid, much may be done. In fact, I do not believe but that we shall be able to wrest her from the hands of her persecutors. Do you accept of our aid?"

"Oh, my friend, how can I thank you?"

"Reserve all that till we have done you some good: The morning is now approaching, and it is time that we left this place. There is one thing, though, that I have to ask of you, sir."

"Name it."

"It is, to be content that we will befriend you, and not to seek to extend your knowledge of who and what we are, beyond what you know of us already."

"And that is nothing. But I give my word freely."

"Very well; then, we quite understand each other. And now, Mr. Blue, where are you?"

"Here."

"Will you send one of your men to look after our horses, if you please?"

"Certainly."

"And will you"—Claude here lowered his voice to a whisper—"will you take good care of Mr. White till you hear from me again?"

"That I will."

"Very good. That is all, then, that I shall ask of you, Mr. Blue, for the present; but from the kind and gentlemanly manner in which you have treated me and my friends, I hope that I may have the pleasure of at another time resuming our acquaintance; and if ever it should be in my power to do you a good turn, you may depend upon me."

"I am sure of that."

There was a tone of great dejection about this man, Blue, as he shook hands and so spoke to Claude Duval. It was quite evident that he was a man of superior education, and it was a sad thing to think that he should have come to such a pass as to adopt such a line of life as he had, and which, sooner or later, would be quite certain to end in disgrace and death.

The coiners who had been sent out to look for the horses came back to say that they were all right, and Jack hurried now to the shed where they were to see if his own steed had suffered anything from the fall it had had. He hoped that, as he had, after all, received no injury but a good shaking, from which he had nearly recovered, that the horse was no worse off.

Claude now said to Mr. Field, appealing by a glance to Dick as he spoke—

"I think that the best thing we can all do now is to go to some quiet inn not very far from Acton, and there breakfast, where we can consult as to the best mode of proceeding at the nunnery?"

"I will be wholly guided by you," said Mr. Field.

"I think it is the best way," said Dick. "Have you a horse, Mr. Field, or are you on foot?"

"On foot, sir."

"Well, it don't matter much; we shall all have to wait till nightfall again, I expect, before anything can be done."

"No doubt," said Claude. "Oh, here is Jack. He, too, has been to see after the cattle. Well, Jack?"

"All's right. The horses are in good condition, and only, I suppose, would look a little grateful for half a peck of corn each."

"That they shall soon have. Now, Mr. Field, if you will come with us we will see what we can do to aid you; but you must keep your servant from getting us all into any difficulties by his blundering, and there is but little chance of our failing in rescuing Alicia Horton from the convent in which she is now confined."

## CHAPTER CCCXXXV.

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE RATHER A NARROW ESCAPE.

IT was rather a hinderance to Claude Duval and his friends that Mr. Field and Dennis had not horses, as they were obliged to go at a walking pace for the purpose of accommodating them.

Claude preferred walking on foot with the bridle of his horse over his arm, for in that way he could converse with the young lover with much greater ease than as if he had been in the saddle and Mr. Field on foot.

They soon reached the high-road, and as the sun was just above the horizon, and the morning after the stormy character of the night was beautifully fine and fresh, it was quite a delightful thing to see nature, as it were, awakening, and the glow of the sunlight slowly but surely creeping over all things, both animate and inanimate.

The birds flew hither and thither, apparently in a wild delirium of joy, and filled the air with their joyous tones; and from every wild flower in the hedge-rows there exhaled some perfume more or less grateful to the senses.

"This is truly beautiful," said Claude, as they reached a rising spot of ground from the summit of which they could command rather an extensive view around them.

"It is," said Mr. Field. "How astonishing it is that people residing in London fancy that it is necessary, before they can get natural and pleasing scenery, to go to great distances, while the suburbs of the great city really present as many natural beauties as any part of the country can show to the eyes of the lover of nature."

"It is a prejudice," said Dick, "and it is one that enters into our feelings with regard to all things. That which is at hand and easily attainable is never much prized."

"That, I suppose, is about the solution of the mystery," said Duval. "But however delightful the undulating country may be, and those dark patches of wood, and that pretty winding stream, which is the Brent, I suppose, and those fields with their rich luxuriance—yet there is one thing which, just now, we should all find, I do believe, quite as delightful."

"What is that?"

"Breakfast."

They laughed, and then Mr. Field said—

"It is I who impede your progress, being on foot; but if you will say where Dennis and I can find you, we will come after you as soon as we can get over the ground."

"Oh, no," said Claude, "let us keep together. What is that yonder, Dick, in the middle of the road apparently?"

"It is a sign," said Dick; "but, I suppose, the winding of the road makes it seem to us in the middle."

"No doubt—no doubt. Well, suppose we make up our minds to go to that inn, be it what it may, to breakfast?"

"Agreed—agreed!"

Upon this they rather quickened their pace, and Dennis said, in his rich unsophisticated brogue—

"Bedad, then, I have just thought of a wonderful plan of getting on mighty quick."

"How is that, Dennis?"

"Why, sir, it's as easy as kiss your hand. You see, sir, there's only three beastes here."

"Three what?" said Claude.

"He means horses," said Mr. Field.

"I beg to inform you, Dennis," said Dick Turpin, as he patted the neck of his beautiful and intelligent steed, "that I think there are very many creatures upon two legs that are much more beastes than this one upon four."

"No offence, sir," said Dennis. "The same to you, sir, and many of them. But as I was a saying, the way to get on quick, would be for you to gallop on at a mighty great rate, and for us to walk aisy and quiet after you; and then, when you get on a mile or two, you can wait for us, and when we reach you we can mount and gallop on, and you can walk after us, you know, and so on."

"And you fancy Dennis, that by that system we should make greater progress—eh?"

"Bedad, then, of course we should."

"Permit me to doubt the fact, Dennis. But it don't much matter, for here is a turn of the road, which will take us at once to the inn yonder, which sign we have had in sight now for some time."

The moment they turned the corner in the road and got fairly in sight of the inn, Dick reined in his steed, and said in a tone of alarm—

"Halt, Claude!"

"What is it?"

"Look! look! Are you blind?"

"Oh, I see now. This way—this way!"

Claude turned his horse's head in a contrary direction at once, and went off at a swinging canter, followed closely by his two friends, and leaving Mr. Field and Dennis in the middle of the road, staring about them in wonder and amazement at such extraordinary proceedings.

When Claude had got some little distance on the other side of the corner in the road again, he pulled up, saying—

"By Jove, that was a narrow escape."

"But what was it?" said Jack. "I saw nothing to give us any alarm. What was it, Claude?"

"You were not forward enough to see the entrance to the inn, Jack," said Claude, "or you would have observed that our friends, the soldiers, were there before us."

"The deuce they were!"

"It is a fact. If we had only advanced a little more, they must have seen us; but as it is they did not."

"Are you sure of that, Claude?"

"Quite, or they would have been at our heels before now. But do you just lay your hand upon the bridle of my horse, Jack, and I will go back on foot, and get Mr. Field and his servant to follow us."

"You need not. Here they come."

Mr. Field, as soon as he had recovered from his first surprise at the sudden disappearance of his new friends, had run on after them, for he could not suppose that they meant to desert him, after in so kind a manner proposing to befriend him in the way they had.

"Dick," said Claude, "and you, Jack, listen to me. I think it will be better, and, in fact, it is but right and proper, to let that gentleman know who and what we are. If, then, he has any scruples about an association with us, or about accepting our services, we can bid him good morning; but if he has none such, it will be much more agreeable to us that he should know us from our own lips, than find it out by some accident."

"I think so too," said Dick.

"Claude," said Jack, "tell him now, by all means, but keep the information from the servant. There is no occasion to fill Mr. Dennis's mouth with such news."

"None in the least. He shall know nothing. I will take his master apart, and let him know."

Mr. Field now reached the spot at which the three highwaymen had halted, and he said—

"Gentlemen, what is the meaning of this? I have no doubt of your good faith to me, for a moment, but this is rather an extraordinary start, is it not?"

"It is, sir," said Claude. "Pray come closer, and I will tell you all about it. You must know, sir, there were soldiers at the inn to which we were approaching, and that is the reason why we rather declined going to its door."

"But, you are not deserters?"

"Oh, no. I am a highwayman!"

Mr. Field reeled a step or two, as he repeated the word, "Highwayman?"

"Yes, I am a highwayman, and those two friends of mine follow the same profession. And now, sir, knowing what we are, if you feel that you compromise either your safety or your feelings by keeping further company with us, just say so, and we will wish you good morning."

"I know not what to say. Is this a jest?"

"Oh, no, sir. It is the sober truth."

Mr. Field looked from one to the other of them, with rather a scrutinizing gaze, and then he said—

"I have frequently heard of a highwayman who has done the most kind and generous acts to those who have been suffering from privation and misfortune. The name of that man is Claude Duval. Do either of you own that name?"

Dick and Jack looked at Claude and smiled; and then Duval, lifting his hat just a few inches from his head, said—

"I am that person, sir, and I think that there are two sorts of people who do me an injustice in this world. One of them make me out much worse than I am, or ever can be, and the other much better."

"So, you are Claude Duval, the famous——"

"Say highwayman, sir. I am not at all offended at being called by such a name. After a lawyer feels no way hurt at folks calling him one, surely the more honest—because more straightforward and truthful—calling of a highwayman need not be thought such a disgrace. But a truce to badinage. Mr. Field, I am Claude Duval, the highwayman. I feel an interest in you, and in the young lady to whom you are attached. It is ever a great pleasure to me to go a little out of the way now and then to do a good action, and to frustrate villany and chicanery. It seems to me something like a kind of set-off against my own ill deeds; and so I will assist you, if you like; but if you object to the source from which the aid comes, say so, and we part as we met, and for the future are strangers to each other."

"I should be both foolish and ungenerous, Duval, in the extreme, were I to do such a thing."

"You accept, then, our services?"

"With many thanks, I do, and with far greater hopes of success than I had before. If there be a man in the world who can really aid me, it is surely you, with your courage and perseverance, and doubtless resolution, in whatever you undertake."

"Don't flatter me," said Claude.



"By heavens, I-do not! I speak the genuine sentiments of my heart in what I say, I assure you, sir."

"Well, I am much obliged to you for your good opinion, then, and all I wish is, that you do not enlighten Dennis as to who and what we are; because, although we might easily enough depend upon his fidelity, we might not upon his discretion."

"There is no necessity to tell him; although, Duval, you know little of the Irish peasant if you are not aware that his natural cunning is quite sufficient always to guard him from saying that which he wishes not to say. But, now, will you take me yet a little further into your confidence by telling me who your two friends are?"

"Yes; this is Dick Turpin."

"What, the famous Turpin, who, they say, has a mare that is quite a fiend, and capable of anything, and which understands every word he says to her?"

"I am certainly Turpin," said Dick, laughing, "and this is my mare, Black Bless, bless her heart! I do believe at times that she does know what one says to her. Only look at her ears, now—she knows as well as possible that we are talking about her."

The intelligent look of Bess would need to have been seen to be believed; but, really, to judge from the attitude and manner of the creature, Turpin's idea that she knew when she was being spoken of did not seem to be at all out of the way.

"You have yet another acquaintance to make, Mr. Field," said Claude. "This is Sixteen-string Jack."

Jack bowed.

"You—you mean some successor of that person?" said Mr. Field.

"No; this is the veritable Jack."

"I thought he was—was——"

"Hanged, you would say," said Jack, "long ago; but, for all that, here I am. It is a long story; and at some other time, if you want to hear it, I will tell it to you, sir, and in the meantime rest content with the assurance that I am the only true and veritable Sixteen-string Jack."

"I am full of amazement, I confess," said Mr. Field.

## CHAPTER CCCXXXVI.

### CLAUDE READS THE LETTER TO THE ABBESS OF THE NUNNERY.

It must not be supposed that during this time the three highwaymen had remained standing on the road in such dangerous contiguity to their foes, the soldiers. On the contrary, they had walked on, so that they were nearly a mile from the corner in the road which hid them from the inn, which so fortunately was situated in a kind of hollow, from which very little of the road, either to the right or to the left, was visible.

Dennis kept at a respectful distance, at a sign from his master to do so; but he was terribly curious to know the meaning of the consultation that was going on, as, from the quietness of the party, he guessed that the conversation was very curious and interesting, indeed.

How to satisfy that curiosity, though, was a proposition that did not seem at all easy to solve; but yet he made up his mind that he would not lose anything in this shape of information from the want of trying in an oblique way to get at it.

With this view he decreased the distance between himself and the party, which they observing, induced them to adopt some means of disappointing him, so Claude said loud enough for him to hear—

"I prefer the round ones."

"And I, kidneys," said Dick.



DICK MAKES A FIRE IN THE OLD MILL TO RESUSCITATE JACK.

"Well," said Jack, "you may say what you like, both of you, but give me the reds—the old original reds."

"Oh, bed id!" cried Denis, "and it's praties they are talking about all this time. Och, murder! is it praties you mean, sir?"

"Yes," said Claude.

"Well, then, there is a pratie that is call'd the Ould Irish, and it's the maliest in all the world, and grows convanient to the bozrs in ould Ireland, and is so big by the same token, it often takes a whole family to punch one of them into the pot to boil."

"That's nothing," said Dick, "to a potato we have in Yorshire."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing at all. There is a potato called the Old Yorkshire Wheelbarrow."

"The what?"

"The Old Yorkshire Wheelbarrow, and it's a common thing to put a wheel on each side of it and a broom-stick for a handle, and then to scoop out with a spade about half a hundredweight of the inside, and it makes an excellent wheelbarrow."

Dennis looked confounded for a minute or two, and then he said—

"Oh, yes. It's myself have heard of them sort before. But the Clare praties bets 'em."

"How?"

"Why, they stick up on an end—mind, they are kidneys are the Clare potatoes—and then they get all the neighbours to hold them, and it takes a couple of weeks to scoop out the inside, leaving the walls about two foot thick, and it makes an elegant cabin, with four rooms on the floor, and eight up stairs, and a little place on the roof to smoke a pipe on, quite grand."

"That will do," said Mr. Field. "That will do, Dennis."

"Thank you, sir."

They all laughed at Dennis's stories of the potato, and Dick said to Claude in a whisper—

"It's of no use contending in lying with gentlemen of Dennis's country. They will beat you out of the field. But now, what do you advise us to do, and where are we to go, for the cattle want corn and water, and we want breakfast?"

"I think, if we could find some cottage where they would accommodate us, it would be better than going to an inn."

"That is a good thought. It would be much better if we could only find such a place as would suit us to go to; but there is the difficulty."

"It vanishes," said Claude, as he pointed to the top of a little cottage-chimney that rose up from amid a cluster of trees at a short distance to the right of the road-way. "The difficulty vanishes, for there is a cottage."

"Yes, there is a cottage, but you don't know exactly if there are the people in that cottage who will make us welcome."

"Certainly not; but we will try, at all events, if they will do so. They may, you know. But does this mode of proceeding meet with your approval, Mr. Field?"

"Whatever meets with yours will meet with mine," replied the young lover.

"And I beg to say," cried Dennis, "that, although descended from the old kings of Ireland, and so entitled to a will of me own, I give in to you, jontilmen, entirely."

"We are very grateful," said Claude; "and so, now that that is settled, let us push on for the cottage. I must confess that the smoke rising from the chimney looks very inviting indeed."

A little turning of about eight or ten yards in length brought them to the door of the cottage, which was as pretty a one as anybody would wish to see.

There was a placard in the window, which went a long way towards justifying them in expecting that they would get every accommodation there that they required, for it announced that new milk and eggs were to be had within.

"This will do," said Claude. "If they sell milk and eggs here they will sell other things besides. The only doubt is concerning the cattle. But we can see about that."

Jack held Claude's horse while he dismounted, and entered the little garden that was in front of the cottage, and made his way up a gravelled walk to the door of the place. A neatly dressed young woman came out of the cottage and asked him what he wanted, upon which Claude said—

"We want some of the new milk and the eggs, and some fresh butter and

bread, and, in fact, anything to eat and to drink that you may have in the place that is likely to be acceptable to hungry travellers, such as we really are."

"Then, gentlemen, you need breakfast?"

"I rather think we may say that we do."

"Walk in, sir. We shall be very happy to accommodate you; and if you will let my son, Benjamin, take the horses to the shed, he can attend to them likewise."

Claude was quite delighted to find that at this cottage they could get well accommodated, and he called to his friends to dismount and come into the garden. We need not pursue minutely all that Claude said, and all that the young woman said, and all that her son, Benjamin, who really looked much too old to be her son at all, did to make the horses comfortable. Let it suffice that in such peace and comfort as he, Claude, had not enjoyed for many a long day, he breakfasted with his friends at the cottage.

Mr. Field was very anxious to know what plan of operation Claude thought of adopting; and after a while, Claude said to him—

"The fact is, I feel in a little difficulty, for I have a letter which was taken from, or rather given up, by Mr. White, and which is addressed to the abbess of the convent; but it is sealed, and I have some scruple about opening it, although, I daresay, it contains information that would be very useful to us."

"Scruple!" cried Dick. "I have none."

"Well, then, do you open it, Dick."

"Stop!" said Jack. "We don't know yet but that such a letter may be useful in an evidential way; so don't destroy the seal of it, Dick, on any account."

"That is well thought of."

"But yet," interposed Claude, "I don't know whether we really ought to open the letter."

Mr. Field was silent, and Dick thought, as he had the letter in his hand, that it was incumbent upon him to say something concerning it.

"Let me," he said, "try what I can do to settle this question of gentlemanly morals as regards the opening another person's letter or not. Hem! In the first place, to open a letter not addressed to yourself, or even to read one that is open, and placed in your hands otherwise than in a fair way, is not only a breach of honour, but a signal guarantee of bad state."

"Granted," said Claude. "What else?"

"But——"

"Ah, there is always a but."

Dick laughed, as he proceeded.

"But when the opening of a letter, or even ten thousand letters—although that would be rather a long job, I admit, and one that I by no manner of means for myself desire—may have the effect of defeating some very great villainy, I think that one is fairly justified in doing so, as in this instance."

"In that case, then, Dick, you think that the end sanctifies the act?"

"I do; but mind you, Claude, that is a specious doctrine that I by no means give way to on all occasions; but in this it holds good, as, after all, the act only consists of a breach of courtesy and good manners, and really inflicts no harm upon any one else."

"Bravo!" said Jack. "Very well argued, Dick."

"Thank you. Just put the blade of this knife into the fire, and let it get hot, if you please."

Jack nodded, and placed the blade of a small, thin knife that was upon the table between a couple of red-hot coals, and when it was tolerably hot, he carefully wiped it, and handed it to Dick, for he knew very well what he meant to do with it.

With great dexterity, then, Dick slipped the hot knife under the seal of the letter, and fairly cut it off, without in the smallest degree injuring the impression upon it.

"That will do," said Jack.

"Yes ; and here is the letter open. Don't let the seal drop on to the floor, and we can easily fasten it on again when we have read this precious epistle to the Lady Abbess. Have you any objection, Claude ?"

"None."

"Nor you, Mr. Field ?"

"Oh, no. They say that in love, as in war, all is fair."

"So it is. Here goes, then."

"'Beloved mother—'

"The deuce ! who does that mean ?"

"It is the way that people who are high in the Catholic religion address the superiors of ecclesiastical establishments," said Mr. Field. "It is only a farce."

"Well, every one to his taste. 'Beloved mother,' it begins with. Sweet, certainly."

"But who is the writer of that letter ?"

"We will soon see that."

Dick turned to the bottom of the page ; and then he saw the name of John Beachem.

"It's the old rascal himself," he said—"it's Sir John Beachem who begins with, 'Beloved mother.'"

"That is the uncle, then, of my Alicia ?"

"Good ; and this letter, no doubt, contains the villanous and rascally instructions as to how the beloved mother is to force the young creature into a compliance with the designs of her charming relative."

"No doubt—no doubt."

"And yet," said Claude Duval, with indignation, "this is what they call a civilised country."

"But," said Jack, "the lord chancellor is the proper person to interfere in this matter, and, of course, he would."

"If he were forced to do so he would," said Mr. Field ; "but not otherwise ; for you must know that the lord chancellor dines with the Beachems, and that they helped him up the road to fortune ; and that it is suspected that he has in secret professed the Catholic faith for the sake of getting business, when he was an attorney and a barrister, from the people of that persuasion."

## CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

### THE ADVENTURERS FIND ADMISSION TO THE OLD PRIORY.

"OH, what villany there is in this world !" said Claude, "when even those in the highest places are not exempt from such iniquities ; but the time will surely come, when there will be greater purity among public men."

"I doubt it," said Dick. "But if you want to hear the letter read, attend at once, for I have got as yet no further than 'beloved mother.'"

"Go on—go on, Dick."

"'Beloved mother—'

"Good gracious ! don't say that again ! The expression makes me quite ill," said Jack.

"'Beloved mother—The bearer of this epistle is one, who, albeit he is not, perhaps, exactly the sort of man with whom we should like to have much to do, is yet extremely useful in his vocation. He is a man who may be bought as you would buy any other commodity ; and let the work be what it may that has to be done, this man will do it, provided you agree with him as to terms."

"I need not, beloved and highly religious mother, expatiate upon the im-



portance and the great benefit to be derived to the true faith from such an acquaintance.

“The name of this person is Mr. White, and he is an attorney-at-law, and, therefore, quite competent to act in the little affair which has been entrusted to him.

“He will place documents before Alicia to sign, which will have the effect of dividing her property equally between me and the blessed convent. I shall find many uses for my share, and the convent's, of course, will be divided between you and the beloved Father Garvey, the confessor.

“And now, beloved mother, it is for you to adopt such means as may have the effect of forcing the rebellious girl, who might have obliged us very much by marrying Henry, to sign the papers that Mr. White will lay before her. Those means will be such as in your wisdom will be sufficient; and when she has signed these papers, it will be just as well that she should not go out into a sinful world again.

“Beloved mother, I have no doubt that you perfectly comprehend your sincere friend,  
“JOHN BEACHEM.”

“That's all,” said Dick.

After the reading of this precious epistle, the friends looked at each other, as well they might, with both surprise and indignation, for a more hypocritical, Jesuitical letter could not possibly have been indited.

It was Mr. Field who broke the silence, and rising hastily, while a flush of colour spread itself over his face, he cried—

“The villain, John Beachem, would destroy Alicia entirely, if he could but force the signature he requires to the deed. Why, the letter first counsels coercion in obtaining that signature, and afterwards hints at her murder!”

“It is very like it,” said Claude Duval. “But I pray you to be calm, sir.”

“Calm! Can you or any man ask me to be calm, after listening to such an epistle?”

“Yes, for I can give you the best reason in the world why I ask you; and that is, that if you wish to save Alicia from her foes, it will only be by calmness and resolution. Violence ill-directed is sure to defeat itself. We will aid you; and, although I confess to feeling great indignation at such an epistle as this, yet I feel likewise that if I were to give way to its impulses, I should do no good in affair.”

“You are right, sir—you are right. My judgment tells me that you are right, and I am thankful that I have one by me who can, and who will, step between me and my agitated spirit.”

“Be satisfied, Mr. Field. This young lady shall be rescued.”

“You promise me that?”

“Upon my faith I do.”

“But—but, it may be too late.”

“Not so. I think, if you consider for a minute or two, you will find that such cannot very well be the case. She is in the convent, no doubt, or this letter would not have been sent. Well, this letter has not yet been delivered, so that the lady abdess is waiting for the instructions that this letter gives to her; so it is quite clear that it is not too late.”

“Oh, what a glorious hope!”

“Come, sir, you must calm your agitation, and we will all act together in such a measure as to insure success.”

“But this lawyer—this villain, White?”

“What of him?”

“Why, he may go to the convent before us, or he may go back to Sir John Beachem, his base employer, and detail the loss of the letter, and then some urgent steps may be taken in the matter.”

“You forget that White is at the old mill, and that the man Blue has promised that he will not let him go from it till he hears from me again; so that dread may be given up.”

Mr. Field clasped his brow with his hands for a few moments, and then he said—

“Pardon me, my dear and kind friend, but really, the shock that that wicked and detestable letter gave to me, drove from my thoughts what I ought to have recollected. I now have a perfect recollection of what you tell me, and I know that you are saying all for the best. I hope that you will not feel any way hurt at what I may say in the agony of my spirit.”

“Not in the least. I can feel for you fully, and I know that were I in your case, that I should find it quite as difficult as you find it to preserve anything like calmness and serenity, under the painful circumstances.”

“Now, then,” said Dick, “what is to be done with the letter?”

“It merits destruction,” said Mr. Field.

“No,” said Jack. “Take care of it, I beg of you.”

“Care of such an epistle as that?”

“Yes. Is it not the passport to the convent?”

“Ah, yes. It is—it is.”

“Then, I say, take care of it, and do you, Dick, fix the seal again, so that it shall not to a cursory observer have the appearance of having been at all tampered with, and, no doubt, we shall find that letter of the greatest possible use in the matter that we are all so willing to undertake and to carry out to the best of our abilities.”

Dick upon this warmed the wax again and replaced the seal so neatly, that it would have taken a far more minute observation than any one usually bestows upon the fastening of a letter, unless there is some object in a close scrutiny, to divine that it had been touched.

“That will do,” said Dick.

“Capital,” said Claude.

“Listen to me,” said Mr. Field. “I beg of you to give me that letter.”

“For what purpose?”

“I will go with it to the convent gate—the production of it will at once enable me to enter the building; and then, in the face of all opposition, I will carry off Alicia.”

“Very romantic,” said Jack.

“And very bold,” said Dick.

“And very imprudent,” said Claude.

“How so?—I would ask how so? The boldest mode of proceeding is in most cases the best. I pray you to allow me to go at once and try what I can do. Give me the letter.”

“Mr. Field,” said Claude Duval, “this is your affair, and you are certainly entitled to the letter, if you like.”

“Thank you—thank you!”

“But if you will be advised by one who looks upon this matter with a calmer judgment than you can possibly bring to bear upon it, you will not be so hasty, but adopt a course of conduct more likely to conduce to a pleasant result. Will you listen to me?”

“Yes—yes.”

“Then I counsel that we wait till the darkness of the evening, and then that I go to the convent with the letter. I will personate Mr. White, and you shall go with me as my clerk. By such a mode of proceeding we shall find out where Alicia is hidden.”

“Hidden, say you?”

“Yes. You do not fancy that you would find her in the intricacies of such a place as that by going in and in a loud voice demanding her? Believe me, no. They would baffle you in that mode of proceeding, you may depend; and after a vain search, during which you would incur, perhaps, very great personal risk from treachery, you would have to leave the convent again, with the certainty that before you could get back to it she might be disposed of.”

“And then again, if you were to apply to the law to aid you,” said Dick, “I

don't think you would be any the better off, for, after all, you are not the young lady's guardian, and Sir John Beachem, it appears, is ; and she is, you say, still a little under age, and, if ever so little, she remains the ward of her uncle, and so to a certain extent, at all events, amenable to his authority."

"Ah," added Duval, "and while all that was being settled, and the semblance of an interference was being canvassed in the court of chancery, all that we dread would be accomplished."

Mr. Field looked from one to the other in dismay, and then clasping his hands he said—

"My good friends, do with me as you will—make your own arrangements—heed me not, but just tell me what I shall do, and I will do it to the best of my ability. I assure you—I resign myself, in this affair, entirely into your hands."

"Very good," said Duval. "I don't think you can do a wiser thing. The object will be to find out where Alicia is imprisoned in the convent, and then to save her. But, as yet, it is impossible that we can say what force they may not have there to resist us, and, I fancy, you would rather get her away quietly than with a riot."

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Very good ; we will manage all that for you ; and when you have a husband's right, you can defy your foes as much as you like."

Young Field was quite convinced that what Claude Duval advised in the matter was the most prudent course to adopt ; so it was fully agreed upon, and all they had to do was to dispose of themselves in the best way they could till the evening.

A whispered consultation took place between the highwaymen ; and then Claude, turning to Field, said—

"Sir, we will meet you at the cottage at sunset ; till then we have some business to transact."

"Be it so—you will not fail me?"

"If we are alive we shall be here."

"I, then, will go to London, and make such arrangements for the reception of Alicia with a female relative of mine, as shall insure to her protection and comfort at once when she is rescued from the convent."

"You had better, too," said Dick, "have a coach in waiting on the Acton-road, with a man upon whom you can depend, for it will be desirable to get the young lady away with all the speed possible, when once we have got her clear of the convent walls."

"I will—I will."

"Till night, then," said Claude, "farewell."

They all three shook hands with young John Field, and he went towards London, while Claude Duval, after having liberally paid for what they had had at the cottage, mounted his horse, and with Dick and Jack took to the road. It was about ten o'clock in the morning then, and by no means the most favourable time for gentlemen of their profession to exercise their calling ; but, the fact is, that after a brief conference as to their resources, they found that they were getting very short of money, and that it was necessary, as Dick said, to transact a little professional business for the sake of replenishing their purses.

"We are rather in strength," said Dick, "and so I don't see what is to hinder us from taking toll upon this road. Of course, we can pick and choose by the broad daylight our customers."

"Yes," said Claude, "we can do that certainly ; but yet it is rather contrary to the ordinary practice to cry, 'Stand!' to a traveller on the highway in broad daylight ; but if there be a necessity for it, why, I will not say nay to it."

"I tell you what we can do," said Jack.

"What now?"

"Why, about a couple of miles further on there is quite a thick little wood, and if we ensconce ourselves among the trees in it, we shall see whoever comes

down the road, and can either keep snug or sally out, according as we shall think proper. The wood, too, is on both sides of the way, so we can baffle any one who may come to look after us, by crossing from one side to the other."

"Be it so. Come on, then, at once."

A sharp trot soon brought them to the wood, if wood it could be called, for, after all, it was but an artificial plantation, which, owing to the estate to which it belonged being unoccupied, had been allowed to grow to a wild state, which would have been prevented had it been in careful hands. It was quite thick enough, though, to afford a good shelter to man and horse.

## CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ESTABLISH A TOLL IN THE HIGH WESTERN ROAD.

"WHICH is it to be, to begin with," said Claude. "The right or the left side of the road?"

"This way," said Jack, and he plunged into the plantation on the left. They both followed him.

The road which led to Brentford was very narrow at that point, and the plantation on each side was only divided from it by a bank which was not above four feet high, so that the horse had stepped over it with all the ease possible. The trees close to the road-side, from getting more light and air there than in more confined situations, had grown very tall and robust, and in some cases had shot out branches that nearly crossed the road.

Under these circumstances, that bit of roadway was rather in the dark, and was perpetually crossed by masses of shadow, through which only at times a bright bit of sunlight, when that luminary was high in the heavens, would find its way, and lie upon the road like a sheet of molten gold.

It was a sweet spot, for the soft air that blew from tree to tree carried upon its invisible wings the odours of fair flowers; and the birds carolled from branch to branch of the trees, as though they considered that spot specially devoted to them, and to be one where they could enjoy life and liberty, free from the danger of molestation, to which they were ordinarily subject.

The three highwaymen dismounted, and looked about them a little; and then Dick said—

"This is 'under the greenwood tree,' in the full acceptation of the words, I rather think, Claude. But which of us is to sally out, and cry 'Stand!' to the first traveller who passes?"

"You," said Jack; "and there he is."

Dick gave a start, and glancing out into the road-way, he saw a quiet, gentlemanly-looking elderly man, mounted upon a short-legged pony, or cob, with a flowing mane and tail, and who, as well as his master, seemed intent upon looking about him, and enjoying the quiet gloom-like aspect of the scene.

"Shall I go?" said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude, "and I will take the next."

"Very good."

Dick sprang into the saddle, and quietly trotted out of the wood into the road. The old gentleman started at the sight of him, and surveyed him from top to toe in silence.

"A fine day, sir," said Dick.

"It is," said the old gentleman. "Good morning, sir."

Slightly touching his hat, the old gentleman would now have passed on; but Dick placed himself across the road, saying as he did so—

"I am sorry to interrupt you, sir; but if you will have the kindness to hand me out your watch and purse, if you have one, I shall be obliged."



THE APPARITION IN THE HAUNTED MILL.

The old gentleman uttered a deep-drawn sigh.

"You are a highwayman?" he said.

"Just so," said Dick.

"Well, I have the sum of thirty-six guineas here in a little leathern bag; but they are not mine."

"Exactly," said Dick; "from the moment that I saw you, they became, in a manner of speaking, mine."

"Hear me, sir."

"Go on, then; but don't be prosy, for I have no time to spare."

"The money I have named to you belongs to a poor widow, who, if it be not



paid within this day, will, with her young children, be turned out of her house destitute. It is a whole year's rent, which I am taking to her landlord. It has been raised by—by"—the old man's voice faltered as he spoke, and tears gathered to his eyes—"by subscriptions, the amount of any of which has not exceeded one shilling. I am the curate of this parish, with a stipend of forty pounds per annum, and eight children to support out of it."

Dick looked down, as he said in a low tone—

"Is all that true, sir?"

"So help me Heaven, it is!"

"Where is the bag and the money?"

"Oh, God! he will take it—he will take it! Here it is! Young man, for you are young in comparison to me, may Heaven pardon you for this grievous sin!"

Dick took the bag, and opened it. Then diving his hand into his pocket, he took out all the gold he had, which amounted to thirteen guineas, and poured it into the bag, on top of the amount that was already there. Then handing the bag back to the astonished curate, he said—

"Take it, sir, and forget that you ever met me."

"Good God!"

"Go, sir—go."

"But—but—What is the meaning of this?"

"If, sir, you find, when you empty that bag before the landlord, there is any overplus, take it back to the widow and the children. Good morning, sir."

Dick would have turned away; but the old clergyman rode up to him, and laid his hand upon his arm, as he said—

"Your name! Who are you?"

"You had better not know, sir."

"Oh, yes—yes, I beg that you will tell me who you are. You may be some one with whom, at another time, I may be able to communicate. Who shall say that I may not save you from continuing this course of life?"

"That's a vain hope, sir, although I thank you for the expression of it; and if you will know my name, you shall."

"I want to hear it."

"Richard Turpin!"

"Turpin? Is this possible?"

"It is true, sir."

"Why, report has painted you as one who never knew pity—as one of the most reckless and heartless of men—as an individual who was to be dreaded—as a pest to society; but I find you with a feeling heart, despite all your errors."

"It won't do to believe report, sir, too implicitly, either for good or for evil; but now that you know who I am, you perceive how completely out of the question it is that I should be other than what I am."

"Alas!—alas! I am afraid——"

"That it is so, you would say, and you are right, sir. It is so, without a doubt; and so, once again farewell."

Without waiting for another word from the old curate, Dick Turpin now turned his horse's head towards the wood again; and, bounding over the little bank, he disappeared among the trees.

The clergyman, after a pause of a few moments, rode on with the little canvas bag of money in his hand, apparently unconscious that he so held it, so deeply was he in thought concerning the strange encounter he had had with Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

When Dick got back to his friends, Claude said—

"Well, Dick, what luck?"

"Oh, stunning luck," said Dick.

"That's right. How much did you get, old friend?"

"Why, I tell you what it is, Claude, if we go on in the way that I have begun, we may as well shut up shop, and go into some other business. When we, a little time ago, compared our resources, I believe I had the greatest amount; but now I am quite sure I have the least."

"You speak in riddles, Dick."

"Or else he caught a tartar," said Jack, "and has been robbed himself instead of robbing the traveller."

Dick laughed.

"I did," he said, "in one sense, catch a tartar, as you say, Jack; and the traveller has gone off with all the gold I had, instead of surrendering all that he had; although I admit that I held his gold in my hand for a moment or two."

Jack looked amazed; but Claude said, very gently—

"I am quite sure that Dick had some good and sufficient reason for acting as he has done; and so, for one, I am satisfied."

"I had a reason," said Dick; "and I will tell it to you both with pleasure."

Dick then related exactly what had occurred; and when he had concluded, both Claude and Jack applauded him for the manner in which he had acted; and it is no stretch of truth to say, that they were much better pleased than as if he had brought to them the canvas bag of the poor widow, with her rent in it.

"Here you are," said Jack, suddenly.

"Where—where?"

"A gig! Now, Claude."

They both looked into the road, and then they saw two persons in a gig; and it so happened that the horse, when he got to that shady place, either thought that it would be a nice place to come to a short halt in, or was alarmed at the sudden change from the sunshine to that place, for he came to a halt; and when the man who was driving tried to whip him on, he stood upon his hind legs, and very nearly sent both the persons in the vehicle out at the back.

Those persons consisted of a man and a woman, both very much overdressed; and, by the vulgarity of their appearance, evidently people into whose laps fortune had fallen, without any effort or exertion of theirs in the least.

"Stop him!" cried the female. "Oh, stop him, do!"

"Woa!" said the man. "Woa!"

The horse, when he found that all that was required of him was to be quiet, stood still enough, and only whisked his tail about in defiance of the flies, that would annoy him if they could.

"Jack," said Claude, "Providence has made these two people a present to you."

"To me?"

"Yes; this is your adventure. Be quick about it, or they will go on. Come, now, Jack, these are folks that you can ease of their ready money, without having any scruples. So, go at once, that's a good fellow."

"But I thought that you——"

"No—no."

"Oh, very good. I cannot possibly have any objection. It's all in the way of business. So, here goes."

Jack made his horse bound over the bank, and in a moment was by the side of the gig, to the no small consternation of the man and woman who were in it, and who glanced at him in evident alarm. The man spoke first, saying—

"Who are you, sir? I—I should like to know who you are?"

"So should I, indeed," said the woman, making a great rustling with the vulgar finery of her apparel.

"A highwayman!" roared Jack, in a loud voice; "and if you don't at once give up your money and valuables, I'll blow both your brains out, if you have any, with all the pleasure in the world."

The woman screamed, and the man opened his mouth and eyes so wide, that it seemed doubtful if they would ever shut properly again.

"Quick!" cried Jack. "Your money and jewellery! Quick, I say!"

"Oh, Lord!"

"You can say your prayers when you get home," added Jack. "There is no time for them now."

"You wretch!" said the woman, "do you know who I am?"

"No; nor I don't care."

"Then, I can tell you that my husband here is a gentleman—quite a gentleman. He is a clerk."

"In the law," stammered the man. "I am a lawyer's clerk, if you please. But I am very well off—that is, I—oh, dear! I am the attorney-general's principal flunkey—no, I mean the attorney—that is to say, clerk. Spare my watch, and take my life. The gig is only hired, I assure you, sir, if you please; and all I have had to-day is a glass of sherry, that my doctor has tasted first, to see that it ain't poisonous to my constitution, sir, indeed."

"Yes," said the woman; "but Mr. Day is highly respectable, and was brought up at one of the first charity schools in the city of London."

"Your money," roared Jack.

"Oh, give it to him—give it to the wretch, do."

Mr. Day handed to Jack a well filled purse, and then Jack said, "Is that watch you have gold or silver?"

"Listen, if you please, sir. You see, we flunkies of the law have to carry our master's wig box to Westminster every day, and if we are not in time, oh, don't we catch it! So don't take the watch. Oh, dear!"

"My dear," said the woman, "you are quite the gentleman, you know."

"Yes, oh, yes, I am—I am. I think I am—eh? Oh, there's somebody coming. Oh, you rascal! I'll have you taken up."

Jack looked along the road, and saw a couple of men on horseback coming forward at a trot.

"Hark you," said Jack, as he took a small pistol from his pocket, "I can easily hold this pistol in my hand in such a way, that with my finger on the trigger, I can fire at any moment, and yet I can cover it with the cuff of my coat from observation. Now, if you give the least alarm to these two men who are advancing, I will send a bullet into your skull."

"Oh—oh!"

"It's of no use your saying, oh! but I will do it. Your best plan is to answer me quite civilly what I shall ask of you, in the hearing of these two men who are now approaching."

## CHAPTER CCCXXXIX.

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS STOP A STAGE-COACH AND CARRY IT OFF.

FROM where they were situated in the wood, neither Claude Duval nor Dick Turpin could see the two mounted men who were advancing on the road, and who would soon be upon the scene of action. If they had seen them the probability is, that, without considering whether it would be best to do so or not, they would have sallied out, fearing that Jack would be in serious danger.

If they had done so, a *melee*, in the course of which bloodshed would have been certain, would have taken place, and that was a state of things they were always desirous to avoid.

Jack, too, was well aware that he might have summoned his two friends to his aid easily enough, but he thought it better to succeed in surmounting the danger that threatened by finesse than by force.

The two men were well mounted, and by the appearance of the saddles of their steeds, Jack's experienced eye could very well guess that they had holsters and pistols at hand.

"Well, my dear fellow," said Jack, in a loud voice, as the men came up,

addressing Mr. Day in the gig, "it's very kind of you to be so pressing in your kind invitation, and I will certainly endeavour to call upon you the very first opportunity."

"Do so," said Mr. Day, faintly.

"Come, madam," said Jack in an under tone, "say something."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Day, "you would be kind enough to come to luncheon at our house in town, Mr. a—a—"

"Smith," said Jack.

"Mr. Smith?"

"Confound her," muttered Mr. Day, "she always asks men to luncheon when she knows that I can't get away from the chambers at Lincoln's Inn. What can she do that for, I wonder?"

The two horsemen reached the spot, and one of them said—

"Have you seen any suspicious characters on this road?"

"Keep off," cried Jack. "We don't intend to let ourselves be robbed, I can tell you. Keep off!"

"Why, who do you take us for?"

"Oh, I don't know, but the fact is, we have heard that there are highwaymen upon this road."

"Then you have heard right; but we are police-officers."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Look at our waiscoats—don't you see they are red? If you want any further proof, we will show you our constable's staffs."

"Oh, what a relief," said Jack. "My friends here really were afraid of being robbed, just now."

"We was indeed," said the lady, in defiance of grammar.

"You need be under no apprehension now," said the two officers. "We are in advance of a party that will, I hope, before nightfall clear the road of these rascals, that we hear upon good authority are upon it. There is a capital reward offered for them."

"How much?" said Jack.

"Why, there's as good as a thousand pounds, one way and another, for, the whole three."

"You don't say so! Well, don't I wish that I could meet with them. But, however, it's no use getting one's brains blown out even for a thousand pounds, is it, Mr. Day?"

"No—no—no!" shouted the man in the gig.

"But, it is a large sum," said the lady.

"Yes, my dear friend," said Jack; "but I feel quite certain that the highwaymen would shoot even you, if they thought that they were in any danger from your dear delightful tongue wagging too freely."

"They would," said one of the officers.

The lady shrunk back in the gig, for she just saw the muzzle of the small pistol that Jack had in his hand, and she fully believed that he would not be very particular whether he sent the bullet into her head, or that of her husband.

"Well, we have no time to spare," said the officer who was the spokesman of the two. "You had better look sharp, if you want to avoid the rascals, for they will be sure to stop you and rob you."

"I should resist them," said Jack.

"You would be foolish to do so, sir," said the officer, "for you would be sure to get a bullet for doing so. No, sir, keep out of their way, if you can; but if they do stop you, resistance is foolish with such fellows. They have everything to gain by shooting you, and nothing to lose."

It was a curious fact at the time when the roads round London were quite infested by highwaymen that the police were always advising people not to resist them, but to let themselves be robbed quietly; and no doubt that arose from several considerations. In the first place, the police by no means wished that the public should cut short the career of the highwaymen; and, in the

second, they considered it an interference with, and an infringement upon, their own professional pursuits for any one to contend with a highwayman, as they were sure to reap both profit and importance for the capture of one.

It so happened, though, in the present instance, that it suited Jack admirably that the officers should give this advice, as it thoroughly completed the alarm of the two persons in the gig.

The officers then rode off without the least suspicion that it was Sixteen-string Jack they had been talking to, for one of them had happened to know by sight the man in the gig; and knowing that he held a kind of law official situation about one of the courts of law, he took for granted that all was right with one who appeared to be travelling on the road with him.

"Well, this is truly dreadful!" said the lady.

"Did you speak, madam?" said Jack.

"I did, you wretch!"

"Thank you, madam."

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I think you the most odious, and the most ugly, and the most horrid wretch, I ever saw."

"You don't say so?"

"I do say so!" screamed the lady.

"There you go again," said her husband. "When you do begin, upon my life you are quite a—a—Oh, dear!"

"I don't see," said Jack, "that any one has a right to complain. The fact is, as far as I am concerned in the matter, if the lady, or female more properly speaking, had fancied me as she does you, I should have begun to ask myself what was amiss in my appearance or conduct to bring me under such a stigma; but as she abuses me, of course that is to my mind the most complimentary course she could possibly adopt in reference to me."

"Ah! Oh, dear! Well, I suppose we may go on, now," said Mr. Day. "I beg, sir, to assure you that you have got all the money I had about me, except what will be barely sufficient to pay the tolls. And so, sir, if you please, I should very much like to say good morning to you."

"Good morning," said Jack, with a smile; "but just for the present I object to your going in this direction."

"What, not as we were going?"

"Certainly not. I have a very particular objection."

"Oh, dear! then we shall have to go back to town, I suppose?"

"I rather think you will; and as you have been so polite as to hand to me your purse without much trouble, I will give you a pass-word, which will save you from being stopped by any of my friends on the road."

"Thank you—thank you. Oh, dear!"

"Very good. When you, then, see any one on horseback approaching you, you will at once pull up and call out 'Bones and blood!'"

"Oh, gracious!" cried the lady, "I couldn't do it."

"It is the only thing that will save you," added Jack, with all the gravity in the world, for he was resolved to let the couple in the chaise into a row on the route back to town, if he could—"it is the only way by which you may save your lives."

"That is something," said Mr. Day. "My precious life is everything."

"Oh, stuff!" said his wife.

"It's all very well for you to say stuff, because you want to marry again, and spend my money; but I have a different opinion, and I will say 'Bones and blood!' to everybody who looks at me as we go home, for home we will go, I suppose, now? It is quite clear that this highwayman—I mean, this gentleman, don't want us to go on this road any further."

"Yes," said the lady, with acrimony, "and that is for fear we should come up with the two constables who have passed us."

"Madam," said Jack, "you have got it there. I admire your discrimination. Now, sir, be off, if you please."



Jack pointed the pistol at the head of Mr. Day, who, looking upon that as a good hint to depart at once, turned the horse's head towards town, and set off at a trot, repeating to himself as he did so—

"Blood and bones!" Oh, dear, no, it was 'Bones and blood!' I wouldn't forget it for the world. 'Bones and blood!' What a dreadful pass-word! But still if it answers, it will be all right."

Jack trotted back to his friends.

"Well," said Claude, "what luck?"

"All's right," said Jack. "I have done better than Dick in his adventure."

"Nay, excuse me," said Dick, "I don't think you have, for my adventure has pleased me more than a great booty would have done. We can always take, but it is not always that we find so good an opportunity of giving as I had."

"You are quite right, Dick. I admit fully the truth of what you say; but here is a tolerably well-filled purse, at all events, and one comfort is, that it comes from a quarter that can very well afford to lose it."

Claude just opened the purse, and saw that it was gold that it contained, and then he gave it back to Jack, who, however, said—

"Do you keep it, Claude."

"No. It is my turn to stop the next passenger on the road, and so I ought not to be the treasurer, in case anything should happen amiss to me, for in that case you would lose both me and the money. You keep it yourself, Jack."

"Very well; but if anything was to happen to you, Claude, I would just as soon let the money go as well."

"So would I," said Dick; "but as it is Claude's turn to stop the next affair on the road, I think he will have a job, for it is a stage-coach."

"The deuce it is?"

"Behold it coming."

Claude raised himself up in his stirrups a little, and there, sure enough, he saw approaching the spot a stage-coach, with four horses, and coming along at very tolerable speed.

"Now, Claude," said Dick. "Sally out. It's your turn now."

"Stop—stop!" cried Jack, "this won't do!"

Dick laughed, and so did Claude, and then the latter said—

"Well, it is rather an awkward thing for one man to stop a coach with four horses, even at night, when the uncertainty as to whether he has comrades near at hand or not adds to the alarm of the passengers; but in broad daylight, when there is no sort of difficulty in seeing that he is alone, it is ten times worse; so I decline."

"Of course," said Jack.

"But we can all do it," said Dick.

Jack looked rather thoughtful, but Claude rode to the top of the bank and took a long look around him, and then he said—

"Well, I don't see why we should not. The road is uncommonly clear just now. Ten minutes will do the job, and, really, I do not see that we need shrink from it, as there are three of us."

"Agreed," said Dick.

"Well, but," said Jack, "I think——"

"Jack, if you have any objection," said Claude, "I will give it up. It shall not be said that I drew you into an adventure of this kind against your own will and judgment."

"Come on, then," said Jack, "I have no objection; and there is no time to argue the matter. I will stop the leading horses, and keep the coachman quiet, while you and Dick do the rest of the business."

"Agreed. Come on."

They all three at once, now, dashed into the road, just as the coach was about a hundred yards from the spot where they emerged from the little wood. Jack placed himself in the middle of the road, with his face towards the advancing vehicle; and Claude and Dick took up each of them a position on each side of

the road, so that when the coach should reach that spot, it would be hemmed in. The natural result of this state of things was, that the coachman took the alarm, and gradually pulled up his horses, so that, without at all intending to do so, he really assisted the highwaymen in the attack upon him and his passengers.

—“Here’s a dozen highwaymen, at least!” he called out. “We shall all be murdered, as safe as a gun!”

Some ladies in the inside of the coach began to scream; and the commotion among the half-dozen outside passengers was immense, as Jack seized, with his left hand, the head of one of the leading horses, and called out—

“Coachman, if you don’t want a couple of slugs through your head, you will keep your cattle quiet and well in hand.”

## CHAPTER CCCXL.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS FIND THEMSELVES IN POSSESSION OF RATHER A LARGE BOOTY.

“Oh, lor!—oh, lor!” said the coachman, as he dropped his whip. “I am as good—I mean as bad as a dead man!”

“Be quiet, all of you,” said Claude, in a clear, distinct voice—“be quiet, and make no resistance, and there will be no danger. It neither suits our objects nor our disposition to hurt a hair of any one’s head if we are not provoked to do it.”

One of the outside passengers began hurriedly to descend; but Claude rode up close to the coach, and placing the muzzle of a pistol against his cheek, said quietly—

“Allow me to request you, sir, to resume and keep your seat, or I shall have to waste a charge of gunpowder upon you very unwillingly.”

With a face as pale as death, the passenger scrambled back into his seat again, and sat there shaking like a piece of jelly.

By this time Dick had let down the glass on the side of the coach next to him; and he gave three raps upon the edge of the window with the barrel of a pistol, and then he said—

“Ladies and gentlemen, I will thank you for your money, watches, rings, and any other little articles of portable value that you may have about you. The ladies may retain their ear-rings, as it is sometimes inconvenient to take them out; but if there is any trouble with any gentleman, we always find that the shortest plan of operation is to send a bullet into him.”

There were four ladies and two gentlemen inside the coach; and the four ladies uttered four screams, as Dick finished his speech, and the two gentlemen swore dreadfully to themselves; but they took good care, for all that, to get their purses out of their pockets.

“Silence, ladies,” said Dick.

“Oh, dear, yes!” said one, “we are silent, I assure you, good Mr. Robber. I swear to you that I have got no money!”

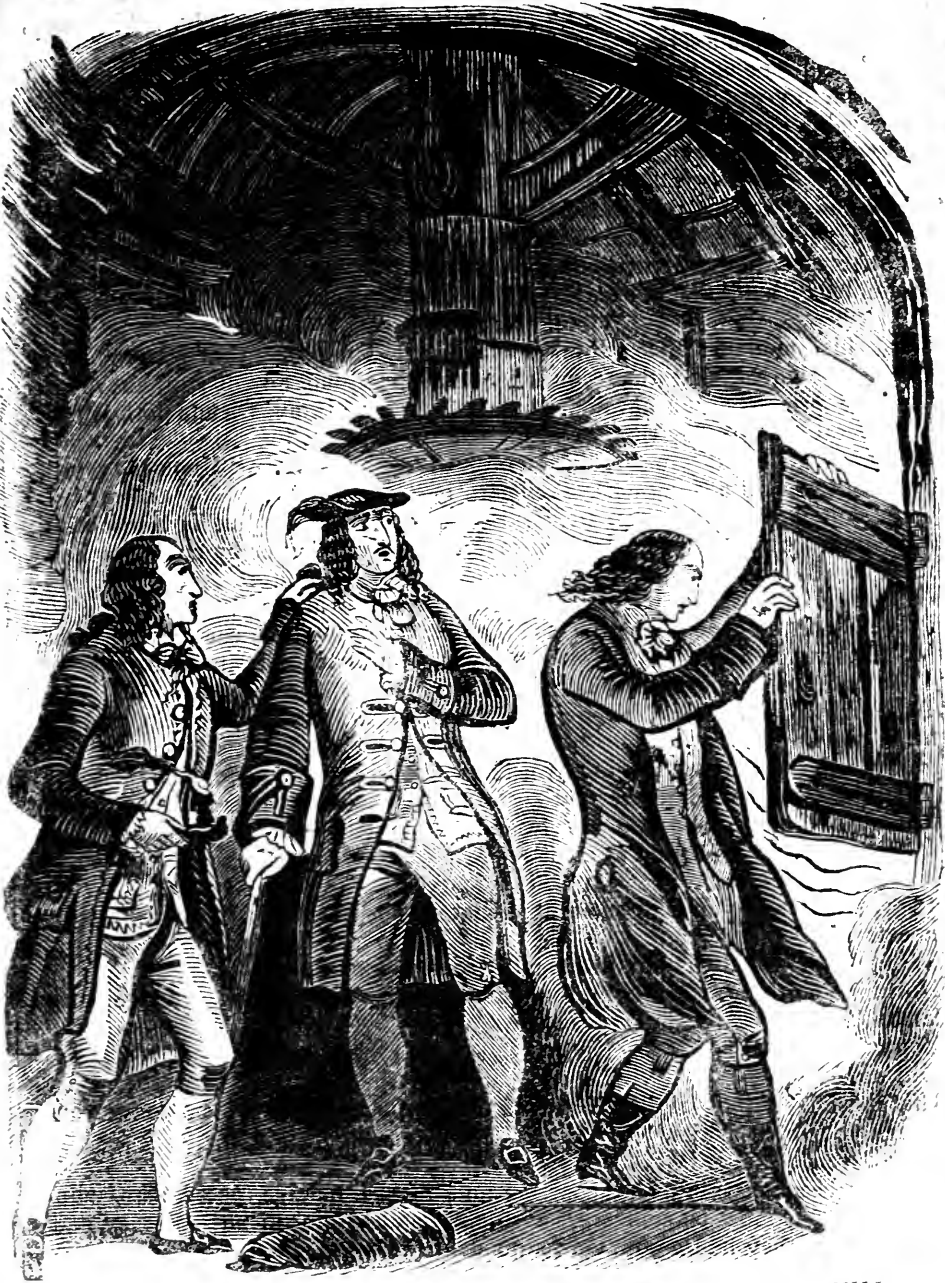
“Very good, madam; then of course you cannot give me any. I don’t do the searching business. There is one of my comrades, a black man, who does that, so I shall have to hand you over to him.”

“Oh, gracious! there’s my purse!”

“Thank you, madam.”

“And there’s mine!”—“And mine!”—“That is all my cash!”—“I hope you will let me keep my watch?”—“Oh, you don’t want my wedding-ring, surely? I have no more than what I now hand to you.”—“D—n it! there ought to be a guard to this coach!”

Such were a few of the expressions of the inside passengers, as they handed



THE THREE FRIENDS ESCAPING TO THE ROOF OF THE BURNING MILL.

to Dick the property he demanded of them; and then a young lady, who sat in a corner, said—

“Mr. Highwayman, I don’t like to give you my purse, for it has only got five guineas in it, and my uncle gave them to me; and they are all I shall have for three months for pocket money.”

“My dear,” said Dick, “don’t mention it; keep them, by all means.”

“Oh, thank you.”

“Well, I’m sure!” said a rather corpulent old lady, “that is always the way with men. They are ready to let children have their own way in everything. I don’t see why we should all be robbed, and an infant, who cannot have long got out of the nursery, should escape.”

"I am seventeen, madam, if you please," said the young lady. "Nursery, indeed! I hate the nursery."

"Sir," said one of the gentlemen, "I trust you will have the kindness to return to me my watch, as you seem a civil sort of a ras—I mean person, for I set some value upon it, I assure you."

"Do you, indeed, sir? Does it go well?"

"It does."

"Very good; then it will go from you as well as it used with you. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I make no doubt in the world but that I have been in this affair most atrociously swindled."

"Swindled?" said the old lady. "Oh, dear! what does the man mean by that?"

"Just this, madam: that I think, and, in fact, I may say that I know, I am atrociously swindled, and that you have not handed me, any of you, above one half of the property you have about you; but I and my friends do business in that liberal kind of way that we allow you to cheat us."

"Allow us to cheat you?" said one of the gentlemen. "Upon my word, that is about as cool a thing as I ever heard of."

"You should always be cool, sir," said Turpin; "for let you be transacting what business you may, you are sure to get through it better by coolness than by being in a flurry."

With these words, Turpin drew up the window again, and was turning off from the side of the coach, when a loud crack came upon his ears, and his hat flew off his head in a moment, while the report of a pistol rang in his ears.

"What's that?" cried Claude Duval.

"All's right," said Dick, as he coolly turned to the coach again, and let down the glass.

The passengers were all looking as pale as death itself, and one of the gentlemen had his lips so compressed, that every particle of colour had left them. Dick pointed to him, as he said, slowly and deliberately—

"It was you, sir, who fired at me!"

They were all silent.

"I say, sir, it was you who committed that cowardly act; for it was cowardly in the extreme."

"What is it?" said Claude, as he galloped to the spot.

"Nothing—nothing. Look to the outside. Claude. I will manage this gentleman."

"You are not hit?"

"Oh, no."

"That is well. All is right, if that is the case, and I know I can leave you to manage your own affairs."

"Thank you, Claude."

Duval had been receiving the contributions of the outside passengers, who had given them, it must be confessed, with rather a bad grace; but still they had given them, and they had amounted to a considerable sum in all.

The gentleman who had fired at Dick Turpin in what we cannot help calling rather a treacherous and cowardly manner, was evidently too much terrified to speak. He only sat glaring at the highwayman, and with a dreamy kind of wonder in his mind as to what he would do next.

"Sir," said Dick, and he spoke with rather startling coolness and determination. "Sir, if, when first I came to this window, you had in a bold and straightforward manner, as you might have done and as you would have been fully justified in doing, resisted me, I should have thought nothing of it; but, on the contrary, you waited until I was off my guard, and for the mere purpose of petty revenge, because I had taken from you a few pounds, you fired at me, and that in the most treacherous manner that you could possibly do it in. Sir, if I were an angry man——"

"Oh, spare him," said the young lady. "Don't kill him."

"That is not my intention," said Dick. "I say, if I were an angry man I should this moment shoot you through the head, as I might do by the least pressure of my little finger upon the trigger of this pistol."

As he spoke, Dick held the pistol muzzle within a couple of inches of the gentleman's head.

"Spare him—spare him!" said the young lady. "I entreat you to do so."

"I will; it would be murder to shoot him now."

"This generosity will meet with its reward," said the young lady. "You may be assured, sir, that it will."

The gentleman now, if he might really be called such, upon finding that Dick Turpin had not the intention to kill him for the attempt that had been made upon his life, gathered courage to speak.

"I am glad I missed you," he said.

"No, sir, you are not."

"Well, a man has a right to defend his property."

"Yes, in a manly manner, but you, sir, have the mind of an assassin, as you sufficiently exemplified by the mode in which you sought your revenge: You did not attempt to defend your property, but you gave that up through fear, and then you sought to assassinate the man you dared not face."

"Oh, nonsense! I fired at you, as I should have been quite willing to have done before, only I could not get at my pistols. I did not want to take any unfair advantage of you."

"Then you mean to tell me that you are the sort of man who would like a fair shot at such as I am?"

"Yes, I am; but it is all over now, and I make you welcome to what you have taken from me. Good morning. Ha! ha!"

There was quite as much nervous excitement as a kind of foolish recklessness in this mode of speaking of the gentleman; but he had no idea that Dick meant to take him at his word.

"Well, sir," said Dick, "I am one who will oblige you or anybody if it be in my power. I will forget the unfair shot that you have had at me, and you shall have a fair one."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that you shall get out of the coach and have another shot at me in a fair and open manly manner, and I will have one at you."

"Oh, no—no!"

"But I say, oh, yes—yes."

"I am quite satisfied. I don't want to have anything more to say in the affair or to do with it, I assure you. I am quite satisfied, sir, and you are welcome to what you have got."

"But I am not satisfied, and out you shall come. Claude—Claude!"

"Here," said Duval; "what is it?"

"This fellow wants a fair shot at me, and I am determined to let him have it, and now he shrinks from it. Help me to get him out of the coach, Claude, so that he may be satisfied, in spite of himself."

"Come, sir," said Claude, as he reached in his arm and seized the man by the collar and had him out in a moment. "This is the way, if you please."

"Murder!" said the old lady.

"It might have been murder," said the young one. "Pray, sir, are you Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Oh, I have so wanted to see you!"

"Take a good look at me, then. I cannot say that I have so wanted to see you, for I did not very fond of your fair existence; but when I do look at you, I esteem myself very fortunate in having that pleasure."

"You are a wretch!" said the old lady. "Go away, do."

"But is she not a pretty girl, madam?" said Claude.

"No!"



"Oh, how can you say that? Ha! ha! Now, Dick, where is your man? Oh, here he is. Well, sir, so you tried one shot at my friend, and now you object to treat us to another?"

"Spare my life!"

"What a coward!"

"Yes," said Dick; "but I don't intend to let him off on that score, for a coward is, after all, a far more dangerous animal than a brave man. I know, sir, that you have another pistol, so you can produce it; and as the one you fired was well loaded, as I may judge by the report, the other is, no doubt, in quite as satisfactory a condition. This is a duel, Claude; will you see fair play?"

"I will, Dick."

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve paces," said Turpin, as he stepped them out upon the side of the road, and then faced his antagonist. "Now, sir."

The man dropped to his knees, and in a very abject manner, cried out—

"Spare my life—oh, spare my life! There was no bullet in the pistol."

"Lie the first," said Dick.

"And I didn't mean to hit you."

"Lie the second."

"And I have no other pistol about me, I declare to you."

"Lie the third."

"Oh, it is true—it is true; and if you fire at me, you will be firing at an unarmed man."

"What's this?" said Claude, as he dived his hand into one of the coat skirt-pockets of the man, and brought out a very beautifully made pistol. "What is this?"

"Oh—oh—oh!"

There was a silver plate upon the stock of the pistol, with the letter B upon it, but at the moment it did not strike Claude what name it might refer to.

"Come, sir," he said, as he threw up the pan, and then carefully closed it again, as he saw the pistol was very carefully primed. "Come, sir, these weapons are in good order, and will do. The word shall be 'fire,' and I will count three before I give it."

"That will do," said Dick.

"One—"

"Stop—stop"! cried Mr. B. "Stop."

"What for?"

"Only to consider a little. I—I—"

"Plague take you. Get up! It is not at all fair that you should be upon your knees, while my friend is upon his feet."

"Never mind," said Dick. "It's much the same."

"Two," said Claude.

Bang, went the pistol of Mr. B., and inflicted a slight flesh wound upon Dick's arm.

"An accident! An accident!" he called out. "I didn't mean it!"

## CHAPTER CCCXLI.

DICK, WITHOUT INTENDING IT, GETS RID OF ONE OF MR. FIELD'S AND ALICIA'S ENEMIES.

✓ THERE could be no doubt whatever but that the rascal who had already had one unfair shot at Dick, had, when he saw affairs were desperate, and that there was no escape from the encounter, determined upon trying the chance of another, and had so fired, when Claude said "Two," instead of waiting for the completion of the signal.

His calling out that it was an accident, was but a weak attempt to get rid of the consequences of the dastardly act.

"Three! Fire!" cried Claude, and before the smoke from Mr. B.'s pistol had cleared away, and before he could scramble to his feet, and fly from the spot, which he was attempting to do, Dick fired.

With a yell, the man sprang up into the air, and then fell like a log to the ground.

"That has done it," said Claude.

"I expect as much," said Dick; "but, after all, I am sorry for it."

"He is a great rascal."

"Yes, but not worth powder and shot, after all, when you come to think of it. But perhaps he is not killed."

The ladies in the coach now began to set up such a screaming, that Claude was obliged to run to the window and cry out to them—

"Silence! There is no harm done. It's only a joke, ladies, after all; but if you make that noise you will frighten the horses."

"Oh, but isn't anybody killed?"

"Certainly not. Be quiet. I beg of you."

Claude went back to where Dick was gazing at the body of his late foe, in an abstracted manner.

"Gone!" said Dick.

"Is he indeed dead?"

"Look!"

Dick indicated with his toe a spot on the forehead of the man, and there, sure enough, the bullet had gone right into the brain, making a clear round orifice into which you might put your little finger. His death must have been instantaneous.

"Come away, Dick," said Claude. "We have been too long here already. This is a deed that will soon be bruted all over the country, with such additions to it as will make it wear a very different aspect to the real one. Let us be off at once. Come—come."

"I should like to know who he is."

Claude ran back to the coach door, and said—

"Can any lady, or can you sir, tell me who the gentleman was who was here with you as a passenger?"

"Yes," said one lady, "it was Sir John Beachem."

"Sir John Beachem? You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir; and by your speaking of him as you do, I presume that he is dead."

Claude made no answer to this, but hastened back to Dick, and was upon the point of telling him who the dead man was, when Jack cried out loudly, but not in a tone of alarm—

"To the wood! To the wood!"

"What is it, Jack?"

"A strong party of horsemen are on the road. They seem to me to have seen the coach at a stand still, and to think it suspicious."

"The deuce they do."

"Quick! They come now."

"Where's my horse?" said Dick. "I tied her bridle to this tree. Good God! if I lose her I lose my right hand."

"There she goes into the wood," said Claude.

Jack galloped up to them.

"Are you both mad," he said, "that you do not fly from here? I tell you that our foes are all but upon us."

"They may be quite upon us," said Dick Turpin—"but how can I go without my Black Bess? Here is her broken bridle. The pistol-firing must have scared her, and yet I never knew her start at it before."

"No, Dick. But you were not with her now."

"Ah! that's it—that's it! We are lost—no, I mean I am. You two can go off; and I beg you to do so, and good luck go with you."

"Bad luck go with us if we desert you," said Claude. "Cannot we all take to the wood?"

"Yes; but these people will tell where we are; and you forget that I am on foot."

"Stop!" said Jack. "Listen to me. Dick, you can get up outside, and keep the passengers there quiet upon pain of death. Claude, you get inside, and do the same thing. Here, let us start your horse and mine into the wood. They won't go far either of them. I will borrow the coachman's coat and hat, and take his place on the box; and we will try and get through this rather ugly affair by a little finesse."

"By Jove, Jack, it's a capital plan!"

"Admirable!" said Dick; "and there is just enough of us to do it. But this dead body will tell tales, if we don't move it. Help me, Claude, will you?"

"Willingly. There he goes. Splash!"

They took the dead body of Sir John Beachem between them and cast it into a deep ditch by the road side. For a moment or two it seemed as if it would not sink in the rather thick fluid that the ditch was full of; but, gradually, as the clothing of the dead man became saturated with water, the fearful-looking evidence of violence settled down to the bottom of the muddy pool.

"That will do."

If the plan that had been suggested by Jack was to be carried out at all with any prospect of success, no time was to be lost in doing so; and, accordingly, the three highwaymen, with a certainty and promptitude that the life of danger and of hair-breadth escapes they had so long led could only have imparted to them, made the requisite arrangements.

The other two horses were conducted to the road side, and sent into the wood. Jack took possession of the coachman's hat, coat, wig, and whip, and said to him—

"You will sit behind me, and be quiet."

"Oh, dear, but—"

"Very good. Open your mouth."

"My mouth? What for?"

"The neatest way of blowing a man's brains out is to fire a pistol into his mouth upwards. It commonly blows off the top of his skull, and that is a settler."

"Oh—oh! it is! it is! I will do anything you like."

"So I thought you would. You are quite a sensible man. Now, get up and be quiet."

The coachman took a vacant seat behind Jack, who mounted the box, and, whip in hand, waited the result of the plan.

Dick Turpin clambered on the roof of the coach, and sat down among the passengers quite calmly, saying as he did so—

"Now, gentlemen, listen to me. The first one of you that makes the slightest alarm will get a bullet into his head. If I and my friends are caught we hang—and it makes not the least difference to us whether we take one or two of you into the other world with us or not."

The outside passengers looked rather ruefully at each other; and one, with his teeth chattering together with fear, that it sounded as if he were doing it on purpose, and trying to execute some extraordinary tune by that means in imitation of the castanets, said—

"Oh, dear me, I don't want to say nothing to nobody. Oh—oh! I wish I had my wife here."

"Silence!" said Turpin.

Claude Duval, when he saw that all was right with his two friends, sprang into the coach.

The ladies uttered screams; but he said "Silence, ladies!" in so peremptory

a manner, that it had the effect he desired immediately; and then, as he sat down, he added in a low, distinct tone—

“Ladies, I beg that you will attend to me. There will come some wicked men to the coach windows to ask some questions, possibly. I beg that you will leave me to answer them; for, if by word, or look, or action, you let them know that I am not a passenger by the coach, or contradict me in anything I shall say, there will be such a bother as you never saw or heard of; and there will be much bloodshed, the result of which I cannot foresee.”

“Oh, we won’t speak!”

“That is right. Fear nothing, for, mark me, I hold out no threats to you; so do not say afterwards that Claude Duval owed his safety to frightening the ladies.”

“Then you are really,” said one, “the—the—Duval?”

“I am, miss.”

“Oh, dear, I never was so delight—I mean, so frightened—in all my life. Oh—oh!”

“Listen, if you please. They come! My life, ladies, I commit to your keeping. By a word, any of you may, I heartily believe, condemn me to death within the next five minutes, for I don’t intend to be taken alive. Will any of you speak that word?”

“No—no!” they all said.

Claude smiled.

“I knew you would not. Beauty and gentleness ever go together.”

“What a nice man!” said the oldest and most plain of the whole party. “Oh, sir, if you would only repent, and reform, and all that sort of thing, and—and then marry some one.”

“Nobody would have me, madam.”

“Well, perhaps no very young person; but—hem!—perhaps some one who was just past the follies of extreme youth, and—and in her prime of life, with a little property—”

“I don’t think, madam,” said a young lady, “that Claude Duval would like to marry any one old enough to be his grandmother.”

“His grandmother, miss?”

“Why, yes; you are surely fifty-five?”

“Oh, gracious!—oh, providence!”

“Ladies—ladies!” said Claude, “I pray you to be mild, if you please—mild and quiet.”

“But the idea!” said the old lady—“the idea of children, who ought to be kept in nurseries, and perpetually whipped, saying such things, is really—too—oh, gracious!—too dreadful!”

With a dash, and a great clatter of horses feet, the strong party of mounted men reached the carriage; and one of them cried out in a voice of authority—

“Halt!”

They all paused; and except the pawing of some of the horses upon the road, and the snorting of others, they were all still enough.

“Is anything amiss here?” said the man who had commanded the party to halt.

“Yes; there has been,” said Claude Duval.

The man stooped, and looked into the coach.

“What is it, sir? We are on the look-out for three highwaymen, whom we have good reason to think are in this neighbourhood. I hope you have not been at all incommoded by them?”

“Only stopped and robbed, that’s all.”

“Robbed, sir?”

“Ask these ladies, if you doubt me.”

“Oh, yes, it is true!” said all the ladies. “That is true enough.”

“Confound it! how unfortunate,” said the man, “that I and my party should be too late for the rascals.”

"It is, indeed."

"How long ago was it?"

"Why, if you had come up, sir, only five minutes' ago you would have found them here, taking the affair quite easy, and having everything their own way."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite so, I assure you; but you are just a little too late."

"By Jove! that is the most provoking thing that ever occurred to me. Did you know who they were, sir?"

"Why, of course, I should not; but in the coolest manner possible, one of them declared himself to be the celebrated Claude Duval."

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear!"

"What's the matter?"

"I was only groaning at the thought that I had missed him, that was all; and it is enough to make anybody groan."

"I don't know that. He is a determined fellow, and a good shot, they say, and I have heard that since his late escape from Newgate, he has made a determination that, let the consequences bet what they may, he will never be taken alive."

"Oh, stuff, sir. I have twenty men here."

"Twenty, say you?"

"Yes, twenty."

"Well, that is a good force, I admit; and I only wish you had got here a little sooner with it, and you might, perhaps, then have saved my watch and seals that I have been forced to part with to the fellow."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! Which way did he go?"

"Towards town."

"And here you are, all of you, outside and in, and suffer yourselves to be robbed by Claude Duval!"

"Ah, but he had two others with him."

"Two others! Why, they are Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack! I should have nabbed them all!"

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## CHAPTER CCCXLII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS EFFECTUALLY ESCAPE THE OFFICERS, AND STOP A CARRIAGE.

THE distraction of the mounted officer at finding he had missed such a prize was so great, that he seemed ready to give himself up quite to despair, and Claude said then to him—

"I can't help thinking that you are losing valuable time. Hang it, man, they can't be above a mile off by this time. Why don't you and your twenty men go after them?"

"I will—I will."

"You will? It's all very well for you to say you will; but why don't you go at once?"

"Yes—yes; thank you, sir. Do you offer any reward for your watch?"

"Yes, twenty pounds."

"Very good, sir. Where shall we find you?"

"At the secretary of state's office in Whitehall."

Upon this the officer touched his hat, for he thought that in the gentleman in the coach he must surely have got hold of some official personage, with whom it would be just as well to be upon good terms as not.

"I will be off at once, sir," he said, "agreeably to your advice."

"You will do well," said Claude.

"Now, my men, come after me, like the devil himself!" shouted the officer





CLAUDE STOPPING THE PHANTOM FUNERAL.

"Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and Sixteen-string Jack, are all three upon the road, only a little in advance of us, and if we rattle on we can come up to them. Forward—forward!"

"Good luck go with you," said Claude, "the further off you get. Hem! Well, ladies, I am happy to have freed you from your apprehensions concerning these fellows. You see, or rather you hear, I should say, that they are completely got rid off."

"They are, indeed," said one of the ladies.

"And you do not regret it, madam?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"Nor any of you, I'm sure."

"Oh," said the old lady, as she managed adroitly to place a card, on which was her name and address, into Claude's hand, "I'm sure if you were ever to call upon me in London, I should be frightened out of my wits, that I should."

"Thank you, madam," said Claude, as with a smile and a bow, he got out of the coach. "I should be sorry to alarm you to that extent: so I shall not do myself that honour."

"The wretch!" said the old lady.

The others laughed, and Claude called out in a loud voice—

"It's all right, Dick and Jack. Come on, now. Ladies and gentlemen, we have the honour of bidding you all good day, and a very pleasant journey, indeed."

"Stop a bit," said Jack. "There's a phaeton coming along the road, Claude, yonder."

"Very good. Let it come. Coachman?"

"Ye—e—es!" stammered the coachman.

"Drive on as fast as you can. Your traces have not been touched; but, remember, if you say one word on this side of Wycombe, whither I see you are bound, about me and my friends, you will be a dead man before the week is out."

"Oh, I won't—I won't!"

"Very good; now be off."

The coachman was to well pleased to get leave to drive off to delay about it; and as the cattle had had about twenty minutes rest when he laid the whip upon them, they set off at a first-rate pace, and the coach was soon out of view of Claude Duval and his friends.

There they stood in the middle of the road, and on foot, too.

"Well," said Turpin, "what have we made of this affair?"

Claude laughed.

"I have a pocket full of purses and watches," he said, "and an offer of marriage from an old lady."

"An old lady?"

"Oh, yes. Ha—ha! I have her card. But where is the phaeton you spoke of, Jack? Has it gone?"

"No, there it is. Ha! it stops, and there seems to be some sort of parly going on with the driver of it. If we were but mounted, now, we wight make more, possibly, by stopping that phaeton than we got from the passengers in the stage coach."

"There is not time to get our horses."

"Never mind. Here it comes again, and at a gallop, too."

It would seem as if the lady and gentleman in the phaeton had had some apprehension that the three figures they saw upon the road might not be exactly desirable to meet, but that their coachman had advised them, as the men were on foot, to trust to the speed of their cattle; and so he lashed his horses into a gallop, and the carriage was whirled along at such a rate, that the footman who was in the rumble behind looked scared, and held on to the back of the phaeton with an immense kind of grin upon his face, as though he considered he was making great exertions to save his life.

"There goes his hat," said Jack.

"Yes—capital! What a hurry they are in, to be sure. There is one thing, though, that is pretty certain, and that is, that we cannot stop them as they go at the rate they are now going at."

"That's true. Out of the way."

Now, if the coachman of the phaeton had been content with having lashed his horses into a gallop he might have done very well, but his fears or his unscrupulousness as to the use of the whip induced him to go on, and the cattle, no doubt began to think—for horses are quite sagacious enough to come to such conclu-

sions—that it was rather unfair to bang them when they were doing their utmost, and so they got out of temper and began to kick.

“Curse you!” cried the coachman, as he still plied the whip. “Go on—go on, you devils, will you?”

The horses came to a stand still as regarded drawing the phaeton, and one of them amused himself by standing on its hind legs, while the other kicked out terrifically.

“Murder!” shouted the lady in the carriage.

“Help!” screamed the gentleman.

The coachman swore and lashed at the horse that stood up, till he got the end of the thong of his whip entangled in the head gear of the animal, and then he was helpless.

“Leave the cattle alone, fool!” cried Jack. “Do you want to drive the horses mad?”

“Murder! Help!” cried the lady and gentleman.

“Be quiet,” added Jack. “Don’t make that squalling: horses don’t like it. Woa—woa!”

Jack got hold of the reins of the kicking horse, and gently patted him on the neck, and coaxed him till he was as still as a lamb, and then the other one condescended to stand upon four feet again, and Turpin patted him a little, so that in a few moments, by dint of kindness and a little attention, the two horses were as peaceable and willing as possible.

“They will do, now,” said Jack. “I will hold them, Dick, while you and Claude speak to the parties in the carriage.”

“Very good.”

“Now, my fine fellow,” said the coachman, waving his whip over the heads of his horses, and Jack’s head, too. “Let them go. I don’t want you standing there any longer.”

“Oh, don’t you?” said Jack.

“No; be off, will you?”

Jack quietly took a pistol from his pocket and pointed it at the coachman between the heads of the horses. As he did so, and glanced along the barrel of the weapon, it was quite a sight to see the look, first of surprise and then of alarm, deepening into actual contortions, that came over the fat, meaningless features of the driver of the phaeton. The whip dropped from his hands, and his mouth and eyes opened to such a width, that he looked quite an object. All he said was—

“Oh, lor—oh, lor!”

“Samuel,” said the lady in the carriage, “why don’t you go on?”

“Oh, lor—oh, lor!”

“What is the matter with Samuel?”

“I don’t know,” said the gentleman.

Claude Duval, by a glance at the position of affairs, soon saw what it was that so powerfully affected Samuel, and then stepping to the side of the phaeton, he said—

“Sir, you should discharge a coachman who treats your horses in such a fashion as yours has done.”

“That is my business,” said the gentleman, with considerable haughtiness.

“Very likely, sir. I have just told you that it is.”

“Go away, my good man,” said the lady. “There is sixpence for your services; you can go and get some what’s-its-name—dear me, it’s what the low people drink.”

“Beer,” suggested the gentleman.

“Oh, yes, beer. Go and get some beer at once. That will do—that will do my good man.”

“Pray, madam, who are you?” said Claude.

“You wretch, how dare you ask? This gentleman is the Bishop of Ripon.”

“Oh, indeed. Why, I have heard of your lordship; you have embezzled more

of the money that was left to the poor and to schools, I do think, than any of your reverend brethren, so report says."

"Go along, fellow!"

"Oh, dear, no. Is this your lady?"

"Don't answer the wretch," cried the lady. "Don't answer him."

"But I will be answered," said Claude Duval, as he caught the bishop by the throat with his left hand, and placed the muzzle of a pistol at his head with the other. "Now, my lord bishop, who is this woman?"

"The Lord have mercy upon me!"

"The Lord may; but I will not, if you do not at once answer me the question that I have asked of you."

"She—she, is my housekeeper."

"Oh, indeed; and what was she before that?"

"She was, before that, Betty Aikin, the bar-maid at a tavern in the city."

"And so, Betty, the bar-maid, quite forgot that it was beer that low people were in the habit of drinking? Oh, Betty—Betty, you are the beggar on horseback, who rode over his old friends on foot."

"I'll scratch your eyes out!" cried the enraged Betty.

"And you are ugly, too," added Claude. "Ugly, and squint, and middle-aged. Oh, my Lord Bishop, is this your taste? Oh, oh!"

Lady Betty thrust her hand into a pocket that was in the lining of the coach, and suddenly snatching out of it a pint black bottle, she made a blow at Claude Duval with it, and hit him on the cheek, so as to make the blood come.

"Take that," she said; "and now be off, or I will give you worse still."

"Betty—Betty," said Duval, with all the nonchalance in the world, "you are an insolent as well as an ugly female; but I will trouble you for your watch, trinkets, and money, and you, my lord bishop, for yours."

The bishop gave up his property without a word; but Betty fought and screamed, and tried to scratch to such a degree, that Claude was forced to call Dick Turpin, and then they lifted her out of the phaeton between them, and accommodated her with a seat, which would have been very kind of them, if it had not been near the ditch by the road side.

"Now, Betty," said Claude, "be quiet, and give up your watch, and money, and rings, or in you go to the ditch."

"I won't—I won't! Oh, you wretches! I'll see you both hung with pleasure, that I will! I'll swear anything to hang you both! I'll——"

"Souise!" said Duval, and underneath went Lady Betty. "How do you feel now?" said Duval, when she emerged, covered with green slime, and half choked by the water. "How does your ladyship feel now?"

She gasped like a fish that is just pulled to dry land, and Turpin took the opportunity of disembodying her of a well-filled purse, and a gold watch and chain. There was a little set of tablets too, mounted with gold, that he took from her, and handed to Claude, who opening them, read upon the first page the following delicious memorandum:

"Tuesday.—Mem.—To place a yard of ribbon in Emma Gray's box, and then call in an officer, and say she stole it, and so get rid of her to prison. She is a deal too good looking, and the bishop looked at her yesterday."

"Did you write this?" said Claude.

"I did; and what then?"

"Dick, my boy, read it."

Dick did read it, and a flush of anger came across his face as he did so.

"What do you say to that, Dick?"

"Give her another souise," said Dick, and in a moment Lady Betty was under water again, and came up looking like some great drowned cow.

"Now," said Duval, "I am sorry to treat anything in the shape of woman in this way, Madam Betty; but there was no difficulty in seeing that you were a cold-blooded, selfish-minded, abandoned woman, and this horrid memorandum in your own tablets proves the truth of that opinion."

"Shall we give her another?" said Dick.

"No—no."

Lady Betty tried to scream, but her mouth was full of ditch water, and she could only make a gurgling noise. They lifted her up again, and flung her upon the bishop in the carriage, and then Claude Duval cried out—

"Let them go, Dick—let them go. That will do, Jack."

"Now, Mr. Coachman," said Jack, "if you please, be off."

The coachman was really too much frightened to drive; but Jack started the horses, so on they went, keeping the road very nicely of their own accord without any guiding at all.

"Our horses! our horses!" said Turpin. "I am getting anxious about my Black Bess, I can assure you."

"Come on, then, to the wood," said Jack.

"Be under no fear," said Claude; "we shall find them. The sweet herbage that is there in abundance will have proved a powerful means of keeping them to the spot."

"I hope so."

They all three now left the high-road as quickly as they could, and scrambling over the bank, they made their way among the trees, but to their disappointment, neither of the horses were visible.

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### CHAPTER CCCXLIII.

THE YOUNG LOVER IS TRUE TO HIS APPOINTMENT, AND CLAUDE COMMENCES THE CONVENT ADVENTURE.

THE dread of the loss of their cattle was one which perhaps more powerfully affected the highwaymen than any other could by any possibility have done. Upon the possession of their horses might be said to depend their very lives.

Besides that consideration, constant association with the creatures begot a sort of affection for them, similar to that which the soldier in a long campaign feels for the gallant steed that has carried him often in safety through the din, and the smoke, and the danger of battle.

"By Heaven!" said Turpin, "I would not lose Bess for half the gold in England."

"Don't put yourself out of the way," said Jack; "you may depend she is not very far off."

"That remains to be seen. I shall soon find that out, although I dread to try the experiment."

"What experiment, Dick?" said Duval.

"I have a silver whistle here, the peculiar sound of which is so well known to Bess, that if she be within hearing distance of it, and can come to me at all, she will, and I can assure you that with her strength and agility it will not be a trifle that will keep her away."

"Sound your magic whistle, then, Turpin," said Duval. "Perhaps if the other horses are with her they may follow her to the spot."

"They may do so."

The spot upon which the three highwaymen were, was one in the very thickest portion of the wood, and so completely impervious to light that even at mid-day it would have been a difficult thing to see objects there with any degree of distinctness. The dead leaves of several seasons lay thickly upon the ground.

Dick Turpin took the small silver whistle that he had spoken of from his neck, and stooping low, so that the sound should travel as far as possible along the surface of the ground, rather than be dissipated amid the leaves of the old trees that covered the land around, he blew a long, low note.



Turpin continued to sound this note till his breath was exhausted, and then he put up the whistle, saying—

“It is of no use to use it twice. If she be within hearing, she will come at the first note.”

“Ah,” said Jack, “what is that?”

“What?”

“A sound like some one breaking some of the underwood.”

“Ah, say you so?”

Dick Turpin flung himself at full length upon the ground, and placing his ear close to it, he listened for a moment or two in silence, and then he cried out in a voice of exultation—

“She comes—she comes!”

“Can you really hear her?” said Claude Duval.

“Oh, yes, quite easily. I know her tread, too. Ah, the whistle has done. The jade was only rambling about, after all, in search of the young grass. She is coming quickly.”

“I only wish we had the like good fortune,” said Jack. “Our horses don’t understand the tune of—

“O, whistle, and I’ll come to thee, my lad.”

If they did, I’ll warrant we should all be soon mounted and out of this confounded wood, for if we do stay here till night fairly falls upon us we shall find it no easy matter to get out of it, and our friend, Mr. Field, will begin to think that in trusting to our words he has been resting upon a broken reed, merely.”

“Don’t be uneasy, Jack,” said Turpin. “I can hear the sound of other hoofs besides those of my bony black Bess.”

“Can you really, though?”

“I can. Out of the way. Here she comes—here she comes.

“Oh, my Bonny Black Bess!

By the glare of thine eye,

There is something that tells me

A traveller’s sigh.

We’ll cry to him ‘Stand!’ with a shout and a dash—

Pray, sir, please to hand out your watch and your cash.”

Ha! ha! here is the beauty. Here she is!”

Turpin’s horse dashed through the thick underwood, and in another moment placed her head against his breast, and began to push him and caress him in something of the fashion of a pet cat.

“Oh you beauty!” said Dick, as he patted her on the neck. “Oh, you duck of a beauty! Did Dick say he would not lose you for half the gold in England? Bah! he ought to have said, he would not lose you for all the gold in England twice told!”

“It’s wonderful,” said Jack; “but the fact is, that Turpin’s Bess must have told our two horses that they were wanted, for, lo! here they come.”

“You don’t say that?” said Claude Duval.

“Yes, Claude, and now the highwayman is himself again.”

Claude Duval was well pleased to hold his horse by the bridle again; and from the ramble the creatures had had in the wood, they were as fresh and full of life as possible, so that they might at that time have been depended upon thoroughly in any enterprise that required steadiness, and endurance, and courage.

“Well,” said Turpin, “here we are, not exactly like the babes in the wood, for we are in a little better case than they were; but here we are in the wood. What is to be the next caper?”

“Escape from our foes,” said Jack. “They come!”

“Ah, say you so?”

“Jack is right,” said Claude Duval. “I can hear them making this way through the underwood, although what sort of success they expect to have I don’t know.

This is the way. As long as we keep some few hundred trees between us and then we shall do well enough."

"And as long as we keep our cattle out of danger, too," said Dick. "I am not going to part with Bess again in a hurry, I can assure you. Come on—come on."

There was no great difficulty in keeping on in advance of the noises of pursuit. It was pretty evident that a number of persons were employed in beating the wood, and in going through it in a body, no doubt, extending its whole width, for the purpose of dislodging whoever might be taking shelter in it.

All the highwaymen had to do, was to slowly retreat before their foes, and that they managed to do with great tact and decision.

Once or twice they heard the discharge of a gun; and once, by the peculiar rattling noise among the leaves of a tree close to them, they could guess that a bullet or two had found its way among them.

"I should like," said Turpin, "to give them a return of that compliment; but it is better not."

"Much better not, Dick," said Duval. "Whoever they may be who are hunting us through the wood, it does not follow that they are quite certain we are here."

"True—true."

"But if we fire, that is a question which would be set at rest in a minute."

"Yes," said Jack, "and along with it we should publish an advertisement, as it were, of our precise position."

"Oh, you need say no more," said Dick. "I won't fire, except they happen to hit Bess, and then I don't know exactly what possible inducement would be sufficient to prevent me from having satisfaction out of some of their thick skulls."

The sound of voices from the men who were coming through the wood with so much deliberation, came attimes upon the ears of the fugitives; but still their retreat continued without any untoward circumstance arising to mar its effect, and Claude Duval had a serious doubt if anything at all connected with them was the real cause of this search of a body of men in that direction.

He stated his doubts to his two friends, but they all agreed that, whether or not, it was better to go on, and they rather quickened their pace, as they got to the outskirts of the wood, where owing to the trees standing rather thinner, they were able to do so.

The sounds of pursuit through the wood gradually died away, and in a very short time the three highwaymen emerged upon a wide open expanse of open land, upon which the dews of evening were now falling fast, and enveloping it all in a misty mantle, that gave it the appearance of some vast ocean of vapour, for they could not see far enough to note the limits of the open space they were in, so it was left to their imagination, which under such circumstances always goes far beyond reality.

"We must get out of this," said Jack. "It will be on the increase rather than otherwise, and to lose your way in a white mist is just a degree or two worse than to lose your way in a wood, I take it."

"It is, indeed. Do you know the way, Jack?"

"Yes, so far as it is to the right."

"Let us take it, then, for I am thinking it is high time that we thought of keeping our appointment with our young friend, John Field, if we are to keep it at all."

"I would not break it for a thousand pounds," said Turpin.

"Indeed!"

"Oh, no. I expect some fine fun in that convent, I assure you."

"Well, there may be."

"I am certain that there will be. Something seems to tell me that that adventure will be one of the most delightful and varied of any that we have had

for a long time ; and, in fact, I would not let it go by on any account, if I can help it."

"Well, we are in good time," said Jack, "and, besides, if we should even be a little late, our young friend, Field, may well imagine that it is possible enough something in our profession may have happened to detain us."

They now, as Jack advised, made their way to the right, and by keeping as close as possible to the hedge, they managed, notwithstanding the white fog, to get along pretty well without straying far from the right direction.

After a time they came to a stile, which conducted directly into the Acton Road.

The stile was a little hindrance, but Jack managed to break it down at last, and then the horses walked over its ruins, and they were in the road. At a short distance in advance they saw a bulky-looking object.

"A coach," said Turpin, "and it is drawn up to the side of the road. I will wager anything now that that is the vehicle that belongs to our friend, John Field."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack, "and if he be there already, he is in a fidgety state for our appearance."

"No doubt he is," said Claude Duval. "I thought that, after all, he would hardly let anything short of death detain him."

"Is it our man?" said Turpin.

"Oh, yes. I knew him at once, dark as it is. Come on—come. It is all right."

"And I knew him too," said Jack. "He has rather a peculiar way with his head, and a quick mode of moving it from side to side ; there is no mistaking him."

The united opinions of Claude and Jack convinced Dick Turpin that all was right, and they all three rode up to the figure that they saw by the old beech tree, and so near at hand to the coach that had halted on the road.

As they got closer, the young lover, for it was indeed no other than he, darted forward, crying out in a voice of joy—

"You are true to your appointment. How shall I thank you?"

"We are, Mr. John Field," said Claude, "and let us hope that we shall be able to rescue your Alicia from her foes, to the confusion of Mr. White the attorney, and his rascally employers, the Beachem family."

Claude did not think proper to tell him that the elder Beachem was no more.

"Yes, and from the machinations of the present Father Garvey, and of the Abbess of Berrymead Priory," said Jack.

"My dear friends," said Field, "my heart is too full of gratitude to you to thank you as you deserve."

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## CHAPTER CCCXLIV.

### THE FIRST APPROACHES ARE MADE TOWARDS AN ATTACK ON THE CONVENT.

THERE did not now seem to be anything which could at all stand in the way of the prosecution of the plan for rescuing Alicia from the convent at Acton, and we may truly say, that never had Claude Duval engaged in any enterprise which had given him so much satisfaction, as the idea of the good he might be doing upon this occasion.

From time to time, in common with all the world, he had heard much of the principles and practices of the Roman priesthood, but it had never before occurred to him to come exactly in their way of seeing, or being in any way mixed up with any special case in which they were concerned.

For all, though, that young John Field had told him, he had every reason to



THE COINERS FIND THE INSENSIBLE BODY OF JOHN FIELD.

believe that what continually took place in convents and nunneries far exceeded in atrocity even the tales that were told of them.

Hence was it, that curiosity, as well as an anxious desire to do all the good he could in the case, urged him on.

We need not say that Jack and Dick Turpin fully coincided in his views, and were resolved to aid him to the utmost.

It will be remembered that Claude had the letter of introduction to the Lady Abbess with which the lawyer had been provided, and, therefore, he considered that one half the difficulty of the affair was really over, since, armed with that letter, the gates of the priory would be at once opened to him.

Thus, then, was Claude and his friends, well armed, along with young Field, ready to do and dare anything in the cause of innocence—of the young girl, whom they fully resolved upon rescuing.

It will be remembered that Mr. Field had thought it prudent in this affair to get rid of Dennis, his sick servant, for more reasons than one, so that neither his ignorance, his blundering, nor his superstition, could stand in the way of a successful carrying out of the affair.

It was a comfort, too, to Claude Duval to think that there was nothing to conceal from the young lover but that he knew perfectly well to whom he was indebted for assistance, so that there was no necessity for Claude and his friends in what they should say to each other before him to keep a guard over their tongues, which, if he had not happened to be aware of their proper reasons and their profession, they would have had to do.

Even in the very dim light that there was from the sky, Claude could well perceive that the young lover was in a state of great agitation, so he said to him—

“Mr. Field, let me warn you of the necessity of keeping yourself quite calm and collected. Any precipitancy upon your part might ruin all our plans, and render the escape of Alicia from the convent all but impossible.”

“Rely upon me,” said the young man. “I will take orders from you ; and whatever I may feel, you may depend upon my exercising a sufficient control over myself to keep quiet and not interfere with your judicious proceedings in my affairs.”

“That is well. Believe that whatever we do is for the best.”

“That I do and will with all my heart and soul. I hope, though, that you have a sufficiently good opinion of my discretion to trust me with all your plans?”

“It would be an insult to you not to do so, my good sir ; so, now, I tell you that I think you and my two friends here must try to make yourselves as comfortable as you possibly can in this little wood, close to Hanger Hill, while I go to the convent and ascertain such particulars as shall enable us to act with some degree of certainty in the rescue of the young lady.”

“Be it so. But how are we to know when our services are required by you?”

“You cannot possibly know except by my coming to you. Of course, much as I may despise the species of force that may be opposed to me in the convent, I do not hope or expect to be able to take Alicia by the hand, and bring her forth in spite of that opposition. I do not wish to drag her to liberty through a path of blood, although it is possible I may be able to do so ; but I will make an attempt to do so by *finesse* what, if *finesse* should utterly fail, we will all do by force.”

“I commend the view you take of the matter,” said young Field, “and I feel that I could not possibly be in better hands than in yours, Claude Duval.”

“Very good ; what you say is a sufficient inducement to me to do my very best for you, so now let us go to the wood I spoke of, and there I must make some change in my outward appearance, and leave my horse to your care and that of my-friends here.”

To this young Field cheerfully assented, and there was one good effect that sprung from the quiet and calm tone in which Claude Duval spoke to him, and that was, that it calmed him down, and induced a much more agreeable state of his nervous system, which was a thing very much to be desired.

As they went the short distance across to the wood, which Duval had made mention of, Field said, in a voice that shook a little—

“You will take, let us hope, the very first opportunity you can possibly get to tell Alicia that I love her still as truly as ever, and that I am at hand to aid in her rescue.”

“Be assured I will.”

“And—and you will say to her that it is not from any shrinking from the dangers attending doing so that prevented me from being in your place, but that



it was from the conviction that the object in view was too important to make it a matter of mere feeling with me, and that I let you go first with the conviction that you would do better than I could all that had to be done."

Claude Duval could very well comprehend the feeling under which the young lover spoke when he made such a remark as this, and he replied to him with kindness and discretion—

"My dear sir, Alicia shall understand from me that the grand object is to rescue her from the species of prison in which she is confined, and not to show off anybody's heroism in particular. I will tell her that by waiting for me in the wood you are doing more towards her rescue than you could possibly do if you were in the convent. Will that content you?"

"It will."  
 "Then you may depend upon my saying it, because it is, in fact, just the truth; for, you see, you love her and I do not, so I can act with that calmness and caution which only springs from a friendly feeling, while you, loving her as you do, would be led astray to do some desperate deed in her favour by that very love."

"Ah! will you tell her that, likewise?"

"I will."

"I am for ever, sir, beholden to you; I feel happier and lighter of heart now than I did before I had this explanation with you, for, to tell the truth, there was a fire burning in my heart that Alicia might think me backward and luke-warm in her cause by not myself coming."

"Your feelings are natural enough," said Duval, "and do you more honour than shame, Mr. Field; but be assured that all will be right, and if Alicia is the sort of young lady you say, she will at once comprehend the explanation that I give to her."

Claude Duval, from the slight interview he had already had with the young lover, thought well of him; but the delicacy of sentiment and very natural feeling that he had expressed, raised him considerably in the estimation of Duval.

They now reached the wood, where it was thought proper that the lover and confederates should wait, while he, Claude, should go to the convent, to make the first advance in the business. That wood has in a great measure been removed, and only portions of it, with cleared spaces between them, are now to be found at Hanger Hill, near Acton; but at the time of Claude Duval it really was a respectable enough, in point of size, miniature forest.

Just as they all got fairly under the trees, an odd falling sound caused them to look up, and then a spot or two of rain that forced its way through some of the interstices of the overhanging boughs let them know that there was a shower overhead.

"This is a good protection," said Claude, "against both wind and weather. If I mistake not, there is rather a sharp shower taking place, and yet, how little we feel of it."

"Little, indeed," said Turpin, "and it strikes me that it would require many hours of rain to soak right through some of the old chestnuts. How cool and fresh the air is."

"It is," said Jack. "I like the feel of this kind of air. At night it is especially invigorating."

"That," said young Field, "is because at night all vegetable substances give forth oxygen gas, which is the vital principle of the air we breathe."

"You are quite scientific, young sir," said Jack.

"No, I have no such pretensions, but when any fact in natural philosophy strikes me as being important, I seldom forget it."

"I wish I could say as much," said Claude Duval, as he dismounted, and took the bridle from his horse's head. "The fact is, the only branch of natural philosophy that I have lent my attention to much, is comparative anatomy."

"Comparative anatomy?" said young Field. "That is a very interesting study, is it not?"

"Oh, yes; when I see a pretty girl with a charming figure, and quite an enchanting face, I compare her in my mind's eye to some other one I have seen whose beauty may be none the less, but who may present some different characteristics in regard to formation. That is what I call comparative anatomy, and a very delightful study it is."

"No doubt," said young Field, with a smile; "it is the most practical kind of comparative anatomy I ever heard of in all my life."

"It's coming now," said Jack.

"What is?"

"The thunder-storm. Hark!"

There was a rumbling of distant thunder now, and the air felt hot and sultry as if suddenly it had been deprived of much of that vital principle which young Field had spoken of.

"Ah, yes," said Claude Duval, "we shall catch it I expect even here, and I don't think this is the safest place in a thunder-storm; but, after all, though they say that trees attract the lightning, how seldom it is that you hear of one being struck. I am quite ready."

"But you will wait till the storm is over?" said young Field.

"Oh, no, my good friend, I am too used to storms of all sorts to care much about them, and my experiences of the delightfully uncertain climate of England are such that I have long since made up my mind not to allow any vagaries of the weather to stop me in the furtherance of any actual business."

Waving his hand to his two friends, Claude Duval stepped aside and opened the vallise he carried usually lashed to his saddle.

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## CHAPTER CCCXLV.

### THE LADY ABBESS IS QUITE PLEASED WITH CLAUDE DUVAL.

THE object of Claude Duval was to get from the vallise such articles of clothing as would make him look less like a knight of the road, and more like a lawyer.

Jack, he was well aware, knew what was in the vallise better than he did himself, and he motioned to Dick to step aside with him as well, in order that he might say a few words to them prior to his departure, which it was just as well Mr. Field should not be in any way alarmed by hearing.

"Jack," he said, "while I speak, look me out the most sober and lawyer-like looking apparel you can."

"Yes, Claude."

"Thank you. Now, Dick, and you, Jack, listen to me. I don't know but I may find more difficulty in this piece of business than at first sight may be apparent. The principal danger I am in is being suspected, and by some sort of treachery decoyed into one of the infernal lock-up places, which I am pretty sure they have in all convents, and which we may take it for granted are pretty numerous in such an old place as Berrymead Priory, and there left to amuse myself with my own thoughts. Now, I don't mean to say that there are any serious chances of such a catastrophe, but yet it is possible such a thing may happen."

"It may indeed," said Jack.

"Or you may be assassinated," said Turpin.

"True, my boy, I may be so, and it is to arrange with you what you are both to do in such a case that I now speak to you."

"But how can we tell?"

"Thus. If I do not make my appearance in the wood, and upon this spot, by midnight to-morrow night, you may assume that I cannot come to you."

"We will."

"Oh," said Jack, "I don't like the affair at all, and really begin to think, Claude, that it is attended by too much risk."

"No—no. Don't say that, Jack. It is only common wisdom to provide against possibilities. Mind you, I don't think this probable by any manner of means. Such things may happen, and that is all."

"But if you come not by the time you mention, what are we to do?"

"That it is not for me to dictate, as you must be guided entirely by circumstances as they turn out. All I have to say is, that you may assume something has gone amiss with me if I am not here at the time I have mentioned to you."

"Very good, Claude," said Turpin.

"But it ain't very good," said Jack rather petulantly, "and I don't like it."

"My dear Jack," said Duval, "be comforted. I don't think, in the first place, that anything is likely to occur to me in the convent for which I shall not be amply prepared, and if it should, I have full reliance in the power of yourself and Turpin, assisted by Mr. Field, of whose ready co-operation with you I feel assured.

"And so do I," said Dick.

"Stop a bit," said Jack. "I have plan. We will all go to the convent at once, and the instant the outer gate is opened we will seize the first person we see, and then go on triumphantly, and take the place by force of arms."

"No—no," said Duval, "that won't do. You are delaying me, Jack, by not looking out the things I want, and for which I relied upon your judgment."

Upon this, Jack said no more, but got out a suit of clothes, which most effectually disguised Claude Duval, so that when he was attired in them, and had put on a cravat of fine cambric, and composed his features to a serious look, he certainly did not in any degree resemble a highwayman, although he looked more like a gentleman than a lawyer.

"Will that do?" he said.

"Capitally," replied Dick.

"It is a good disguise," said Jack, "but you don't look like a lawyer, Duval, and never could be made to do so."

"Never mind, this will do. I have the letter of introduction to the abbess, and my pistols all ready, so now I am off. Mr. Field, good-evening. I hope to bring you a good report of your affairs before long."

"Heaven protect, and aid you," said Field, with considerable feeling, as he now stepped forward, and shook hands with Claude Duval. Jack and Dick did the same, and in another moment Claude was off.

During the process of dressing himself for the occasion the thunder had repeatedly made itself heard in peals of reverberating echoes overhead, and once a vivid flash of forked lightning had seemed actually to play among the trees.

The rain, which had heralded in the storm, had ceased when the lightning became apparent, so that Claude in making his way to Berrymead Priory, had not to encounter the disagreeables of getting wet through, which he had only a short time before thoroughly expected.

With his natural knowledge of the country, Claude took but a short time to reach the corner of the lane at which the entrance to the old convent was.

To those conversant with the spot, it will be well known that the convent wall extends a considerable distance down a lane, as well as along the side of the high road, and that it is a wall of great strength, further secured by massive brick buttresses sloping to the road, and that it has all the appearance about it of great age.

It was at the corner, then, of this lane that Claude Duval paused, upon that eventful evening, and took a brief glance upwards at the scudding clouds and

the strange colour of the sky, before he applied for admission at the convent gate.

Two or three big drops of rain fell upon his face, and by the sound of the next peal of thunder, he felt convinced that the storm was passing over Acton rapidly, and would soon be gone from that immediate neighbourhood. The sky, however, in the north-west looked very strange and threatening.

"Well, let it thunder, and blow, and rain," said Duval, "it don't matter to me. I shall soon be housed, and I daresay I shall be glad enough to get out again, for there is something even now about the very look of this place that is enough to give one a cold chill to cast one's eyes upon it."

Duval looked carefully for some means of making his presence known at the priory gate, and at last he saw the iron handle of a bell. He laid hold of it and gave it a smart pull, when the dull, monotonous tone of a bell, with certainly a crack in it, immediately responded, and he waited with some degree of anxiety for the result of this first and important step in the business.

The French have a proverb that the first step in most affairs is the only difficult one, and in many affairs it is undoubtedly true, although not in all. Still in the enterprise he was one, Claude considered that if he succeeded in deceiving the Lady Abbess into the idea that he was the agent of the Bechem family, that would be the first step that would lead to success.

With such a feeling, he in a low voice repeated to himself the French proverb, as the tingling of the convent bell sounded in his ears.

After waiting above five minutes, and finding that no attention was paid to his summons, he rang again. Five minutes more elapsed, and still no one came, so that Claude began to suspect that there must be some other entrance at which he ought to apply, and that this one, although apparently the principal one, was really disused.

"Confound the place," he said, "I don't see any other gate at all. I will ring once more, and then give up this part of the wall, and take a survey of the rest of it."

The ring that he now gave at the bell was rather a sharp one, for he was impatient. It had an effect, for a voice suddenly said—

"Who rings?"

Claude started, for the voice was close to his ear. The fact was, that a little square wicket was opened in the gate, and that as he stood by it, it happened to be close to him,

"Who rings?" said the voice again.

Duval understood in a moment that he stood by a little opening in the door, and by putting out his hand he felt that a grating of iron bars was over it.

"I wish to see the Lady Abbess," he said.

"What Lady Abbess?" said the voice.

"The Lady Abbess of this convent. Have you more than one?"

"That is our business. You cannot see her. Who are you?"

"I am a visitor, who having rung three times, surely expects a civil answer."

"If you had not rung three times, you would not have had any answer at all," said the voice. "So many lunatics amuse themselves as they pass, by ringing at the convent bell, that we never take any notice of one or of two rings, but at the third we come to the gate."

"Oh, that is it; but who are you?"

"The portress."

"Well, I have a letter for the Lady Abbess, by which she will know that I was expected, and that I have real business with her."

"Give it to me."

"No, it is for herself only, I must give it into her own hands. I cannot part with it otherwise."

"Man," said the portress, in a cracked and passionate voice, "if you were to remain where you are till the day of universal judgment, you would not be admitted."

"But ——"

"Peace! Do not disturb the repose of this holy place. Go your way."

"No; I come from London, and I must perform my mission. If there be no other way of proceeding but giving you the letter, I must do so; but you surely will not keep me outside here till the abbess reads it?"

"Yes."

Claude Duval was now rather puzzled to know what to do, and he was silent for a few moments. If he refused to give the letter, he considered that, after all, he should do no good, while, if he gave it, although he did not like to part with it in such a way, it was possible enough it might answer all the purpose for which he brought it.

Suddenly, while he was thus cogitating, the little wicket in the door was shut with a sharp noise.

"Stop! stop!" cried Claude, as he struck it with his fist; "stop! I agree to your terms. Give me your assurance that the Lady Abbess shall have the letter forthwith, and I will hand it to you."

The wicket was opened again.

"Give it to me!" said the voice sharply.

Duval handed the letter sideways through the iron bars; and in another moment it was snatched from him, and the wicket in the door closed and bolted, for he heard the bolt shot into its socket.

"A pleasant reception, this," said Claude. "We shall see how it all ends."

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## CHAPTER CCCXLVI.

### DUVAL DISCOVERS SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THE OLD PRIORY.

As the thunder storm had passed away, the rain clouds seemed to think that it was only proper for them to interfere, and to soak the earth and everything upon it as quickly as possible.

While Duval had been talking to the portress, he had got considerably rained upon; but now as he did not know how long it might be before he got an answer to his epistle, he stepped some few paces on one side, and got under a perfect canopy of overhanging ivy, which came over the top of the convent wall, and which sheltered him from the descending rain, except so far as a few splashes were concerned.

After about a quarter of an hour, as nearly as Claude Duval could guess, for it was too dark by a great deal for him to see the hands of the gold watch he had in his pocket, and which he tried to consult, he heard a voice say—

"Where are you?"

"Here—here!" said Claude, stepping up to the wicket gate—"here I am, and getting rapidly wet through."

"That is of no consequence," said the voice.

"To you certainly not; but to me I humbly suggest that it is not at all pleasant."

"Silence! Don't be chattering there. Is your name Block?"

"Block?"

"Yes, is it Block? The letter is signed 'William Block.'"

"Oh," thought Claude, "this is to catch me in some prevarication, and to find out if I know the contents of the letter or not."

"You will excuse me, Madam Portress," he said; "but if the Lady Abbess has told you that the letter is signed Block, she has misled you."

"Who wrote it, then?"

"Mr. Beachem."

"Oh, indeed? But it makes mention of you as Mr. Block, and so gives you an introduction to the Lady Abbess."



"I beg your pardon," said Duval. "My name is White."

"Oh, White, is it? Dear me! what a memory I have got. You are a doctor, I believe?"

"No, a lawyer."

"Well, I said a lawyer."

"Oh, did you?"

"Of course I did; and you come to see a young lady named Fanny, so the letter seems to say?"

"Wrong again," said Claude, who was now fully alive to the Jesuitical cross-examination he was being subjected to, and could easily foil it, let it last as long as it might. "Wrong again, madam. The young lady concerning whom and on behalf of whose friends I am here, is not named Fanny."

"Indeed! What is her name, then?"

"Alicia."

"Oh, you don't say so? Well, you may come in; but, really, I don't think it is right to let you."

"You can leave it alone, then," said Claude, pretending to have lost all patience. "I am quite willing to go back to my highly respectable client, Mr. Beachem, and tell him the sort of reception that I met with here, notwithstanding his letter of introduction, which he said would smooth all difficulties. I am a professional man, and a respectable man, and I don't like to be treated in this way."

"Peace! peace!" said the portress, as she took Claude by the arm, and pulled him through the narrow opening at the gate. "Peace, I say! You do not know how cautious we are forced to be."

"About what?"

"Why, about whom we admit within these walls. If we were not to be ever on the defensive we should soon be very differently situated to what we are; but now that there is no doubt of who and what you are, all will be quite well, and you will find yourself capitally treated at Berrymead Priory. You ought not to feel offended at the precautions we are compelled to use to keep out improper persons."

"Well, there is something in that."

"There is everything in it. Why, this very Alicia has a lover whom we have been specially told to guard against. How did I know but that you might be some artful emissary from him?"

"Oh, but the letter!"

"Ah, that's all very well; but still the most extraordinary things do occur, and you might have obtained possession of it in some surreptitious manner."

"That's true," said Claude.

"Exactly so; and, therefore, it was quite necessary that I should try you to know if you really were aware of its contents. Come, all is right, now—I will get a light—come this way."

The conciliatory tone of voice in which the woman spoke, Claude thought was more disagreeable than the sharp, suspicious one in which she had addressed him through the grated wicket; but he played his part well by saying—

"Don't notice it, I beg of you. Of course, knowing that I was in the right, I did at the moment feel a little hurt by the suspicions that were expressed of me, but, upon reflection, I see the full necessity of caution."

"Of course, you do."

"Yes, and when, likewise, I come to consider that so pleasing a person as yourself conducted the cross-examination, I am the more inclined to think nothing of it."

"Oh, sir!"

"Hem!" thought Claude. "This horrid wretch is open to flattery. That is a useful piece of information."



THE COINERS READING MR. WHITE'S PAPERS TO YOUNG FIELD.

"I am quite sure you don't mean what you say," added the portress, as she gave Claude's arm a squeeze that almost made him cry out.

"Oh, yes, I do," he said.

"No, no—you fancy that I am handsome."

"It's no fancy—I am certain you are."

"And what, pray, can make you so certain, Mr. Fetterer?"

"The beauty of your voice makes me think that you must have a fair face. If that ain't a crammer," thought Claude, "there never was one told in this world."

"Ah, that's like all you men!" sighed the portress. "You do nothing but flatter us poor girls, till you ruin us."

"Oh, no—no!"

"But I say yes. However, we will talk about all that another time. I must now take you to the Lady Abbess, who anxiously expects you; and if she thought that I had said one-half that I have to you, I should find my way to one of the cells."

"The cells, do you say? Then, there are——"

"Hush! hush! Don't ask any question. It's much better for you to know nothing here than too much, I assure you. Whatever business you have to transact let it be done quickly, and then get away."

"I will follow your advice."

"But if—if you are inclined to come and have a little chat with me at another opportunity, you know, that if you tap with your knuckles, or with anything that will make sufficient sound for me to hear, at the wicket gate, always taking care that no one sees you, I will open it."

"Oh, what charming condescension," said Claude. "Dear me, what's that?"

Claude had nearly fallen over a step that was in his way.

"I ought to have warned you of the step," said the portress. "You had better stay where you are, now, till I get a light."

"Thank you."

Duval felt that he was standing upon some boarded place now, and that he was out of the open air. All was profound darkness for a few moments, and then there came a faint light, and the portress who had left him came back, carrying in her hand a small lamp.

By the light of that lamp Claude Duval saw that she was a wrinkled hag-like looking woman of about fifty years of age, and that she squinted fearfully as she leered upon him.

It was as much as he could do to conceal the disgust with which he looked at her, for in addition to her other charms, the small-pox had made fearful ravages in her face.

It did not appear, though, that this woman thought herself otherwise than very passable in her looks, if not absolutely charming, for when she saw Claude Duval looking at her she put on quite a simper, and cried out, with all the air of a young girl inclined to flattery—

"Really, now, how you do look at one—don't—oh, go away!"

"Charming creature," said Claude.

"Oh, you gay man!"

"No, I assure you I am not. But can it be possible that you give me leave at some other opportunity to call and see you?"

"It will be exceedingly imprudent of you to do so; but if you will, why, really I don't see how I can help it."

"Then, at some other opportunity I will avail myself of the generous permission."

"Mind you do. Heigho! you are not at all bad-looking."

"Thank you."

"Now don't come near me. I don't want any impertinence, though there is nobody here. Don't be kissing me."

"I won't," said Claude; "your commands are law to me. I shall take good care to keep my distance, you may be assured; and I have no doubt but that the Lady Abbess is getting furious at not seeing me."

"Oh, gracious, yes! Come this way. I had forgotten her at the moment; I am afraid you are quite a rake. But let me warn you of the Lady Abbess; for, between you and me, she is—oh, dear, that I should say it!—rather fond of the men."

"You don't say so?"

"It is a melancholy truth. Father Garvey is just at present her confessor—hem!"

"Oh, he is. I heard something of him from Mr. Beachem. A very holy sort of man is he not?"

"Oh, uncommon! But the Lady Abbess is rather jealous, and so he has a great deal of trouble, poor man!"

"Trouble? How so?"

"Oh, don't ask me, I beg of you. But she will persecute the nuns so, and more particularly those that Father Garvey likes the best."

"Oh, indeed; is Alicia among that number?"

"Yes; but of all the obstinate wretches that ever stepped, she is about the worst; but she will never see the sun shine outside the walls of this house again."

"Oh."

"Oh, dear no, she knows too much, so that's quite sufficient; but, mind you, when you see the Lady Abbess, don't seem to know anything, for you cannot think how desperately cunning she is, and when you least expect it, she is studying your looks, and putting artful questions to you."

"I will be upon my guard."

"Do so. Oh, you are a very nice man, but really are just a little—only a little—too—too——"

"Too what?"

"Too retiring and timid, if I may say so much."

"Dear me," said Claude, "that is not my general character at all—I quite wonder at your saying so. But where are we now?"

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## CHAPTER CCCXLVII.

### CLAUDE DUVAL AND FATHER GARVEY DO NOT AGREE VERY WELL TOGETHER.

WHILE the portress had been thus, in a low tone of voice, telling to Claude Duval a great deal more than she ought to have told him, and which she would not have dreamt of mentioning but that she was thrown off her guard by the fond belief that at last she had found some one who was enamoured of her, they had proceeded from the lodge entrance to the convent, along a peculiarly gloomy path of the garden, which was so completely overgrown by tall trees, that even in the daytime it must have been quite impervious to light.

The ground was well gravelled though, so that it was clean enough to walk upon, and perfectly dry.

After traversing this path for some time, they had come to what appeared like a low stone wall, and that was what had occasioned the inquiry that had come from Claude's lips of—"Where are we now?"

"Hush!" said the portress, in a whisper. "I come no further than here. You will find another of the sisters, who will now conduct you to the abbess. Be cautious and discreet, and rely upon my affection for you."

As she said this, the portress, unable any longer to conceal her gratification at making the acquaintance of Claude Duval, flung her arms round his neck, and embraced him, and spilt a quantity of oil from the lamp over him.

Most certainly, under any other circumstances than those then existing, in which it was a necessary thing, and might naturally tend to the success of the affair that had brought him to the convent, to be upon good terms with the portress, Claude Duval would have got rid of her by some very summary process; but as it was he put up with the embrace as well as he could, disagreeable as it was to him.

"I think I here some one," he said.

"Oh, gracious! No!"

The portress released him in a moment upon this, and disappeared down the dark walk with such rapidity that Duval was quite delighted to get rid of her.

Before he could take a thought of what he was to do next, a voice said in a low tone—

"Are you there?"

"Yes," said Duval.

"The stranger?"

"Yes—all right," said Duval, "I am Mr. White."

"That will do. Follow me."

"But I don't see you at all, or I would follow you."

"The door is open. Surely, it is not so dark but that you can see an open door-way from a dark one. Look well about you."

Thus advised, Claude Duval did look well about him, and he saw that in the stone wall that appeared to block up the further progress of the dark pathway, a low arched door was opened. Stepping at once forward, he passed through the doorway, saying as he did so—

"I see the door open now, and I will follow you, as I perceive that you are there, whoever you are."

"I am Sister Jude," said the voice.

Claude did not feel that his stock of information was very much increased by being told that it was Sister Jude who spoke to him, for he could see no one. After however, going a few steps along a narrow passage, a faint light dawned upon his senses, and still further on the light was sufficient to enable him to see a figure in a long gray dress with a black veil on the back part of her head, and, as he thought, on her face likewise, but in that he was mis taken.

The light came from a lamp that was upon a bracket before a little image of the Virgin Mary, that was fastened in some way to the wall.

Upon arriving opposite to the image, Sister Jude made a low reverence, and mumbled some prayer in a strange chanting tone of voice. Then she turned and looked at Claude, presenting to his view a face that, no doubt, had at one time been very comely, but which was now so very pale, and had such an expression of hopeless woe, that it was painful to look upon it, and said—

"You are not one of us?"

"I am not a Roman Catholic."

"It is strange that you are here, then. But that is no business of mine. I am the abbess's personal sister."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"Simply that I wait upon her."

"I understand you. I am, then, to be taken to the abbess by you?"

"Yes, such are her orders; and let me advise you—yet, no. It is better to say nothing."

"I beg of you that any advice you are kind enough to think of giving to me you will not withhold."

Sister Jude had altered her mind, and she made no reply to this appeal from Claude Duval, but walked off so quickly, that he had to run in order to keep up with her, seeing that she had got some twenty paces or so in advance of him.

"It is very cruel of you," he said, "not to finish what you were about to say."

The nun turned abruptly upon him.

"It is much more cruel of you," she said, in a low tone, that almost approached a whisper, "to get me into danger of my life by speaking in such a strain to me, within the hearing of one who may resent it upon me."

"I did not know that."

The nun placed her finger upon her pale lips as a signal to him to say no more, and Duval was silent accordingly, for nothing could possibly be further from his thoughts or wishes than to bring distress or danger upon any of the miserable victims of the monastic institution. Such a vile and unnatural state of things he felt brought with it its own sufficient punishment to all who had anything to do with it. Claude Duval knew well that where there was not vice in a nunnery or a monastery that there must be wretchedness.

It is likely enough that there may be in such institutions some poor belated insane creatures, who may fancy that they are living quite in a state of beatitude;



but then we always find that the greater number of lunatics are those who are mad upon religious subjects.

Of such the real and true religious recluses are found. All others go into convents, either from the crimes which, to speak vulgarly, have made the world too hot to hold them, or because they have found out that there they may have an opportunity of leading a life of the most unbridled licentiousness.

Added to this, there are some positive prisoners, who have found out too late what the system is, but who are not permitted to escape to blazon forth to the world the iniquities they would fain shun.

No doubt this poor Sister Jude was one of this latter class, and the Lady Alicia would have been converted into one, but for the interference of Claude Duval and his associates.

But we must not anticipate. Our object in detailing this portion of the adventures of Claude Duval is to give the reader an insight into the conventual system, and so we go into rather more details than we have usually done.

Sister Jude now tapped gently against the panelled wall, and after a few moments the faint sound of a little handbell was heard.

"Come," she said. "This way."

She went on for about twelve steps, and then opened a door, immediately upon the other side of which was a thick green baize, that hung in many folds from the ceiling to the floor.

"Wait till you are told to enter," said the nun, and then, without pausing for any reply from Duval, she left him, and returned in the same direction from which they had come.

Duval listened, but could not hear the slightest sound on the other side of the entrance for the space of about three minutes, and then a voice, which came only in muffled tones to him, cried—

"Enter!"

The only way of entering was evidently to pull aside the green baize curtain, so Duval did so, although its numerous folds gave him some little trouble, and caused some time in setting aside. The moment, however, that he fairly removed the obstruction, the light that his eyes encountered rather dazzled him for a time, and he was compelled, as he stepped into a large and handsome room, to shield his eyes with his hands.

"Come in, Mr. White," said a voice. "I have been expecting you for some time. The last letter that I had from Mr. Beachem, led me to suppose that you would be here last night."

"Madam," said Claude, "I was robbed on the highway and delayed."

Duval's eyes had got now a little familiar with the strong light in the room, and he was able to look about it, as well as at the Lady Abbess of the convent.

The Lady Abbess was rather a tall, robust looking woman, of about forty years of age, with a high colour, that looked exceedingly like paint—she had very glittering teeth, which were rather prominent, and her hair, which was seen partially, was nearly black.

Take her for all in all, she was what people of vulgar taste generally call a fine woman.

She was rather richly attired in black silk velvet, and had a very rich lace veil over her forehead, but principally hanging down her back, nearly reaching to the floor.

The room which was occupied by the Lady Abbess was one well worthy of some little description; but it must not be supposed that Claude Duval had an opportunity of so minutely examining it upon his first introduction to the abbess. We merely say what we do of it for the satisfaction of the reader.

The room, then, was of large size, being very nearly square, and running about thirty feet in each direction. Upon two sides of it, it had windows, these testifying that it was at the corner of the house.

The ceiling was beautifully painted in some allegorical subject having reference

to the state of beatitude of the saints of the Catholic church, after they had given up the troubles and the turmoils of this life.

Upon the walls of this room hung some superb paintings, and there were likewise some richly carved old cabinets in oak and other woods. The floor was nearly entirely covered by a Turkey carpet, which looked as dingy as Turkey carpets usually do.

The draperies at the windows, of which there were six, were all drawn closely over them, and the light that had so dazzled Claude Duval at first, came from a huge lamp that was upon the table, and which just being about the level of any one's eyes, was anything but agreeable. That lamp was the only thing in the room which could be said to be in bad taste.

### CHAPTER CCCXLVIII.

#### FATHER GARVEY APPEARS UPON THE SCENE AND THINKS CLAUDE DUVAL AN INTERLOPER.

SUCH, then, was the apartment in which the abbess at Berrymead received Claude Duval, supposing him to be the unscrupulous agent of the Beachem family, and one of the persecutors of Alicia.

Observing that Duval hesitated, and not knowing that it was from the effect of the sudden light, the abbess, who was seated upon one of the old, high-backed Elizabethan chairs, which are to be found in old houses, called out to him in rather a sarcastic tone of voice—

“I am glad to see you, Mr. White. Why—why, how is this?”

“How is what, madam,” said Claude, bowing.

“Mr. Beachem said that you were a—a——”

“Lawyer, madam, I presume?”

The abbess laughed, and added—

“No. He said that you were anything but what you are, Mr. White. Why he surely must be blind to represent you as he did to me, as anything but a gentlemanly-looking man. Mind, he did not for a moment disparage your character, but he did not tell me that you were good-looking, as indeed you are.”

“Really, madam,” said Claude, “you quite flatter me by your kindness.”

“Not at all—oh, not at all,” said the Lady Abbess. “I hope that you will not think so for a moment; indeed it would quite distress me were you to entertain such an opinion.”

“Then you are exceedingly liberal,” said Claude Duval, “to entertain so kind an opinion of one who is a stranger to you.”

“Oh, not at all. At the first glance it is impossible to mistake you for other than what you are.”

“Indeed, madam?”

“Oh, yes; you are a man of the world, and a gentleman. I am only rather surprised that Mr. Beachem should so far have mistaken your character, as he appears to me to have done.”

“Has he really done so, madam? Pray what has he taken upon himself to say of me? I hope you will tell me, and in asking you to do so, I beg to assure you that the information shall go no further.”

“I may rely upon your honour?”

“Oh, perfectly; I hoped that you would see I was sufficiently a man of the world never to betray the confidence of a lovely and confiding woman.”

The abbess nodded and laughed.

“I don't think,” she said, “that I am often mistaken in my estimate of any one, and I feel quite sure that such is not the case in the present instance. I have a good opinion of you.”

“That, madam, is all I require to make me quite happy.”

The Lady Abbess looked at Claude and shook her head, and smiled again as she said—

“I don't know yet whether I ought to trust you; but I suppose, after all, that I must do so.”

“You may depend upon one thing,” said Claude Duval, as he returned the smile, “and that is, that if any good is to be got out of anybody it is by trusting them.”

“You are a philosopher, indeed.”

“Only in a small way, madam. But I do think that a little association with you would make anybody anything you choose.”

All this time the Lady Abbess kept looking at Claude Duval in rather a peculiar manner, and he began to entertain a serious idea that she was mistrustful of him, and that, after all, she was not so easily deceived as he thought she would be. The thought gave Duval some little disquietude as regarded the success of the expedition he had come upon, but still, as he could not be quite sure about it, he resolved to carry on the same appearance he had started with as long as possible.

Claude Duval had ample reason to know in a short time that he was very much mistaken indeed with regard to the light in which the Lady Abbess regarded him; but we must not anticipate events which we are proceeding to record in the due order of their occurrence.

Duval would have liked to ask at once about the Lady Alicia, but he dreaded to appear to be too eager upon that part of the subject lest he should give rise to suspicion of his motives, if there were really none already, and if there were suspicions already entertained of him he dreaded to confirm or strengthen them.

Under these circumstances, then, Claude Duval was exceedingly discreet.

“And so,” said the abbess, as if only giving utterance to the suggestions of a turn of thoughts that she had been engaged in, “and so you are a lawyer, are you?”

“I am, madam.”

“Well, this is very agreeable.”

Claude looked at her as though he would have said—“Pray, madam, have the goodness to explain yourself.”

“You do not understand me,” she said, “but what I meant was, that, situated as I am in this place, it is a very desirable and agreeable thing to know that there is a professional man like yourself who is not at all scrupulous about what sort of suit he engages in, and who likewise is so much a man of the world and, I may say, a gentleman, that one may be always glad to see you here.”

Claude bowed, as he said—

“Madam, when first I engaged in this business at the instigation of Mr. Beachem I flattered myself that it would be a kind of introduction to you and to the convent, which would lead to pleasing results.”

“You are right—you are right. I am delighted to see you. Come, sir, you don't like our convent wine.”

“It is excellent—madam, I drink to the conservation of your beauty, and to our better acquaintance.”

The wine, to tell the truth, was about the finest that he, Duval, had ever tasted, and he had not the remotest objection to indulging himself with a glass or two of it. He filled the glass for the abbess, but before she could raise it to her lips there came a mysterious knock at the chamber-door.

“Ah, who knocks?” she cried.

The door was opened, and an old nun just peeped into the room, and whispered something to the abbess.

“Well, let him come,” laughed the abbess, “let him come.”

The nun retired with a curtsy.

“May I ask who it is that you have given leave to come here?” said Claude.

“Yes, it is Father Garvey.”

“A priest?”

"Yes, and our convent confessor. I do not know that your appearance here will give him any satisfaction, but that does not at all matter. He must take his chance of these things."

Claude Duval did not care to inquire more particularly into the meaning of what the abbess said. He had a shrewd guess upon the subject, and that was quite sufficient for him; moreover, the arrival of the confessor put a stop to any further confidential discourse with the abbess.

Father Garvey was a man about forty years of age, rather short of stature, but of a strong, well knit frame, as far as could be judged beneath his monastic dress, which hid the greater part of the figure.

The complexion of the holy father was dark, almost to blackness, and his black eyebrows met across his brow in a manner that gave him a strangely sinister look.

He made two steps into the room in what might be considered an easy and an unembarrassed manner; but then his eyes fell upon Claude Duval, and he gave a slight start; and, crossing his arms upon his breast, he bowed to the Lady Abbess.

"This is a friend," said the abbess.

"A friend?" echoed the priest.

"Oh, yes, I assure you, Father Garvey, that this is a particular friend of mine."

"Indeed."

"Will you allow me to introduce you to him?"

"Madam, I think that it will be as well if at the present time I decline that honour and pleasure. My mind is so full of holy meditations that I fear to disturb the current of thought by any intercourse with strangers. I was coming here to ask your opinion about a passage in the writings of the holy St. Chrysostom, which appears to me rather difficult to comprehend."

"Stuff!" said the abbess.

"Madam?"

"Stuff, I say! This is Mr. White, the attorney of Mr. Beachem. Are you now satisfied, Father Garvey?"

"You don't say so!" said the confessor, stepping forward with quite an altered manner. "My dear sir, how are you?"

"Pretty well, I thank you," said Claude. "But do not let me disturb your pious meditations about St. Chrysostom."

"D——n St. Chrysostom!" said the confessor.

Claude laughed; and the Lady Abbess handed Father Garvey a glass of wine, which he tossed off with as jolly an air as possible. Claude Duval was highly amused at this sudden change in the manner of the pious confessor, and resolved to bring him out as much as possible.

"Various circumstances," said Duval, "have delayed me, or I should have been here much earlier; but I hope that there will not be many difficulties in the way of proceeding with Alicia. What sort of mind is she in?"

"It is hard to say," said the abbess. "What do you think, Father Garvey?"

"Confound her!" said the confessor; "I don't know what to say about her. How very beautiful she is."

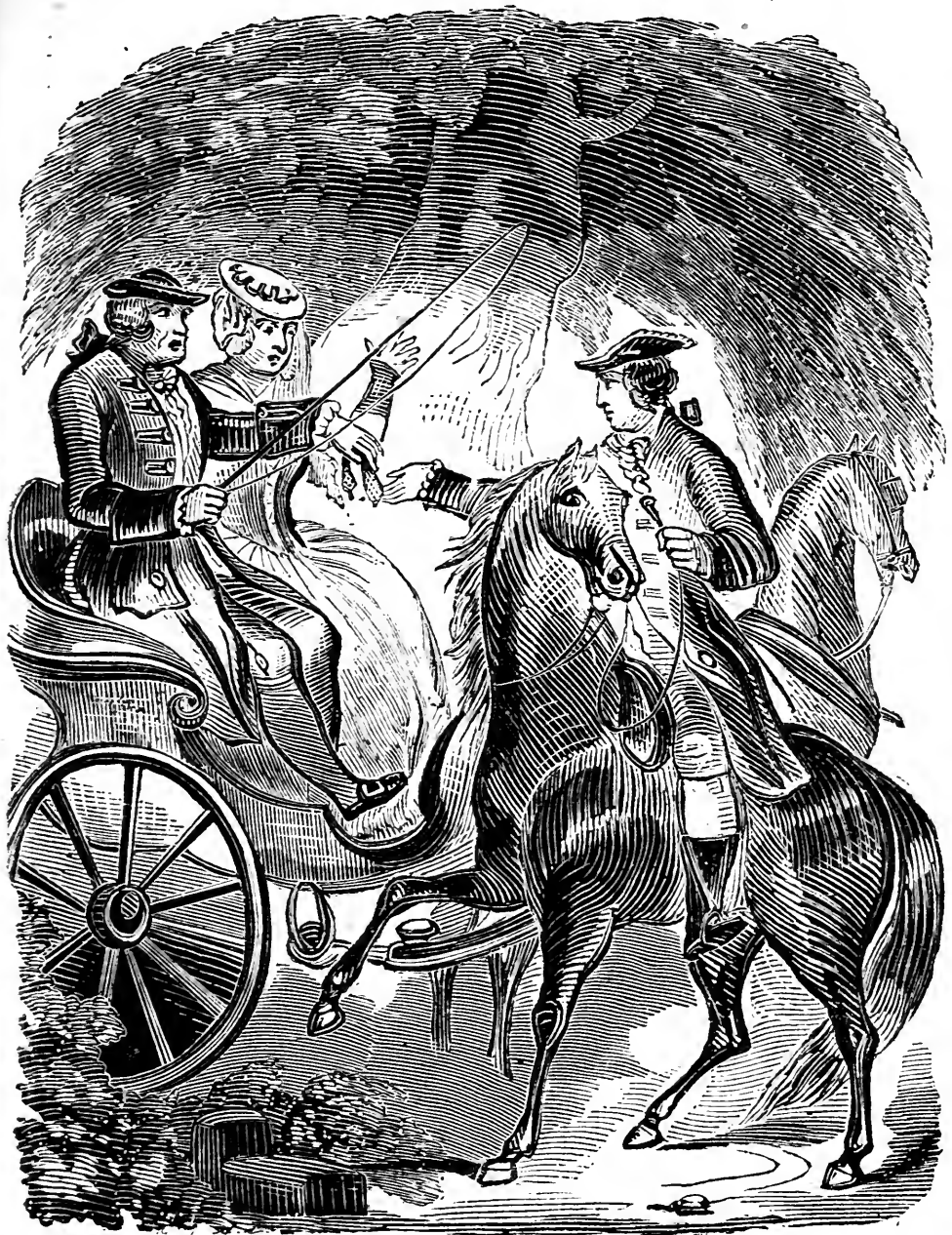
"Indeed, Garvey!" said the abbess; "you begin to admire her, do you? Well, I thought that some day you would leave off complimenting me, and take to some one who comes rather nearer to your taste."

"That is very strange," said the confessor, "for do you know that I always had the idea that some day you would see some one whom you would think much more of than you ever did of Father Garvey."

As the confessor spoke he looked at Claude Duval.

The abbess at the moment looked rather flushed, and seemed as if she meditated a passionate reply.

If her ladyship did at the instant feel hurt by the cool manner in which the confessor alluded to the fact which he had, with the tact of his calling, read in



JACK STOPS MR. AND MRS. DAY.

her eyes, that she was enamoured of Mr. White, the lawyer, she quietly abandoned the idea, and bursting into a loud laugh, she cried out—

“Well, done, Garvey—well done. I release you from all allegiance to me. Go with your sighs where you please.”

“And I congratulate you, madam, upon finding one who is so much more worthy of your regard than myself.”

There was just a slight tone of acidity about the way in which Father Garvey uttered these words; and, in fact, the abbess herself, although she had tried to laugh the affair off, was evidently not at all pleased that the confessor should be able so easily to give her up to another.



Claude Duval listened to this little interlude with mingled feelings of curiosity and disgust. He felt all the curiosity which any man would feel, at finding himself thus, as it were, behind the scenes of conventual life, and disgust at the profligacy that was spoken of so coolly, as though it were quite a thing of course.

"I interrupt you," said the confessor, rising.

"No," said Duval. "Oh, no. I hope to hear from you, sir, some account of the sort of humour that this rather self-willed girl, Alicia, is in. Will it not be desirable to lose as little time as possible in the matter?"

"No time should be lost. The property is to be divided into thirds, I think."

"Fourths," said the abbess.

"Well, thirds or fourths, I don't know exactly which; but I am to have my share, and the sooner I get it the better."

## CHAPTER CCCXLIX.

### CLAUDE DUVAL PASSES A NIGHT IN THE CONVENT.

THE Lady Abbess looked rather spitefully at Father Garvey, as she said—

"I am afraid, my dear friend, that you are rather selfish."

"Only afraid, are you?" said the monk. "Oh, I admit the fact in toto; Every one for himself, I rather think, is a well understood motto in this place."

The abbess smiled, and turning to Claude Duval, she said—

"You must not judge of Father Garvey by what you see of him to-night, my good sir. He is very much put out of his way at something."

Claude laughed.

"I hope that the holy father," he said, "will soon recover his serenity; but in the meantime, permit me to hope that there will be no difficulties in the way of inducing Alicia to sign the paper that I shall lay before her, and to ask you what you think will be the best way to set about it,"

"That is the question," said Father Garvey.

"It is no question at all," said the abbess, as her face assumed a strange expression. "We have ways and means of overcoming more obstinate natures than that of the fair Alicia. I only hope that there will be found no person connected with this establishment who will be led away from the due exercise of his duty by a foolish pity for one, who must be forced into doing that which it is our intent that she should do."

"If by that speech you allude to me," said the confessor, "your fears are quite groundless, I assure you. I am an advocate for the greatest rigour being exercised towards the girl."

"Is that possible?"

"It is so, and I will assist you in any way in my power."

"Then," cried the abbess with triumph, "I know what has happened."

"What?"

"She as repulsed you!"

The countenance of the confessor got several shades darker, and his small dark eyes seemed to retreat deeper beneath his overhanging brows. He clenched his fist and struck it upon the table, and seemed about to give utterance to some violent speech, but even at the moment that he opened his mouth to utter the words, a second thought came over him, and bowing his head he was silent.

"It is quite enough," said the abbess. "I am assured."

The confessor was still silent, and the abbess then struck a small silver bell, and the old nun who waited upon her made her appearance.

"Sister Martha," said the abbess, "you will conduct the prudent Alicia to the gray chamber at once."

Sister Martha made a low reverence, and left the room.

"Come," said the abbess, rising, "we will all see this obstinate girl, and you

sir," turning to Claude, "can explain to her that by signing the paper which you are prepared to lay before her, she will be saving her life, and the life of the young man to whom she professes to have an attachment."

"You mean Field?" said Duval.

"I do. Can you tell us any news of him?"

"No, but Mr. Beachem is very much afraid that he is trying his utmost to find out where Alicia is."

"No doubt; but even should he discover that she is here, I don't think it is a piece of information that will very much assist him in his suit. But follow me, Mr. White, and you shall see this obstinate girl."

The Lady Abbess took in her hand a small silver lamp, and opening a concealed door in the apartment, she left it, followed by Duval and the confessor. Father Garvey crept up to Claude, and touched him on the arm.

"Well, sir?" said Claude.

"Hush! speak low. I only wanted to say, that if you had any notion of making friends with the abbess, and of coming here often, I have no objection."

"You are very good."

"Not at all. Alicia is for me. You understand that? When her mind, by a residence of some time longer in this place, is sufficiently subdued, she will easily yield to me. I have marked her for my own. And I won't interfere with you. Is that a bargain?"

"With all my heart," said Claude Duval.

"Agreed, then. I am glad we understand each other so well, but I, as a friend, beseech you to be careful. The abbess is a woman with the passion of a fiend."

"I thank you for the caution; but this conversation is imprudent just now, for she is straining her hearing to catch what she can of it."

"I have noticed that; but fear nothing. She is a little deaf."

"That is a good thing for us, then."

The abbess stopped at the door of a room which was at the end of rather a long narrow passage, floored with oak, and the walls of which were of the same material, highly polished.

The abbess touched a spring in the door, and it flew open rather sharply.

"Come in," she said, turning to Duval, "and don't believe one word of what Father Garvey has been saying to you against me."

"Madam, he said nothing against you. What he did say of you I feel myself constrained to believe. It was, that there was not a figure in the whole convent to be compared to yours, and he begged me to notice how truly majestic it was, which, however, he need not have done, for I could not fail to notice it without any prompting."

The abbess laughed, and shook her head, but it was evident that she was not at all displeased at the compliment.

"Capital—capital," whispered Father Garvey to Claude Duval. "You did that well."

"It was easy."

"Yes, but still it was well done."

Duval smiled to himself at the commendation of the confessor; but he had no further time to waste upon him as he was soon too much occupied with the proceedings of the Lady Abbess in the apartment to which she had conducted him.

The room itself was rather a small one, considering the size of the building in which it was situated, but it presented rather a curious aspect by being covered all over its walls by thick gray cloth, that hung in heavy folds from the ceiling to the floor.

There did not appear to be many windows to the room, as far as Claude Duval could then see, but it was just possible that there were, only that the gray curtains covered them up.

From the ceiling hung a bronze lamp, which cast a dreamy sort of light over the room, for it burnt but dimly.

In the centre of the floor was a small round table, and the other furniture of the room consisted of some three or four couches, and some few of the old high-backed awkward-looking chairs, such as were in the abbess's own room.

There was no one in this gray chamber, as the abbess called it, when she and the confessor and Duval entered it, but scarcely had the door with the spring closed behind them than another door opened at the opposite end of the room, and the long gray cloth hangings being pushed aside, Sister Martha appeared.

"Where is Alicia?" said the abbess.

"Madam, she will not come."

"Force her. There are surely enough of you to do that?"

"Yes, madam."

Sister Martha left the apartment, and Claude Duval turning to the abbess, said—

"Is this Alicia, then, so violent a young lady that she will not do what she don't feel inclined to?"

"No. Not violent at all. I am quite surprised at this message from her. She is delicate and gentle in appearance, and I did not expect much trouble with her."

"Those are just the spirits," said the confessor, "which, when once roused, you will always have the greatest trouble with. Ah, she comes!"

Claude Duval listened, and heard a clatter of voices, and a rushing of feet. The door again opened in the wall. Again the gray cloth was pushed aside, and four nuns appeared dragging along Alicia.

It could hardly be said that Alicia was resisting them, for she walked of her own accord; but still there was sufficient reluctance about her proceeding to show that it was a matter of force. One of the nuns had hold of her wrists, and the others pushed and dragged her forward into the room.

At the first glance at the lovely girl, Claude Duval felt that Field, the young lover, had very far from made any exaggeration in describing her beauty.

Alicia looked if anything a year or two younger than she really was. Her face was one of those pretty shaped ones which are rather wide across the eyes, and come delicately and sweetly small to the chin. It is a kind of face that is in nine cases out of ten spoiled by the chin being a trifle too long, which has the effect thus of giving a pointed expression to the lower part of the face; but such was not the case with Alicia. Her chin was sweetly rounded, and in perfect harmony with the rest of her features.

The soft and beautiful eyes were of the most charming blue that could be conceived, and she presented the rare contrast of very dark brown hair with those coloured eyes that really are only to be found in very fair people.

Claude Duval was quite charmed with the young girl; and yet it may be well supposed that, terrified and persecuted as she was in that convent, he saw her to the greatest possible disadvantage.

She did not at the first glance look to be above sixteen years of age; but after looking at her a little you could see that she was older than that, although all the charms of early youth were about her.

At the sight of the confessor Alicia shrunk back, exclaiming—

"No—no! Oh, no!"

"Silence!" said the Lady Abbess. "Leave us, dear sisters."

The four nuns bowed, and left the room. Alicia stood trembling, and evidently trying to keep up her courage.

"Child," said the Lady Abbess, "it is with pain that we hear you are still possessed with a spirit of rebellion."

"Rebellion!" said Alicia, and as she spoke her voice thrilled to the very heart of Claude Duval. "Rebellion, madam, do you call it to wish for life and liberty—to sigh for all that is pure and good in the great world that God has given to his creatures in lieu of all that is wicked and bad within these

dreary walls? Oh, no—no! It would be rebellion against nature were I to affect to be pleased to stay here. I demand my freedom."

"Human nature," said the abess, "is always demanding much."

"And don't get it," said the confessor.

"Silence!" said the abess. "Let me speak to this recusant."

The confessor bowed and drew back.

"Alicia," began the abess, "do you not know that your fate in life is in your own hands?"

"No, madam."

"I thought not. Come, we shall all be good friends soon, I daresay. All you have to do is to sign certain papers that this gentleman will place before you; and then as soon as our rules will permit, without bringing discredit upon the convent, you will be free to leave it."

As the abess said "This gentleman," she pointed to Duval, who, stepping forward, bowed to Alicia very profoundly.

"Another?" said the girl. "Oh, how many persecutors am I to find in this dreadful place?"

"I am not one," said Claude.

"Nor I," said the confessor.

"Nor I," said the Lady Abbess. "On the contrary, we are all your dear friends, Alicia, if you will permit us to be such."

"Oh, no, no, no."

"But we say yes. Of course, you are young and inexperienced, and all we desire is that you should profit by our better knowledge of the world. Come, now, I felt assured from the first moment that you came here that you would soon be on the best of terms with all of us. Let us see whether or not we cannot arrange all this affair to the satisfaction of every one."

"Hold!" said Alicia. "Do not be so hasty, madam, in supposing that as yet you have driven me mad."

"Mad, do you say?"

"Yes, mad, for that seems to be the object of what you call your conventual discipline; but Heaven may give me strength yet to resist you. I will sign no papers."

"But, Alicia?"

"No, no, madam, I tell you I will sign no papers at all. The object of them is to rob me of all that is of right my own, and with which I would render independent one whom I feel desirous to be so. You may kill me, but I will not sign any documents whatever in this house. I defy you all!"

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## CHAPTER CCCL.

ALICIA IS FOUND CONTUMACIOUS, AND DEALT WITH ACCORDINGLY.

THE confessor, as Alicia thus spoke, grinned maliciously; but the Lady Abbess looked the very picture of rage.

"Wretch!" she cried—"no; I am wrong."

With a wonderful command over herself the abess at once changed her tone, and in quite a mild voice she added—

"Alicia, you speak under mistaken feelings, I feel well assured. It is quite out of the question to be able to explain to you the many advantages that will result to you from signing the papers that will be laid before you. But I can and will explain to you what you will suffer by your obstinacy."

"I will not yield," said Alicia.

"In the first place," said the abess, "you will be confined in one of our cells, which are specially constructed for such sinners as you are. Of course, we shall all pray for you, but that is all we can possibly do. The light of Heaven will

never again shine upon you; and, in company with the rat and the toad, you will live and you will die!"

Alicia turned deadly pale.

"He whom you, with your girlish simplicity, think you love, will never see you more; but if he knew that you yourself had by your obstinacy here produced such a result, he would rather curse than reverence the memory of the lady that so treated him, and made it impossible that he could be happy with another."

"Oh, no—no!" sobbed Alicia.

"But I say yes!" cried the abbess, in a voice that rang through the apartment. "I say yes. Does he whom you affect to love only love you for the wealth that you so pertinaciously cling to? Is it that he may be enabled to live upon your money that he seeks your hand?"

"No—no, you don't know him."

"But I know you. Listen to me, girl. Suppose you had been poor—suppose it possible that you had had nothing to subsist upon but what thousands of others have, namely, the proceeds of your own industry—would you then have loved him?"

"I would—I would!"

"Would you then have refused to share with him his joys and his sorrows?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Then why do you now object to signing documents which will at once release you to do as you please, and yet leave you independence? We will not be trifled with. In a word, sign the papers that this gentleman will lay before you, or consider this to be your prison for life."

"Can this be possible? Am I in England?"

"Oh, yes. We can answer in the affirmative to both of those propositions. You will do well to consider your decision."

"I have considered!"

"And what is the result?"

"That I will not sign away that property which is mine own."

"Be it so."

The Lady Abbess advanced upon Alicia, and in her passion would have struck her; but Claude Duval was not going quietly to permit that, so he suddenly interfered, saying—

"My dear madam, I think that I can say something which will induce the young lady to consent."

"Oh, in that case—"

"No—no," said Alicia, "you can say nothing. I will not hear you."

The abbess was too much exasperated to say more to her, but clapping her hands together, she cried out—

"Where are ye, holy children—where are ye? Come to the aid of the fold. Come to the truth, and hide in darkness the heretic and the traducer."

The four nuns on the moment made their appearance, and one of them, who was the ugliest being that Claude Duval thought he had ever seen in the shape of woman, sprang upon poor Alicia like a tiger, and twined her long skinny fingers in the hair of the young girl, as she cried out—

"Oh, the sinner! Oh, the sinner! To the glory of the saints, the sinner shall perish for ever."

"And ever," said Father Garvey, in a deep sepulchral voice.

"Away with her," said the abbess; and then suddenly turning to Claude, she whispered, "we will soon frighten her into a compliance with our wishes. She don't know yet what our vaults are."

"Have you vaults?" said Claude, affecting to speak in the most indifferent possible manner to the abbess.

"Have we vaults? To be sure we have. I thought, Mr. White, you could have no sort of doubt upon that subject. Away with her—away with her at once!"



The other nuns seized poor Alicia, who, in that moment of despair, called out in shrieking accents—

“Oh, save me—save me! Henry Field, where are you now? Oh, God, look with pity upon me!”

“Away with her!” cried the abbess. “Away with the wretch!”

The nuns dragged Alicia from the room, and Claude Duval could hear her utter shrieks as they bore her away from the apartment through a number of narrow passages.

It had required all the strength of mind he possessed to enable him to resist the impulse to spring forward and cast his arm round the waist of the young girl, and defy them all. But reflection told him that to do so would be very indiscreet, indeed, for the result could only be that he would have to fight his way out of the nunnery, the topography of which he was profoundly ignorant, and that in his route, which might be wrong or right as chance might dictate, he would be exposed to every possible peril, and both he and Alicia would, in all probability, fall victims to his want of patience.

“You see of what materials,” said the abbess, “our fair Alicia is composed, Mr. White.”

“I do, indeed,” said Claude Duval.

“Curses on her obstinacy! If by any possible means she could be induced to sign the papers, conveying her property from herself, she would soon cease to be of any trouble to us.”

“You would really let her go then?”

“Let her go?”

“Let her go?” echoed the confessor.

“Oh, dear, no,” added the abbess; “we are not in the habit of letting any one go, Mr. White.”

“What would you do then with her?”

The abbess pointed with her finger to the floor, and the confessor nodded.

“I do not quite understand,” said Claude.

“I have no objection to tell you,” said the abbess, as she took a seat and began to fan herself after her exertions. “If she once signed the documents, which you know how to prepare, she would not live long. That is what I mean. But, curses on her, as long as she refuses to sign them, her life is too valuable to tamper with. That is the whole case.”

“I quite understand it,” said Claude; “and now permit me to ask of you the permission to see her alone. I have an argument that I can, I think, use with success, to induce her to consent.”

“What is it?” said the confessor, with a short, dry cough.

“Ay, what is it?” said the abbess.

“I will tell you: I should not have mentioned it at all if I had not meant to tell you, and it is just this:—I suppose that she really does believe that if she were to sign that paper in dispute she would be let go free.”

“I suppose so,” said the abbess; “but if she does think that, it is a very great mistake.”

“Doubtless; but what, now, if I were to see her alone, and tell her that I am moved to pity at her position, and would do all in my power to aid her; and that I would depose to the fact that she signed the paper under duress, and so vitiate the signature, but that she had better do so at once for the sake of freedom. Do you think that would do?”

“It might,” said the abbess.

“And it might not,” said the confessor.

“Which,” said Claude, “is a very sapient remark to come from you, learned sir.”

“Can we trust you, sir?”

“You have trusted me so far already,” said Claude Duval, “that it is much better to go on than attempt for a moment to draw back. Besides, I rather

think that my interests are too much wound up with those of the Bechem family for me to act otherwise than in accordance with their interests."

"That is true," said the abbess, as she gave the confessor a look of intelligence, to which he responded with a nod. "That is quite true; and you shall have the opportunity you ask for, Mr. White, of making the experiment you suggest."

Claude Duval could hardly conceal his exultation at this success; but when he came to consider, there was a something about that look that had passed between the confessor and the abbess that he did not quite like.

"When shall it be?" he said.

"In a couple of hours," said the abbess. "By that time Alicia will have had some slight taste of the atmosphere of our cells."

"Good," said Claude. "That will, no doubt, place her in such a frame of mind, that she will be glad to welcome anything that looks like a chance of escape."

"Perhaps so," said the confessor, cunningly—"perhaps so."

"What," said Claude, "doubting again?"

"Sir, I did not speak to you."

"And I feel quite sure that I have no desire to speak to you; but I appeal to the Lady Abbess whether it will not be very desirable, pending the little experiment I wish to make upon the fears and credulity of Alicia, to take care that Father Garvey does not pay her a visit."

"He dare not now," said the abbess.

Father Garvey silently bowed his head, but about his lips there was a covert smile, and there was a twinkle of his eyes which looked like mischief.

The abbess led the way back to her own apartment, and Claude and the confessor followed; but when the Lady Abbess reached the door, she stepped aside, and motioned to Claude Duval to go in, and then facing the confessor, she made a very elaborate curtsey, and said—

"Good-night."

The confessor kept his countenance well, and holding forth both his arms, as if he invoked a blessing on the head of the abbess, he said—

"Good-night, holy sister. The peace of the saints be with you."

The abbess slammed the door of the chamber in his face, and then stamping with rage, she cried out—

"I hate him—I hate him!—Oh, how I hate that man! You can have no notion of how much I hate that man, Mr. White."

"He is not the most loveable person in the world," said Claude. "I don't wonder at your getting rid of him."

The abbess laughed at Duval in a peculiar manner, as she said—

"Before I send for Alicia and allow you to speak with her in private, which I intend to do, I wish to ask you some questions."

"I am quite willing to answer them," said Claude.

The abbess seated herself in a chair that was very elaborately carved, and motioned to Duval to occupy another close at hand; and then she said, with a tone of great seriousness—

"Father Garvey means mischief."

"To whom?"

"To you and to Alicia; but to you first."

"He had better be careful."

"He will be careful, you may depend. He is a priest, and as such he never forgives an injury. He thinks that you have done him one, you may depend, and, therefore, he will not forgive you."

"What injury have I done to him? I never saw him before in all my life."

"Very likely not; but, you must know, that he does me the honour to admire me very much, and, I am sure, by the glance of his eye, that he is of opinion you have supplanted him in my regards."

"A broad hint this," thought Claude Duval, and then he said, aloud, "Madam,



THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN BEACHEM.

if I thought that indeed it were possible to hold a place in your affections I should begin to consider myself one of the happiest of men; but, alas, I fear that it is out of the question."

"Not at all—oh, not at all. But we will speak more of this when the affair of Alicia is disposed of. We must attend to that in the first place; but what I wanted to say to you with regard to Father Garvey was, that really it would be no bad thing if you induced him to leave the country."

## CHAPTER CCCLI.

## FATHER GARVEY VISITS ALICIA IN THE CONVENT CELLS.

CLAUDE DUVAL looked a little surprised at these words from the abbess, for how it was possible that he could induce Father Garvey to leave the country he could not for a moment conceive.

"How can I so far influence him," he said, "as to get him out of the country?"

"Easily."

"Well, with all due submission to you, madam, it certainly appears to me that I am about the last person to whom he would listen upon this occasion."

"Not at all. If a person should be removed from any particular spot of earth, whether they be taken from it to another, or carried upward, or placed beneath it, they will be to all intents and purposes equally removed from the country."

"If placed beneath it?"

"Yes."

"I think I understand you."

"I know you do. Hark you, Mr. White, if you think that my favour and my friendship and countenance are worth the having, you will have to get rid of Father Garvey, or he will get rid of you."

"I am very much obliged for the hints you give me upon the subject," said Claude Duval, "and shall take good care of myself accordingly."

"You must do more—you must take care of him. Listen to me. It is the intention of Father Garvey to visit Alicia in the cell to which she is by this time conveyed."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am as sure as if he had told me. I saw it in his eye; so you need not doubt it. Now, I want you to follow him, not only to hear what he will say to the girl, but to give you an opportunity of disposing of him. After you have accomplished both these purposes, you can come back to me in this room, and I shall be glad to see you, and to send for the girl for the purpose of your trying your plan to make her sign the papers."

Claude Duval was secretly delighted at this arrangement of the abbess's, since it well enough chimed in with his own views of what it would be highly desirable to do with regard to the present posture of affairs. The only difficulty that struck him at the moment consisted in the fact of his total ignorance of the interior of the convent.

"I will in all things obey you," said Claude; "but I fear that I hardly know how to set about it."

"How mean you?"

"I mean, that I am a stranger to the topography of the convent, and, therefore, if I were to start this moment upon the expedition to find Father Garvey, I could not do so."

"All particulars of that chamber shall be placed in your way; but you must promise me that you will kill him."

"I will."

"Upon your soul?"

"Oh, yes, upon my soul—if he won't be quiet by any other means," added Claude to himself.

"Then I am satisfied," said the abbess. "Take this key—you see that there is a set of wards at each end of it. One or other of those wards will open any door in the convent. I cannot particularise which will open which; but it will not consume much time to take the other, if one should fail. Now follow me."

"With pleasure," said Duval, as he took the key, which was a very ancient one indeed. "I feel as if I should like now to do what I daresay I shall not be

able to resist the doing, and that is, to follow you for the remainder of my life."

"Are you serious?"

"I am, indeed."

"How can I prove that?"

"I don't think there is any difficulty. In the first place, you see, that I have eyes in my head, and in the next you can easily look into a mirror, and then you will see yourself; and I would ask you, then, how it is possible for any one blessed with sight to do other than admire you?"

The abbess patted him upon the arm, as with a smile she said—

"I think it a happy chance that brought you here. I assure you I feel that we shall be very great friends. Follow me now. I am anxious to get all this affair over, which cannot be considered to be the case till both Father Garvey and Alicia are no more."

The compliments which Claude Duval had paid to the personal charms of the abbess had had the effect of completely winning her heart, and she looked upon the handsome attorney, Mr. White, as she thought him, as a lover whom she valued more than any she had ever known.

Her anxiety to get rid of Father Garvey increased each moment, and she hastened to place Duval in a position that would enable him to satisfy her that the confessor was no more.

Claude followed her out at another door than that through which they had before passed from the room; and after crossing a corridor, which contained a few pictures of saints, and which was dimly lighted by a lamp that burnt before a statue of the Virgin, the abbess turned abruptly upon Duval, as she said—

"The key."

"It is here," he replied, "but I hope you will give it to me again, for I regard it as a proof of your confidence."

"Assuredly," she replied. "You shall have it again, quickly enough. I am only about to convince you of its usefulness, by opening a door with it."

By the dim rays of light emitted by the lamp in the niche, where was the figure of the Virgin, the abbess now sought for a small door, which was so cunningly contrived in the wainscot of the wall that if one had not known it had been there, it might be passed a thousand times, and the keyhole, which was hidden by the ornamental portion of the frame of a picture, would never have met the sight.

The abbess turned the key in the lock, and a tall narrow door opened in the wall, showing beyond it complete darkness.

"Follow," she said. "Follow me, and fear nothing."

"With you I cannot fear anything," said Claude, "but to lose you."

"That is a mistaken fear."

Claude found that after proceeding only a couple of paces through this door in the wall, he came to some stairs, and he rather shrunk back, as he said—

"Are we to descend far?"

"No, only four steps."

"Is that all?"

"It is so. Come on. There you are at the foot of the stairs. Now wait a moment, for I must be guided by my hand, since all here is in darkness."

A sudden sound made Claude Duval start. It was the door that they had passed through, which had closed with a snap. It was intended to close at once, when let go, but the hinges were rusty, and the spring in the same condition, no doubt, so it had taken some time to close.

"It is only the door," said the abbess. "I ought to have closed it. Ah, here is the keyhole—all is well. Do not utter a word, unless I tell you that you may do so with safety."

"I will obey you."

Another door now was opened by the abbess, and Claude Duval felt a rush of cold air upon his face, which was really very pleasant, after the confined atmos-



phere he had been for some time breathing, for the interior of the convent altogether was closely shut up, so that but little fresh air circulated in it.

Duval would fain have said, "Where are you now?" but as the abbess had enjoined silence upon him, he thought that it was better to keep quiet, and he said nothing at all, but strove to pierce with his eyes the mass of gloom that was before him.

The abbess did not speak, but she took him by the arm, and led him forward a pace or two, and then he heard her closing the door behind her, so that it should not make any noise in so doing.

Gradually he began to be able to see a little about him, and then he became sensible that he was in some rather large space, in which there was a dim reflected light from somewhere, but he could not tell where it came from.

"Hush!" said the abbess, very softly. "Stay here till I come back."

"Yes," said Duval, in a similar low tone of voice.

She left him, and each moment he could see more clearly about him, and he became certain that he was in the chapel of the convent, and that he was not far from the high altar, which was a little to the right of him.

Whatever reflections and cogitations this change of place might have given rise to in the mind of Duval, was put a stop to by the voice of the abbess, who said in a canting, hypocritical tone—

"Is there any holy sister here to whom I can afford consolation and advice? If so, let them speak."

A deep groan proceeded from a corner of the chapel; and then a voice said—

"Holy mother, I am here—Sister Ann. I am repeating the prayer of penance."

"Did Father Garvey enjoin thee?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"It is well I sought you. He desires that you now retire to your cell to finish the penance prayer. Go at once."

"I go—I go," said the voice.

Through the misty light Claude Duval saw the tall form of somebody in black glide past him, and then all was still. The nun had left the chapel, so that the abbess was free to act as she thought proper.

"Mr. White?" she said.

"Here," replied Duval.

"Come this way. Hem! Can't you see me?"

"No."

"Then you will shortly. I am afraid to turn the lamp, which now sheds most of its beams away from the chapel. You can be guided by my voice. Be careful of the steps that are before you."

Duval, guided as she had said by the voice of the Lady Abbess, walked forward and ascended what he supposed to be the steps of the altar. In a few moments she held him by the arm, as she said—

"I can see you well enough."

"And I you now," said Duval. "My eyes are getting accustomed to the obscurity of the place. Is this a chapel?"

"It is. I find that you can see that much. Speak low; for although I have every reason to suppose that I have removed the only person who was in this place, yet it is impossible that I can be quite certain upon that subject."

"Thank you for the caution," said Claude Duval. "I will hold it in mind. And now will you tell me why I am brought here?"

The abbess laughed strangely, as she said—

"You don't fancy it is to say your prayers, do you?"

"Hardly that," replied Claude.

"Well, then, it is that you may be enabled to follow your foe, the confessor, and my foe likewise, as I know well he is. In order to get to the vaults, in which Alicia is a prisoner, he must pass through this chapel. He will have a

light, as a thing of course, and that will enable you to see him, and follow him. Wrapt up as he will be in the object that brings him here, and not at all suspecting that he is followed by you, he will not be very suspicious; but still, despite that, I advise you to be very cautious, as, before you kill him, I wish you to hear every word that he says to Alicia."

"I understand you."

"Of course you do. Your professional experiences are such as not to deaden your conception of such little matters as these, and I feel quite certain that you will execute what you undertake with due discretion. There remains now but one other subject to settle."

"What is that, madam?"

"How do you propose to yourself to take the life of the confessor? Are you armed?"

Duval did not choose to tell the Lady Abbess that he was amply provided with arms, offensive or defensive; for it did not look very lawyer-like to be in such a state of readiness for a fray, so he merely said—

"I think, if I once get hold of him by the throat, that he will find a very considerable difficulty in getting away again."

"No—no, that will not do."

"Well, madam, I am open to any suggestion that your better experience may enable you to make to me upon this subject."

"Take this."

"What is it?"

"A poniard. It will not fail you, you may depend. I think, that after you have heard all that there is to hear, you had better at once step up to the confessor and leave this in his back."

"I daresay that would do."

"It would be sure to do, and nothing is easier. I tell you, that I hate the man, and must and will be rid of him. I shall think the better of you if you aid me in this business; but if, at the last moment, as I know people are apt to do, you falter at it, I will do it myself at the first opportunity that offers."

"Make yourself easy," said Claude Duval. "I will dispose of the confessor."

Duval made this promise to the Lady Abbess, but he certainly had no sort of idea of carrying it out in the way she dictated. That it would be very desirable to get the confessor out of the way, Duval fully felt; but he shrank from assassination, and left it to good fortune to point out some other mode of disposing of the very pious and holy Father Garvey.

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## CHAPTER CCCLII.

### DUVAL FINDS THE WAY TO THE VAULTS OF THE CONVENT.

THE dagger with which the Lady Abbess so kindly furnished Claude Duval for the destruction of the confessor, was, in good truth, a most murderous weapon, and Claude, as he passed his hand along the blade, felt that it would very speedily, indeed, accomplish the object of the Lady Abbess's even in the most unskilled hands.

There is very little doubt but that if he had let the abbess know how very much averse he was to the use of such an implement, she would not have been at all particular about giving him a taste of it; but Claude Duval took care to keep that state of things to himself.

It did not take him much trouble to thoroughly understand the abbess. She was one of those women of wicked passions, who have always some friend and lover for the time being, but who are always ready to throw him aside for a new one who might strike her fancy at the moment.

The death of the old lover was, then, the very best and most ready mode of disposing of him ; and what so politic as to employ the new one upon such an enterprise ?

It was very probable that Father Garvey might have disposed of his predecessor, and, no doubt, he would have had much less scruples about the mode of doing so than Duval had.

The little conversation that had taken place between Duval and the abbess was conducted in very rapid whispers, so that it did not take long in coming to an end, and then the abbess said to him—

“ Now, you quite understand me. When you have done all that you have to do, you can come to me in my own room ; or suppose I say, that I will be waiting for you in the corridor through the two secret doors ?”

“ That will do,” said Claude, “ provided I can find the doors.”

“ That you will do easily, knowing the position of them. There is yonder lamp which you can take possession of, as it will aid you on your return. Here is the key that I before gave you.”

“ A thousand thanks. And now, madam, I beg that you will consider your orders as obeyed to the letter.”

“ Be it so.”

The abbess glided away like a ghost, but where she went to Claude could not in the obscurity of the chapel take upon himself to say. He thought in his own mind, that it was highly probable she had some other mode of getting to her own apartment than by the secret doors leading to the corridor.

Situated as he now was, Duval became perfectly alive to the slightest sound which should be indicative of the approach of the confessor. He had a fear that Father Garvey might glide into the chapel, and pass out again without being seen, and that made him so anxious, that he started at the slightest noise that occurred within the convent.

This state of things lasted a considerable time, till a strange rattling kind of sound came upon Claude's ears, which for a few moments rather confused him, till the idea occurred to him that it was rain upon the roof of the chapel. By listening intently, he thought, too, that he could hear the roaring of wind among the trees in the convent garden.

“ A rough night,” thought Claude.

Like a star amid the obscurity of the chapel, Duval suddenly saw a faint light at the farther end of it, and he crouched down upon the steps of the altar, to watch its progress.

Slowly marching up one of the aisles came a dim figure, the outlines of which were so very indistinct, that Duval could not take upon himself to say whether it was the confessor or not ; but he was soon satisfied.

As the figure approached, the star-like light that it carried shed a dim radiance around it, and then as it once paused, and the little flame of the hand-lamp was allowed to steady itself, it burnt much more clearly, and Father Garvey, attired in his gown, with the cowl partially drawn over his face and head, stood revealed to the gaze of Duval.

It appeared by the attitude of the confessor, that he was listening to the sounds that were indicative of a storm without.

During the few moments that he did so pause, Claude Duval had a good look about the chapel, as well as at the priest, for the light that Father Garvey carried each moment burnt with a clearer flame.

The convent chapel was in good truth a rather gorgeous place. The appointments were all in the highest style of florid gothic art, and from the glance that he, Duval, took at the altar that was close to him, he could see that it was quite a blaze of gold and velvet.

Duval, however, was too anxious to look well at the confessor, and to watch him and his movements, to waste much time in studying the appointments of the chapel, although he would have been well pleased to have done so.

After muttering something to himself, as the wind roared and shrieked over the chapel roof, the confessor glanced at his lamp, and came slowly on.

Claude was afraid that he was on the point of coming up the steps of the altar to the very spot where he stood, and he thought it desirable to creep behind the altar; but before he could accomplish that movement the confessor turned aside, and walked up to a portion of the wall of the aisle.

Duval watched him anxiously.

The confessor placed the lamp upon a little bracket that was fastened to the wall, and then Claude heard a rattling sound, like that which might be produced by a key in a lock, and then in a very mysterious kind of way the confessor suddenly disappeared, and all was darkness in the chapel, save a faint kind of reflected halo, that came from the spot where the confessor had so suddenly and strangely disappeared.

Deeply interested at all this, and fearful of losing sight altogether of Father Garvey, Claude crept forward as noiselessly as he possibly could towards the place and then he soon got a solution of the apparent mystery.

The bracket upon which Father Garvey had placed his lamp was fastened to a small iron door which he had opened, so that by the act of opening it the lamp, had been carried inwards with the door, as that was the way it moved.

The confessor himself was just upon the threshold or the top of a small, narrow flight of stairs, as Duval afterwards saw, and was in an attitude of listening intently with his hand up to his left ear.

A corinthian column that was close at hand, and which formed one of the supports to the arched and richly ornamented roof of the chapel, now afforded to Claude Duval a very convenient place of hiding in, and by just peeping round its convexity a little he could watch the proceedings of the priest.

After listening in this way for any sound that might come up from the subterranean passage beneath the chapel, the confessor put his head out into the sacred building again, and listened for about the space of a minute in that direction.

To hear more acutely he had thrown the cowl back from over his head and face, and as the rays of the lamp fell upon him, Claude Duval had a good view for once in the way of the undisguised features and aspect of a man who probably never, except by such an accident, was seen by human eyes unless he was playing a part that was pleasing to his real feelings.

Such an expression of frightful, satyr-like sensuality upon the face of any human being Claude had never seen. The low forehead—the thick lips—the strange, rolling eyes, and the general expression of the priest's face, were those that are given in some of the paintings of the old masters to the grinning heads that are represented peeping through clefts of trees, or peering down far amid masses of luxuriant foliage at some nymph reposing, and seeking a bath in some refreshing stream in the depths of a forest.

Claude Duval shuddered to look at the man, who, by the ignorant and the bigotted, was, no doubt, esteemed quite a holy person.

But here we would not have our readers mistake us, and suppose that in recording the fact that Father Garvey, who lived some hundred years ago, was a real type of the Catholic priesthood. On the contrary, we believe, and we know that there are many highly intellectual and excellent men belonging to that fraternity; but what we do mean to show is, that the conventual system permitted the existence of such men as the confessor, and of such woman as the abbess.

Having satisfied himself that, beyond the sound of the rain upon the roof of the chapel, all was still, the confessor turned again, and taking the lamp off the bracket, he descended a few steps further, so as to be clear of the door, and then closed it.

A double darkness seemed to fall upon the chapel.

This was a state of things, of course, which was not at all calculated to frustrate Duval's views, so he at once stepped forward and felt for the key-hole of the

little iron door. For a few moments he was rather puzzled to find it, as a loose piece of ornamental iron hung over it; but as he felt that yield to his touch, he guessed at once that it was only a shield to the key-hole, and in another moment he was carefully trying the key that the lady abbess had given him in the lock.

A pang of disappointment came across the mind of Claude, as he found that the key, instead of opening the door for him, turned round and round in the lock without exercising the slightest influence on it. At the moment, he forgot that it was a master-key that he had with a set of wards at each end of it; but it was only for a moment that this lapse of memory took place, and then he rapidly turned the key.

The lock yielded in a moment, and the little iron door opened.

Claude Duval now felt all the necessity of caution for more reasons than one. In the first place, Father Garvey was, no doubt, perfectly acquainted with all the intricacies of that underground portion of the convent; and so, if he had any suspicions that he was watched, might easily elude him, Claude.

In the second place, if he were only once to discover that his visit to Alicia was found out by the man whom he believed to be his enemy, there was no knowing but he might take the life of the innocent young girl to avenge himself.

For these reasons, Claude Duval was as cautious as it was possible for any human being to be, as he proceeded upon the ticklish and somewhat perilous adventure.

Even as Father Garvey had projected his head from the narrow passage on the other side of the secret door to listen in the chapel, so did Claude Duval project his head from the chapel to listen in the secret passage.

All was still.

A new dread, however, soon came over the heart of Claude Duval, and that was, the possibility that, while he was being so over-cautious in listening that the priest did not suspect his presence, he, Garvey, might reach the victim of the persecutions of the convent, and torment her with his insolent addresses, without he, Claude, being able, amid the intricacies of the place, to find the cell.

No sooner did this notion find a home in the heart of Duval, than he hurried forward at once after the confessor.

Two steps from the entrance to that mysterious region there commenced a flight of stairs—so narrow and so steep were those stairs, that only one person could descend with anything like ease at a time, and that one required to be specially careful how he went on lest he should slip from the narrow step he trod upon, in which case, the probability of his falling all the way was very strong, indeed.

Claude was very careful; but he had the disadvantage of being in the dark, so that he shuddered with a strange sort of dread as he went step by step down there, as it were, into the bowels of the earth, and still found no termination to the steps.

He regretted much that he had not begun to count the steps from the top; but now it was too late to do so, and the idea of going back for such an object as that was not to be thought of.

Down, still down went Duval, till he made sure that some fifty feet at least had been descended from the level of the chapel floor, and then he felt that he was no longer on the stone steps that he had wished so devoutly at an end.

He drew a long breath of relief.

“At last,” he whispered to himself—“at last I have reached the foot of this staircase; but where is the confessor?”

That was, indeed, a question, for the place in which Claude Duval now found himself was profoundly dark, and no confessor was to be found at hand.

The floor was evidently of earth merely. No doubt it was hammered down hard





CLAUDE DISGUISES HIMSELF FOR HIS EXPEDITION TO THE CONVENT.

and flat ; but still it was only earth. The air was very cold, and at the same time there was a strange sickly odour about it that laid hold of the senses of Duval, and seemed to deprive him of one half his strength.

“If one should chance now,” he thought, “to faint in such a place as this, there would be no further hope. Death would be certain. I must not think of such horrors.”

By an effort Claude shook off the strange feelings that were crowding about his heart, and he listened intent'y.

## CHAPTER CCCLIII.

## THE HORRORS OF THE CONVENT VAULTS TRANSCEND CLAUDE'S IMAGINATION.

As Claude Duval, in a crouching attitude at the foot of the long dreary stairs, listened for any sound that might enable him to guess the whereabouts of the priest, he suddenly heard a pattering kind of noise.

At first he could not make out what it could mean; but as he listened he felt convinced that it was the fall of water from some great height in drops into some pool that it had formed.

That afforded him no indication of the way which the confessor had taken, and he was about, with the hope that chance might direct him, to proceed cautiously forward, when there came a rushing sound, and he felt something pass over his feet.

Some unmistakable squeaks from rats engaged in a fight with each other convinced him that what the abbess had said of the reptile inhabitants of that region was by no means an overdrawn picture.

And yet, much as Duval detested those creatures about him, he felt it almost a relief, amid the stern solitude of that place, to find aught in the shape of life there.

"I will proceed," he said to himself. "Surely I shall hear something of the confessor. This place cannot be so very large."

At that moment there came a dim flash of light on the scene, and from a long vaulted passage to the left of where he stood, Claude heard the sound of hasty footsteps.

The light increased each moment in power.

That this was Father Garvey, for some reason or another, on his return to that spot, Duval could not for a moment doubt; and as he did not wish just then to encounter the priest, he glanced around him for some place of shelter.

The vaulted passage along which the confessor was coming, went past the end of the staircase, and so right on into an obscurity which Claude could not penetrate with his eyes.

Upon rather the impulse of the moment, than from any reflection that that would be the best thing he could do, Claude ran down the darkest portion of the passage, and finding that there were small gothic doors upon each side, he pushed at one of them.

The door gave way, and Duval fell headlong down a height of about three feet, on to what felt like damp straw.

Fearful that the noise of his fall might alarm the confessor, Duval would not move, but he listened with all the intensity in his power for any sound that might enlighten him as to the state of affairs in the passage he had left.

The gothic door that Duval had pushed open, and then fallen through, was not above twenty paces from the foot of the stairs, so that when the confessor passed at that latter point with his light, a faint ray or two of it found its way to where Claude lay.

By that faint ray, he could just see that he was in a little vaulted apartment about twelve feet square, and that there was a wide bench in one corner on which was standing a jug, and a piece of stale bread; the floor was covered with straw in a very scanty manner; the place had evidently been used as a prison for some unfortunate. The confessor either heard, or fancied he heard some noise, and proceeded cautiously to look all around him, holding the lamp in his hand above his head, and endeavouring to pierce the gloom that reigned in that place. He approached the passage which Claude had just traversed, and began to examine the cells in a very cautious manner, and if he had continued his search as he began it, without doubt he must have found Duval; but he did not.

"I certainly heard the noise of something like a heavy body falling; but

perhaps it was some of the old plaster giving way. I do not like searching these vaults," he said.

As he spoke, he turned slowly round; and Claude saw, or fancied that he saw him tremble as he did so.

"The fellow is a coward, after all," thought Duval.

"I am certain I heard some sound from here," added the priest; "and yet, what or who could it possibly be? Not the abbess, surely? and she and I only could visit these places at such an hour as this."

With a wild rush, a whole legion of large grey rats now darted past the confessor, and fled screeching and squalling along another passage to the right.

"Curses on the vermin!" he said. "So it was the rats, after all, that once more have filled me with fears in this place? If I came oftener, which, thank the fates, I do not, I suppose I should get a little used to them. Confound them! Well, well, it was better to come back and know what it really was before I went to the cell of Alicia."

With these words, the confessor slowly moved towards the direction from whence he came.

As he went, Duval could still hear him, amid the intense silence of that place, muttering to himself—

"Yes; she shall be mine—mine only! We never yet had in our prison these walls any one to be compared to her in beauty. Wonderful—wonderful!"

Claude scrambled out of the dungeon, the floor of which was so much lower than the passage which led to it.

"Is it wonderful?" he said to himself. "I will let you find out that there is something more wonderful, still, in the whole proceeding than the beauty of Alicia. I feel quite obliged to the rats for making disturbance enough to bring the holy father back again to this spot, for now I can with ease follow him."

Nothing could be easier, now, guided by the light that Father Garvey carried, for Claude Duval to follow him along the narrow passage he was pursuing.

It was astonishing now with what complete security the confessor seemed to proceed. The discovery that it was the rats that had made all the noise appeared so completely to satisfy him, that it is doubtful if anything but a human voice would now have had the effect of inducing him to turn his head.

This was all, so far, in Claude's favour.

The passage was about sixty feet in length, and then it suddenly widened out into a large gloomy looking vaulted apartment, which was some thirty or forty feet across it in one direction, that is to say, opposite to the end of the passage, while right and left it was quite lost in the darkness, so wide was it in both of those directions.

The confessor paused.

Claude Duval now hoped that his perseverance in following Father Garvey would be crowned with success, for it was evident the priest was near to the cell he meant to visit.

Turning round slowly the confessor held up the light, and took a keen glance around him. Then he muttered—

"So! this is the place that they all shudder at, and pretend is haunted—haunted with the spirits of the nuns and the novices who have here come by death, and of the children who have perished in the well. Haunted! Ha! I fear not these idle tales of superstition, not I."

A deep groan sounded audibly from out of the intense darkness; but whether it came from the right or from the left Duval could not say.

The confessor appeared to be equally unable to fix the locality of the sound, for he looked about him rather wildly, and then uttered a cry of terror as he sunk almost to the damp floor, and trembled excessively.

"Serves you right," thought Duval. "The more frightened such a rascal as you are the better."

"What was it?—what was it?" said the confessor in a thick and husky whisper. "I thought I heard a something. Oh, what was it?"

All was still again as the grave.

"No—no!" he added, "it was only imagination, or the rats again—yes, the rats again. Oh, fool—fool that I am to allow myself to be thus played upon by my over-acute senses. It is nothing—oh, it is nothing!"

He rose to his feet again, and looked rather anxiously at the lamp, which was burning but dimly.

"It is the bad air here," he muttered, "that affects the flame of the lamp. I will go to the cell of Alicia at once. I must take her out of this place, for it is paying too dear a price even for her sweet society to visit her here."

Again the dismal groan came upon the dusky air.

The confessor did not utter any cry this time; but he shrunk back, and Claude could see his eyes glaring into the obscurity far away to the right of where he stood.

"The well—the well!" he said, "Surely it comes from the well. No—no! Death only is there. This place should be still as death, for what is it but one great grave?"

With a shuddering horror the priest now looked about him, and then passing his disengaged eyes across his brow, he muttered—

"Let me think—oh, let me think—What other inhabitant of this gloomy region is there beside Alicia?"

After a few moments' thought he exclaimed—

"Oh, fool that I am to forget! the young girl from Ostend is here, to be sure—she who would not consent to receive the fond embraces of the Prior of St. Mary's. Ah, yes, how could I forget! She is but a child, too, to utter such groans as that. Her cell is yonder, and she is left to perish, I suppose."

The confessor seemed now, as he looked in the direction of the cell he mentioned, to be consulting a little, but the result was what might have been expected, for with a toss of his head, he said, suddenly—

"Well, let her perish; Alicia engages my attention now; and, besides, there is no comparison between them, and there would be just as much trouble with one of them as with the other."

With this speech the pious man strode onwards down towards the deep gloom that lay to the left of where he had been standing and looking about him.

"You scoundrel," thought Duval, "I will follow you now for the sake of Alicia; but I am glad you have given me information that there is another victim in this place, for before I leave it I will rescue her likewise."

Never had Claude Duval felt greater satisfaction at the prospect of the good that he might do in the carrying out of any of his adventures than he did now at the idea that by coming to the convent to save Alicia he might be the means of likewise snatching another human being from the terrible fate that awaited her.

Following the confessor, now, rightly but silently, and being himself in the deep shadow of the place, while Father Garvey was plainly visible by the lamp that he carried, Claude saw him at length pause at a portion of the wall of the open space.

That open space, to which the narrow vaulted passage had led, deserves something like a description.

Imagine a space of about thirty feet in one direction and in the other of more than a hundred. The floor is partly earth, beaten very hard, and partly covered with flat red tiles. The roof is somewhere about twenty-five feet in height. In fact, this place was as nearly as possible under the floor of the chapel.

Around the walls appeared at intervals low arched gothic doors, and it was to one of these that the confessor now directed his attention, and, no doubt, there was the cell of Alicia.

The heart of Claude beat rapidly.

"Now," he thought, "I shall indeed, knowing where this fair young creature

is imprisoned, have a chance of rescuing her from priestly tyranny—a chance do I say? Oh, I will take such special care that it shall be a certainty.”

The confessor now rattled his key in the lock of the cell door, but it was hard to open, and he had to place his lamp upon the floor before he could manage to turn the key, since it required the strength of both his hands to do so.

Then it was evident he was very careful, lest he should defeat his own intentions, and break the key in the lock, so that it was about half a minute of suspense both to him and to Claude Duval before the harsh grating sound of the rusty wards of the lock, as they yielded to the power of the key, came upon their ears.

“Done at last!”—  
He stooped and picked up the lamp from the floor before he opened the door of the cell, and then, with his right hand he opened it wide, and holding up the lamp, he cried—

“Girl! girl! Are you here? Speak!”

“Mercy!” cried a faint voice.

“Good,” said the confessor, “good,” and he at once crossed the threshold of the cell.

## CHAPTER CCCLIV.

### FATHER GARVEY FINDS AFFAIRS ANYTHING BUT PLEASANT.

IN one moment, Claude Duval was at the door of the cell into which Father Garvey had stepped, with such a feeling in his mind of perfect security from all interception.

The door had partially closed after the priest, so that it only remained open about six inches, but that was all the better for Duval, as in the darkness he could stand close to it and look into the cell, without much chance of being seen by the confessor.

And after all, now, Duval did not a great deal care whether he was seen or not, for he had accomplished the principal object of his visit to that underground region in finding out where Alicia was imprisoned, and beyond a little curiosity to know what the holy father might want [to say to Alicia, he had nothing to do now but to lay hold of him, and dispose of him, not as the lady abbess had intended, but in some way that would at all events keep him out of harm's-way for a time.

The cell in almost every respect was like the other one in which Claude had been. If possible, it was a trifle smaller, and the roof was a little lower.

The lamp that the priest carried was ample light for such a small place, so that everything in it was as clearly visible as possible, so that Duval had no difficulty whatever in being a spectator of all that occurred.

Oh, how little did the terrified and agonized Alicia dream that almost within arm's length of her was such a protector as Claude Duval!

In the farther corner of the cell there was Alicia—pale as death itself, and half reposing upon some straw that was on the floor. The beautiful young creature held out both her hands as though their weak force would be sufficient to keep from her the confessor, and there was upon her face an expression of the most terrible dread.

The priest looked at her in silence for some moments, and then in a thick, husky voice, he said—

“Girl! why do you regard me with such looks?”

“Oh! have mercy!”

“Mercy! What have I done that you should doubt my mercy? Why am I here? Of course I come to save you.”

“To save me?”

“Most assuredly. Do you think that I could, by any possibility, permit the



abess to murder you? Do you think that I, a man, could feel towards you as an angry woman would?"

"I do not understand you," said Alicia. "If your words are not a mockery—if you comprehend them in the same sense that I do, you will let me go forth from this dreadful place."

"Well, and why not?"

"Can I hope so much?"

"It is just what I came for."

"Oh, I will bless you if, indeed, you have repented of the past and will tell me exactly what you wish."

"To my liberty. All I wish is that you would let me leave the convent. Give me leave to feel that I am free, and I will then find some one to befriend me. Place me in any street in London that you like, and leave me to my own fortunes."

"Indeed! Perhaps you would change your religion?"

"Religion? Is it for you to talk of religion?"

"Certainly. I am a priest—but, at the same time, I am a man. Do you think that because I am a priest I have neither eyes nor other senses? Do you think that because I am a priest I do not see that you are beautiful, Alicia?"

"Then—then—" again she moaned—"oh, is this keeping your promise to set me free? No—no, it is the old talk."

"Silence! girl. I will set you free unknown to the abess—likewise to all in the convent. I came here for that very purpose. You shall find that there is one, at least, who will not let you pine in such a place as this."

Alicia only looked at him now, but she made no reply to him. She had too good reason to doubt the sincerity of his statements.

"Listen," he continued. "I intend, by the power that a full and complete knowledge of this place, and the possession of a key which will open all its several doors, give me, to take you out of the convent before day dawns."

"Can this be possible?"

"Yes, upon conditions."

"Conditions?—Oh, what conditions?"

"You shall hear. They are not hard ones—on the contrary, they are such as ought to present themselves to you in the most delightful and glowing colours."

"I will listen," said Alicia, sadly.

"For some time past," said the confessor, "I have been tired of my residence in England, and I have sent letters to Rome to get myself removed to some other country. They have been answered to the effect, that if I so liked, I might take up my residence at Lisbon. You, no doubt, are well aware that that city abounds in all that can delight the senses. The climate is beautiful—the wines are charming—the women!—Hem! I don't mean that; but I mean to say that a residence in Lisbon will be a very agreeable change."

"Go, then," said Alicia; "and take my prayers with you, if you release me before your departure from this place."

"That I mean to do; for upon your release will depend my departure altogether."

"I do not understand you."

"Fair girl, I make you the offer of being the companion of my flight to Lisbon. When there, I will introduce you as my niece. Most priests have a niece; and nobody is so ill-mannered as to make any further inquiries about such a personage. Your life will glide away in tranquillity and pleasure. What say you? Is the condition a hard one?"

"It is such a one that I cannot express my indignation at. I prefer death to such degradation."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes; and I now only pray that Heaven will take me to itself, and save me further suffering."

"Rash girl, you know not what you say. Beware!—oh, beware!"

"Of what? I have nothing to beware of but the wild anger of the abness, who so transgresses the commands of that Heaven she affects to serve, as to persecute where she should protect."

"It is not of the abness that I bid you beware."

"Of whom, then?"

"Of me. I am all-powerful! I tell you, girl, you are at my mercy."

"Your mercy? That is a quality you do not possess; so it cannot come into question."

"Very good," said the priest. "Then you consent, of course?"

"Never!"

"Pho! pho! You see, girl, that I am not at all angry at this little coquetry on your part, for it only adds a zest to beauty, as sauce does to some delicate dish. I will just tell you, though, what would be your fate if I were not to save you from it."

"I know it."

"Oh, no, you don't. Did you never hear of the well?—the convent well, I mean?"

Alicia shuddered. She had, indeed, heard of the well, for the old nuns had threatened her with death by being cast down it frequently upon finding that she was not willing to consent to what the superior desired of her.

"You need not answer me," said the priest. "I can see that you have heard of it."

"If death is to be my fate," said Alicia, clasping her hands and looking upward, "it is easier and better than the degradation to which you would consign me."

"Stop a bit; you reckon too quickly. The abness, before you were consigned to the well, would amuse herself by submitting to you such punishments that you would wish for any death to escape from them; and, besides, I would ask you what is to hinder me from by force achieving that result which you will not from love accord to me?"

"Oh, Heaven send me succour now!"

"Heaven? Stuff! Do you fancy that the age of miracles, if there ever was one, is to be restored specially upon your account? Why, you must be mad, girl."

"Still I have a hope that, as Heaven looks down into this dreary cell, and sees the danger that I am in, something will yet happen to aid me—yes, to deliver me."

"Despair of any such circumstance; you are here wholly and entirely in my power. Your cries—your shrieks would not be heard here; or if they did faintly reach the ears of some shrinking nun, she would but cross herself, and with a prayer to the Virgin compose herself to rest again."

"Is there no humanity in this place?"

"No; but there is plenty of piety."

Alicia sobbed, and wrung her hands:

"Girl," added the confessor, "I begin to perceive that you are now awakening to the hopeless character of your position. Surely it is better to be friends than foes with me. Come, let me clasp your wondrous beauty in these arms. I want you to rain soft kisses upon my lips—I want to hear you tell me that you love me; and you shall do so. Resistance is all in vain. You may shriek—howl—pray, or rave as you please, but still you are mine, and mine only. Ha! ha! You are weak, and I am strong."

"Help!" shrieked Alicia.

"If you please, sir," said Claude Duval, as he stepped into the cell and placed his hand on the shoulder of the confessor—"if you please, sir, I beg to object to this little proceeding."

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen to his feet, the confessor could not possibly have been more thoroughly confounded than he was at this most unlooked-for

interruption. It so staggered him, that after one cry of surprise and fear, he stood like a man turned to stone for a few moments.

The hand of Claude Duval was still upon his shoulder, and with a calm, keen look, he looked into the face of the audacious priest.

Poor Alicia, who had really thought that her last hour had come, for to outlive disgrace was a thought she could not for one moment entertain, still remained upon her knees in the corner of the cell, and with her arms uplifted to Heaven, appeared to implore that divine mercy, which alone could save her.

Alicia, no doubt, at this moment, could not conceive that the lawyer, and friend of the lady abess, as she thought Claude Duval to be, could possibly come there as her champion. It rather appeared to her at that moment that his appearance was part of the plot against her peace.

This state of quiet into which the confessor was thrown, was not likely to last very long. It was but the calm which is too often a prelude to a storm.

## CHAPTER CCCLV.

### CLAUDE DUVAL VISITS HIS FRIENDS, AND ARRANGES A PLAN OF PROCEEDINGS.

If anything, as a mental faculty and exercise, is paid more attention to than another with the Catholic priesthood, it certainly is that presence of mind which, however estimable a quality it may be in some situations, may in others be denominated nothing but brazen impudence.

The holy Father Garvey had not had that essential portion of his education neglected. He was a Jesuit! That, we opine, is sufficient evidence of the fact.

But the circumstances into which the holy man of God was now thrown, were quite perilous. If the affair had been one of an ordinary character, he might have preserved his equanimity; but it will be borne in mind, that his passions were concerned in the matter at present on the tapis, so nature get the better of the force of education and culture, and with a howl of rage, Father Garvey awoke from the sort of trance that had come over him, and turned upon his assailant.

"Wretch! Villain!" he cried. "What do you here? But why do I ask?—why need I ask? This shall suffice."

As he spoke, he drew from some sheath that held it elevated, so that the handle was towards his hand, a dagger of about eight inches in length. It was, in truth, a most murderous and formidable looking weapon.

Making a strange circular movement with it round his head to give force to the blow, he aimed it at the neck of Claude Duval, with the full intention of despatching him.

It was well for Claude that he was quick of eye and agile of limb, or he might there and then have fallen beneath the steel of the murderous priest. As it was, he, with an agility and precision that few men could have compassed, caught the descending arm of the confessor by the wrist and gave it such a wrench, that, with a yell of pain, the would-be assassin dropped the dagger to the floor of the cell.

"Be careful," said Duval. "Another such attempt will cost you your life. Do you understand me?"

As he spoke, Claude took from his pocket with his disengaged hand a pistol, and quite heedless of the confusion he created among the teeth of the confessor, he dashed the barrel right into his mouth, and held it there.

"One touch," added Claude with the same imperturbable calmness with which he had spoken all along—"one touch to the trigger of this pistol, and your brains are scattered on yonder wall. How do you like the prospect?"



CLAUDE AT THE PORTER'S GATE OF BERRYMEAD PRIORY.

"Murder!"

"Oh, no, it would not amount to murder. If ever in this world there could be a justifiable homicide, this might be called such."

"Mercy!"

"Hold, Sir Priest! How dare you, who knows no touch of such a god-like quality, ask for mercy?"

The confessor was silent; but a fit of trembling now took possession of him, and he could hardly support himself upon his feet. From that moment Duval saw that even his vindictive spirit was for the time broken by abject fear, and he did not consider that there was anything further to apprehend from the

confessor. Taking the barrel of the pistol from his mouth, then, Duval pointed to the opposite corner of the cell to that where Alicia still knelt, and in a voice of command, he said to the trembling confessor—

“Go there.”

“Yes—yes. What do you mean? Who are you?”

“Obey me. Kneel! That will do. If you value your life, you will be still.”

The confessor shrank to the corner of the cell pointed out by Duval, and knelt down. In such an attitude Claude felt that it was not very likely he could be suddenly dangerous; for unless he had fire-arms it would be quite impossible for him to make any aggressive movement unobserved.

All this scene, which we have had to describe in its details at some length, happened with great rapidity. So much so, indeed, that Alicia had scarcely time to ask herself if it could be possible that the man who had been introduced to her by the abbess as the agent of the Beachem family could really be her friend or not.

The panic of the confessor, and the whole of the scene that had taken place between him and the attorney, as she thought Claude Duval to be, was too real and natural to be a piece of acting, and she had looked upon the latter part of the affair with mute wonder.

Having, though, disposed in some sort of the priest, Claude Duval at once turned to Alicia, and said to her—

“Alicia, let me as soon as possible say sufficient to you to induce you to trust me. I am your friend—I am the friend of Mr. Field, who loves you, and my errand here is to protect and to save you.”

With a cry of joy, Alicia rose, and springing forward, she, with a childish confidence that was irresistibly enchanting, flung herself into the arms of Claude Duval.

It was but for a moment, though, that the extatic feelings of the young girl at finding Heaven had indeed raised her up a friend in such an emergency got the better of her prudence and her womanly reserve. She disengaged herself from the arms of Claude Duval, and burst into tears.

Claude could very well guess the state of feeling that she had now fallen into, and with all the delicate courtesy of tone that he knew so well how to assume, he said—

“Alicia, calm your fears. You may well imagine that I am one who can be well trusted by your lover, or he would not have consented to allow me to come upon this errand alone. Do not weep, I pray you. This should be the beginning of joy, not of tears.”

“Oh, yes—yes, it should!” she sobbed; “but when the poor heart is full, it must find relief in tears. Save me—oh, save me from that dreadful man, and from this terrible place. Save me, and I will pray for you, and bless you while I live.”

“Hush! All shall be well. But you must have a little patience, yet, Alicia, and it is necessary in the first place to get rid of this encumbrance.”

As he spoke, Claude pointed to the confessor, who, thereupon, with a deep groan, fell flat upon his face, for he construed those words of Claude’s into nothing less than a sentence of death against him.

“Spare him!—oh, spare even him!” said Alicia.

Claude approached close to her, and whispered in her ear, so that the priest should not hear him, saying—

“I would not soil my hands, nor afflict my soul by his murder for the world. If he remain non-resisting as he is now, he is safe enough from me at present; but it will be necessary and highly proper to secure him somewhere where he can do no mischief either by detailing what has taken place here to others, or by taking active steps himself to thwart us in our future proceedings.”

“Dear friend, what do you purpose doing with him?”

“Placing him in one of the cells and leaving him there for a time a prisoner. I have from his own lips heard that neither cries, nor shrieks, nor prayers, have



any effect upon the inhabitants of the convent when coming from these dreary cells; so upon his own showing he will be safe enough. You have no objection to his being so located?"

"Oh, no—no. But tell me—is he quite well and happy—Mr. Field, I mean?"

It was with downcast looks that Alicia ventured to ask this question concerning her lover, and Claude Duval could easily imagine how many more she would gladly have given utterance to, but that maidenly reserve held her back from so doing.

"Well, in bodily health, doubtless he is," said Duval, "but happy he is not since you are from him."

"Oh, no—no; but—but——"

"What doubt is it that hangs upon your lips?"

"He might himself have come to my rescue."

Claude smiled as he replied—

"And so he would, but I prevented him."

"You prevented him?"

"Yes, for his own sake as well as for yours, I would not let him come, and I will tell you the reason. Love, Alicia, is a feeling that in its intensity swallows up all others. It would have been out of the question for him who loves you as Field does to come here and play the part that I have played and that I still have to play, for your rescue. His feelings would have overcome him on the instant that he saw you, and you, too, if you had suddenly been introduced to a room in which you saw him as you saw me, could you have so far restrained your feelings as to seem to know him not?"

"No—oh, no."

"So I could have sworn, Alicia. Do not, then, for one moment blame your lover for not himself coming here to manage your escape. I prevented him from so doing."

"I owe you the more thanks. You have convinced me that you have pursued the best course. But what do you propose now?"

"Stop! The confessor."

Father Garvey upon hearing himself now spoken of, uttered a deep groan, and piteously looked up. Alicia understood what Claude Duval meant, which was, that they should put him, the confessor, in some place of safety before they proceeded further in their plan of escape, or even before they spoke further of the mode by which that desirable end was to be accomplished.

"Come, holy and accomplished sir," said Claude Duval, as with his foot he stirred up the attention of Father Garvey, "I will trouble you to rise and follow me forthwith."

"Have mercy upon me! What good will it do to you to take my life? You have conquered me, I freely admit. Oh, be just and merciful to me, now! If it be your wish to leave the convent with this young lady, only say so, and I will smooth the way for you. I will take you past all the dangerous places, and see you safely in the open air. But do not—oh, do not slay me, I beg of you!"

"Follow!"

"Mercy! mercy! Oh, Alicia, bid him spare me! To you I appeal! You are gentle and good. You do not wish to see blood shed, or to know that it is shed."

He tried to take hold of her hand, but Alicia shrunk from him with horror.

"Abstain from appealing to her," said Claude Duval. "Recollect the character of your answers to her, when only a short time ago she appealed to you, and you thought that no help was nigh. I wonder that with all your priestly cunning you are foolish enough not to draw such a parallel. Follow me at once!"

"Yes, yes—oh, yes! I will follow you; but you will yet spare my life? Help! help! mercy! Oh, murder! Help! mercy!"

The confessor lost all self-control, and shrieked aloud.

## CHAPTER CCCLVI.

FATHER GARVEY HAS A TASTE OF THE CONVENT CELLS, WHICH HE DOES NOT ADMIRE.

THE sound of the cries of the confessor echoed through the open space outside the cell ; and notwithstanding he had himself assured Alicia that no cries, however loud, that might be uttered in that place would reach any ears in the convent, and that if they did, such sounds would be paid no attention to, Claude Duval was afraid that the racket and confusion he made while the fear of death was so strong upon him, would be fatal to the future plans of himself and Alicia.

Under these circumstances, it became necessary to let the half-mad wretch know that his life was safe.

Clutching him by the throat with a force that at once stopped his cries, by nearly stopping the whole of his breath—for Claude Duval felt quite certain that there was no other mode of quieting him—he spoke calmly and deliberately—

“I would not soil my hands nor my conscience by taking your life. That is safe ; but you will, for security, occupy one of the cells for a time. Do you understand that ?”

“I do,” said the priest, in half-choked accents :

Claude then took his hand from his throat, and permitted the half-strangled wretch to breathe again, when, casting himself at the feet of Duval and Alicia, he cried out in abject accents—

“Oh, what clemency—oh, what tokens of mercy is this ! How can I possibly thank you both sufficiently for my life—how can I say or do enough to thank you ?”

“Silence—silence !”

“Nay, but I will tell you all. You cannot escape the intricacies of the convent. All the routes that lead from it are too well guarded for you to escape. There are several men employed by the Jesuit Committee who keep guard, and there are some of the old nuns who know the use of fire-arms. It will be impossible for you to leave the place except you encounter the whole convent. You will be crushed in the attempt if you had twenty lives unless you take me with you.”

“No.”

“Yes—oh, yes ! With knives and with every kind of weapon that they can possibly use the nuns will oppose you. You will have to fight women—you will have to slay them. You cannot leave the convent without giving the alarm, for there are alarms in the shape of bells and of explosive substances, so placed that you must disturb them. Do you wish to fight your way through a mass of alarmed women—do you wish to kill them ? Oh, no ! But you will save yourself all this if you take me with you.”

“No.”

“Yes—oh, yes, let me advise you—let me implore you !”

“Not another word. Follow me. Alicia, do you take the light ; I shall not feel at ease till I have this fellow under lock and key.”

The confessor gathered enough from the tone in which Claude Duval spoke to feel that it was quite useless to urge him further, and so, despite his horror at being shut up in one of the cells, he had to reconcile his mind to it as best he could, and he only shook his head now and then as he followed Claude Duval and uttered deep sighs.

Duval took good care to let Alicia go first for fear the rascally priest should be seized by some sudden feeling of desperation and seek to take her life, thinking possibly that, after all, by so doing he could not be making his own situation worse than it was in reality.

In this way, then, they left the cell, and Alicia held the light as high as she

could, so that Claude Duval might get a good look at the open space from which the cells opened.

"There is one," said Alicia.

"Yes," replied Duval, as he pushed open the door of the cell, "this one will do. Now, holy and pious sir, walk in."

"In—there?"

"Precisely."

"But—but—you will not——"

"Will not what?"

"Lock and bolt and bar the door, surely, if I give you my sacred word of honour, and further fix that fast and strong by oaths, that I will not stray from this cell till you say I may do so. You can trust me."

"What! trust a priest? Oh, dear, no. Walk in."

"Not yet," said the confessor, and turning sharply, he fled across the open space with great speed.

"We are lost!" cried Alicia.

"No," said Claude. "Wait where you are."

On the moment Duval dashed after the priest; but the latter would probably enough, considering the intimate knowledge he had of the locality, have got off, but that he turned his head for a moment to see where was his pursuer. That movement decided his fate, for he ran against one of the columns that held up the roof, and recoiling with the shock, he fell to the ground.

In another moment Claude Duval was upon him with a shock that nearly killed him.

"So, holy sir," said Claude, "you would escape, would you?"

"Oh—oh! Oh, mercy!"

"Rise, man, at once."

"I cannot."

"Try it. Oh, you cannot, or you will not. Well, we shall see if we cannot find some mode of helping you."

Duval looked around him, but could see no means of annoying the holy father ready at hand; so he drew from his pocket a pistol, that had attached to its barrel a spring bayonet with so very fine a point that nothing could resist it.

"Try and get up now," said Claude Duval, as with the point of the bayonet he gave the confessor rather a sharp touch or two about the region of the ribs.

The glibness with which the sharp point of the little bayonet slipped through his clothing, and some couple of inches of his flesh, had a most startling effect upon the priest, and he sprang to his feet with a speed and dexterity worthy of a tumbler.

"What the devil is that?" he said.

"Oh, nothing particular," said Claude, as he gave him another touch with the bayonet that made him cut a most extraordinary caper. "Nothing particular; but I am rejoiced to see you so much better."

Laying hold of him now firmly by the back of the neck, Claude Duval led him along till they came to the door of the cell, and then by the aid of a kick that was not to be resisted, he sent him right away to the farther extremity of it.

To close the door, lock it, and put up the heavy iron bar across it, was the work of the next half minute, and Father Garvey was at all events for some time out of the way of doing any further mischief.

Alicia, during the short race that had taken place after the runaway confessor, had remained trembling by the cell door. She felt that if the priest made his escape, that there would not only be no hope for her, but that, in all human probability, he who had ventured to that dismal place to rescue her would not escape from it with his life. It was, therefore, a great relief to her to see the confessor brought back so quickly, and in such good custody.

When he was, however, fairly thrust into the cell and the door was fastened,

Alicia felt able to breathe freely; and looking with eyes swimming in tears in Claude's face, she said—

"The grateful feelings of a life will not be sufficient even to repay you for what you have done for me."

"Don't think of that," said Claude. "What I wish now to see to is your escape; and, in the first place, tell me if you have been long enough here, or if you have seen enough of the mysteries of this convent, to come to any opinion regarding the truth or falsehood of what, in his fright, the confessor said about the difficulty of leaving the convent?"

"Alas! it is true."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, I have every reason to be sure of it. The one person in all this establishment who uttered many words of sympathy to me, told me the same thing; and I fear she has suffered for it."

"Who is she?"

"A young girl, a novice, who feels that happiness is not to be obtained here; and that the vices of the conventual system, even if it were properly administered, far exceed any good that can possibly accrue from it. Alas! I tremble to think what has become of her!"

"What do you suppose has become of her?"

"She disappeared."

"Disappeared? Stop! That puts me in mind that I have an idea some one is in one of the cells close at hand to this one. It may be your young friend, for all we know."

"Oh! if it should be, what a joy it will be to me to rescue her from death and despair!"

"Come on, Alicia; we will see to this at once. This way. And now while I am here, I will not leave one of these cells unsearched; and, if I can help it, there shall be no victim of Catholicism left in this terrible abode but those who are obstinately foolish enough to stay in spite of reason."

At this moment the confessor kicked loudly upon the door of his cell; but so thick was the door, and so heavily plated with iron on both sides, secured by nuts and screws, that the blows, although, no doubt, they were given with great force, only sounded hollow and muffled.

"He thinks I am gone," said Claude. "It will be, perhaps, as well to undeceive him on that head."

Duval, in order to let the priest know that he was still there, gave the door a great kick, and then all was quiet within the cell. It was tolerably clear that the holy father had an opinion it was better not to provoke his captor too far.

"Now, Alicia," said Claude Duval, "let us commence an examination of the cells; and when that is concluded, we will consider what is best to be done in the way of escape."

The cells were easily got at; but in none of them did they find any prisoner, till they came to one from which there issued a scream, as of some person in great agony, as Claude took down the iron bar that held the door shut.

"Some one is here," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, yes! If it should be Margaret, how happy I shall be that she, too, will be rescued by you from this dreadful place."

"Is Margaret the name of the young novice who spoke kindly to you?"

"Yes; oh, yes."

Claude Duval flung the door of the cell wide open, and then a voice cried out in a tone of pain—

"Oh, spare me!—spare me, I beseech you! Only let me go forth into the world, and I will say nothing of the terrors of this house. I swear that much to you by all that I hold sacred!"

"Margaret—Margaret," cried Alicia, "it is I! Oh! come forth and let me embrace you, my dear friend, and weep that you have suffered for my sake!"

Claude Duval took the light from the hands of Alicia, who then sprang into

the cell, and folded a young girl in her arms, who sobbed aloud from joy at finding that it was not the abbess or the confessor who had sought her cell.

"Oh, Alicia, Alicia," she said, "it was old Sister Bertha who listened to what I said to you, and then informed the abbess, who ordered me to be imprisoned in the cells. But how is it that you are able to come to me?"

"I owe that dear privilege to this gentleman," said Alicia, pointing to Claude Duval. "He will save us both, and rescue us from this place."

"I will try to do so," said Claude. "But time's precious. Let me ask of you both again if you think that it would be possible for us to leave the convent now at once without observation?"

"No—no," they both said.

"By force, then, could it be done?"

"Ah, no," said Alicia. "I think not. We could help you but little; and the vindictive rage of the elder nuns would make each a fury."

"Well," said Claude, "listen to me, then, both of you. By exerting a little patience, I can bring a force into the convent which will put all resistance out of the question. Can you bear with this place for a few hours longer, while I go for such aid? I have no less than three friends upon whom I can fully rely. The abbess, as yet, thinks me in her power; and all I have to do is to make to her a sufficient excuse to leave the convent, and then come back again with my friends over the wall of the garden. I think I can induce the abbess to tell me how that can be done with safety. What is your reply to this?"

It was not without some reluctance that Margaret and Alicia agreed to this arrangement of Duval's; but it did not require much reflection to convince them both that he was quite right in it, and that it was far better to suffer a little further the inconvenience of being in that dismal portion of the convent than to sacrifice possibly all chances of escape.

Besides, as Claude Duval at least found it, it was hardly possible for them to do otherwise than adopt his views.

"You have only both of you," he said, "to tell me that you prefer risking everything in an attempt now at once to leave the convent to any delay, and I will try it. I am well armed. I can provide each of you with fire-arms, and we might possibly succeed."

"No, no," said Alicia, "we will wait."

"We will wait," said Margaret, as she embraced Alicia, and hid her sweet tearful face in her bosom. "God bless you, dear friend, and prosper you. We will wait in patience."

Claude Duval felt deeply affected by the conduct of these two young girls in such cruel circumstances as they were placed. The manner in which they had such great confidence in him, a total stranger to them, would at any time, even if he had not had the precise resolution to do, have inspired him to do wonders in their defence.

"Trust to me, implicitly," he said. "I will soon return to you both, you may depend; and until I do, I recommend you to make the time you have to pass together as light as possible by such discourse as will engender hopes of happy days in store."

"We will—we will."

"Do so; and now farewell for a time. The lady abbess, if I did not soon make my appearance would, I feel convinced, seek me even in this spot."

This was an idea that so much alarmed Alicia and her young friend, the novice, that they were both as anxious for Duval to go as they had been for him to stay.



## CHAPTER CCCLVII.

THE LADY ABBESS IS QUITE DELIGHTED WITH DUVAL'S CONDUCT.

Go at once," said Alicia. "We will not attempt even to thank you for what you have already done; but the time may come when, with minds more free from the shadow of present evils, we may be able to do so."

Claude, with an assuring smile to them, waived his hand; and then, with the lamp in his hand, without which he felt that he could never have found his way to the chapel again, he took his route back to that portion of the conventual edifice.

It was sorely against his feelings and inclinations to leave those two young creatures in so gloomy a region; but the more anxious he felt for their release, the more he decided that it should depend wholly upon himself.

The reasoning by which he brought himself to temporise with this adventure, and to act with a greater degree of caution and forethought towards danger than he had ever done in his life before, simply arose from the full consciousness he had that if he, unaided, were to attempt the escape of the two young girls, and if he was to be killed in that attempt, their fates would be sealed.

Such a contingency might happen if he were to make the attempt alone; but if there were several with him, the death of one would not be a death-blow to the whole party.

This was the feeling with which he now made his way back to the convent chapel, and to the lady abess, to give her a report of his proceedings as regarded the holy father confessor.

That that amiable lady was waiting with no small amount of impatience for news of the death of the confessor, he did not for a moment doubt.

At any other time, alone as he now was, and without the dread of any interference with his life and liberty, Claude Duval would have been glad to have taken the opportunity of examining more minutely the underground place in which he was; but he felt that the very existence of the two young creatures who had placed implicit reliance upon his honour, and his exertions, were at stake, and therefore he would not, although sorely tempted so to do, tarry by the way.

"I may yet have," thought he, "another, and a still better opportunity of discovering some of the mysteries of this monastery, and if I do I will take good care to avail myself of it most thoroughly."

As he passed the mysterious-looking wall in the court-yard adjoining the cell, he cast down it a shuddering glance, and he thought how convenient it must be to such an establishment to have such a place in which to get rid of the remains of those who become obnoxious, either by their obstancy in clinging to their earthly possessions, or by their virtue to the authorities of the convent.

With such thoughts as these busy at his brain, Claude Duval made his way rapidly towards the flight of steps that led up to the chapel of the establishment.

Nothing happened to disturb the even tenor of his way, as he went, and he reached the little door that opened into the chapel, close to one of the confessionals without hearing a sound.

To open the door was the work of a moment, and then he was about to step into the chapel, when a hand was laid upon his arm, and a voice cried to him—

"Hush! Not a word."

It was the voice of the Lady Abbes.

Before Claude Duval could reply, a loud shriek burst upon the still air, and then as the Lady Abbes pulled him into the chapel, and without any ceremony dashed him headlong into the confessional, he saw a flash of light, and heard the confused tread of feet.



CLAUDE, DISGUISED AS A LAWYER, INTRODUCED TO THE LADY ABBESS.

It was a moment or two before Duval could make up his mind as to how much or how little, he was fully interested in what was going on; but in the course of a short time he found out pretty well what was proceeding, although the cause of it was to him a mystery.

There was a piece of gauze over one of the panels of the confessional, through which no one could see from without, because to do so was to look for light into the absolute darkness of the confessional; but nothing was easier than for Claude Duval to see through it, from the obscurity of the place in which he was into the chapel; it was quite light now from the flare of some half dozen torches.

The scene that presented itself to him was now a most wild and singular one.

Advancing from the further end of the chapel, through a doorway which connected with a passage that lead to the cells of the nuns, came about twenty of the elder sisterhood, dragging with them a young novice, whose age could not have been above nineteen. Among all that dragged her along, Claude Duval could see none of the younger sisterhood of the convent,

The Lady Abbess stood upon the steps of the altar, and kept calling out in perfectly demoniac accents,—

“To the cells with her! To the cells with her! She is possessed by a fiend! Drag her along! To the cells! She shall never see the light of day again!”

The young girl shrieked aloud, and then some of the old nuns about her dealt her several blows upon the face with their fists, and others tore her cheeks with their nails.

They seemed delighted, did those old hags, who no doubt had been compelled from their vices to retire from a world that would no longer tolerate them, to have it in their power to inflict injury upon that young and helpless creature.

Without being so fair and engaging in her beauty as Alicia, this young girl was still of very prepossessing appearances, and delicate form. It was quite out of the question for her to do any good by attempting to defend herself against the host of foes that surrounded her.

And yet with the feeling of desperation which, no doubt, the knowledge of the fate to which she was about to be consigned engendered in her mind, she struggled to the extent of her ability against the old nuns, and several of them were hurt in the great squabble.

“Drag her along!” screamed the abbess. “Oh, fools that you are! will one girl, a mere child, get the better of you all?”

Upon this the old hags surrounded her like furies, and in a few moments there was hardly a rag of clothing left upon the novice.

“Mercy!—Oh, mercy!” she cried.

“That will do,” said the abbess. “Place her in one of the cells, and we will see how she looks and thinks at this time to-morrow night. We will give her twenty-fours for reflection. Ha! ha!”

“Help!—Oh, help!” screamed the girl.

“Ha! ha!” laughed the Lady Abbess. “You would hardly believe it, my dear sisters, but this child came to me and demanded to be let out of the convent, and to go to her friends; because she said she had been hidden in the chapel, and had seen me in here with a man, and had heard me say strange things to him.”

“Oh, mother!” cried all the old nuns.

“She is mad!” said one. “Mad!”

“Yes, dear sister Margaret, she is mad,” said the Lady Abbess; “but if she got out into the world, the are people—enemies, I mean, of our holy faith—who would pretend to believe her, particularly wretches connected with newspapers, so drag her along.”

“Oh, Heaven!” cried the young girl; “is there no hope? Is there, indeed, no hope for me in this world?”

“None,” said the abbess.

Oh, how gladly would Claude Duval, if he could have but for one moment thought it prudent to do so with reference to the safety of others as well as that of the young girl herself, have rushed out of the confessional and told her that he would protect her; but the idea of having, single handed, to fight the whole convent was too much of a good thing, and he kept quiet from the conviction that he would be able soon to rescue this young novice as well as Alicia and her young friend.

The abbess herself descended from the elevated station she had taken on the altar steps, and opened the door leading to the vaults.

“Away with her,” she cried, “away with her!”

The nuns dragged the girl along, but what with the ill-usage she had received

and the exhaustion consequent upon her struggle, she fainted, so they had to carry her through the doorway, which they did with as little care of whether they hurt or not as if she had been a bundle of hay.

As the young creature was carried through the door-way the abbess struck her several blows with her clenched hand, and stamped with rage at the idea that she had been retorted to by one so young and so bold.

Gradually the old nuns, with the girl in their charge, disappeared down the staircase, and then all was still, and the abbess after one hasty glance around her opened the door of the confessional and said, in a low tone of voice—

“Mr. White—Mr. White?”

“Yes,” said Claude, “I am here.”

“Come out then and leave the chapel, you know the way?”

“Where to?”

“To my room.”

“Oh, yes, I think I do, my charming madam.”

“Stop.”

“At your pleasure. What would you say?”

“I cannot control my impatience to know if Father Garvey is at all likely to trouble us more?”

“Not at all. You may take my word for it, madam, that you need be under no uneasiness at all regarding the pious father.”

“What? You then accomplished your purpose in the vaults?”

“I did.”

“You are a man after my own heart—go at once to my room, I beg of you. The night is still young, and I will come to you soon. I do not want the old nuns to see you here. Oh, what a narrow escape I have had.”

“As how?”

“That abominable novice, she actually saw you here, and heard all that passed, and if it had not been for her own simplicity she might at some inopportune moment have escaped, and so brought, by her tales, ruin upon us all.”

“What a pity!”

“A pity! It would have been destruction worse than death itself to me. But fortune has favoured us, Mr. White, and all is well. You shall tell me all that passed.”

“Nay, you know that best.”

“You misunderstand me. I allude to Garvey’s visit to the cells. Oh, the villain! How well I knew that he would make such a visit. But go to my room now at once and wait for me there. You will find the way; I must stay here till the sisters come up from the vaults again. Go at once, for I hear them.”

Duval felt that it was anything but politic to remain longer in the chapel, for of all things that he had now to dread, so far as the safety of the persons in the vaults was concerned, was that the abbess should have any suspicions concerning his intentions.

“I go,” he said, “and await you with impatience.”

“You will not have to wait long.”

Claude Duval glided past the altar, and, without much difficulty, he found the door in the wall which led by the secret and circuitous passage to the lady abbess’s room.

The determination of Claude Duval was now made to leave the convent as quickly as possible, and seek his friends, informing them of the state of affairs there, and getting them to make such arrangements with him as should enable him and them to make a vigorous systematic attempt to rescue the unfortunates who were in the vaults.

That there were three now to rescue from that horrible state of imprisonment Claude Duval knew, and that there might be yet more to be found was a likely enough proposition, reasoning upon the facts that he already knew.

With such thoughts he hurried to the abbess’s room.

## CHAPTER CCCLVII.

## CLAUDE DUVAL LEAVES THE CONVENT AND REPORTS PROGRESS TO HIS FRIENDS.

It was not very likely that in the state of mind he was now in Claude Duval would pay much attention to the little disagreeables of the narrow passage in which he found himself after leaving the chapel by the secret door at the back of the altar; but he found himself in the course of a few moments amid such a cloud of dust, and so completely enveloped in spiders' webs, that he paused in surprise.

"Surely," he thought, "the lady abbess comes much too often along this passage for it to be in this condition."

The further he advanced the more untrodden and strange did the place appear, until at length he found his course arrested by a door, such as he was quite certain he had not seen before.

This at once led Claude Duval to the conclusion that he had taken some wrong turning, and had wandered away from the route that would lead him direct to the room of the abbess.

Such a state of things under existing circumstances was not exactly what he could have wished, although as regarded the grand notion of making what discoveries he could in the convent it might be all very well.

"I must retrace my steps," said Duval, "for this will never do. If anything more than another will arouse the suspicions of the abbess, it will be not finding me in her room when she herself repairs to it."

It was not difficult at all to get into the right track again. Claude Duval found that he had, without thinking of it, taken a turn to the left instead of going straight on, and so found his way into that unused portion of the secret passage that terminated at the door which had aroused him to a sense of his error, and barred his further progress.

The other portion of the passage was clear enough from any of the encumbrances in the shape of dust and spiders' webs with which the unused portion was so filled up, and in the course of a few moments more Claude Duval was in the abbess's room.

It is frequently from some trifling mistake, though, that we elaborate a new idea, and so now was it in this instance with Claude Duval. He thought it highly probable that the door he had come to, and which had stopped his course in the direction he had inadvertently taken, might possibly, if it were opened, disclose some other of the secrets of the convent.

"I will not forget that there is such a door," he said, "and I can reserve the knowledge of it for future consideration."

Being now alone in the abbess's room, Claude Duval had an opportunity of looking about him, which, had she been there, he could hardly have availed himself of with such facility.

He was quite surprised when he came to look closely at the furniture and fittings of the apartment to see the amount of wealth and luxury that it really contained within its not very large dimensions.

The chairs were inlaid with plates of gold, silver, and pearl, and the hangings were all of the most rich and costly description. Upon a beaufet in one corner there were cups and tankards of gold and silver, and upon every table and shelf in the room there was quite a crowd of little objects of art and taste, all of the most costly character.

"These are the spoils of monasteries," said Claude Duval to himself. "I wonder whether it would be safe now to lay hands on a few of these relics of the past?"

There was one square box of solid gold that struck the eye of Claude Duval.



In the centre of the lid of it there shone a ruby of great size and beauty, and an inscription upon the side of the box was as follows—

"HERE ENSHRINED IS A NAIL OF THE TOE OF THE HOLY ST. ANTHONY."

"Confound his toe," said Claude Duval. "I should like the box very much. Ah! I hear a footstep."

The panel in the wall opened, and with a flushed countenance the abbess made her appearance in the room.

"Oh, you are here?" she said!

"Certainly," replied Claude. "The way was short and easy. You expected me here, did you not?"

"To be sure I did. I am fatigued."

"Pray be seated," said Claude Duval, as he very politely handed her a chair.

"Thank you. My malediction light upon that wretch!"

"What wretch, may I ask?"

"Oh, you saw her. The novice I allude to, who is now safe in the vaults. Ha! ha! She will not be very likely to see daylight again."

"Serve her right, too."

"You really think so, Mr. White?"

"Of course I do. The girl is a fool."

"Ah, she is—she is. Why, Mr. White, I do, indeed, begin to think that you are a person after my own heart."

"I am sorry for that."

"Sorry—sorry?"

"Yes, that you only begin to think so. I really had hopes that you had settled that in your mind to your complete satisfaction a long time ago."

"Well—well, perhaps I have; but what made you call the novice a fool?"

"Just because I think everybody is a fool who sees the way to any enjoyment, and don't at once take advantage of it. She saw that if she had chosen she might have led a placid enough life here; but with her stupid prejudice, which, forsooth, she will call virtue, she would not do so; and behold what is the result."

"True—true," cried the abbess, clapping her hands together. "You are a dear man, Mr. White."

Claude Duval bowed in reply to the compliment. Of course he had said what he had for the express purpose of making the abbess thoroughly and entirely trust him, so that he might with a greater certainty succeed in defeating her in her abominable cruelties and deceptions.

"Go to that beaufet," she said. "You will see a long-necked bottle there with some yellow wax round the cork."

"With all the pleasure in the world."

"It is some of the finest wine in the world even now. You will find glasses there. I feel that I want something to refresh me."

"No doubt of it," said Duval, as he coolly knocked the top of the neck of the bottle off against the edge of the table, and then poured out a glass of rich sparkling Burgundy for the lady abbess, and a glass for himself—"I have no doubt you are fatigued."

"I am, indeed."

She drank the wine at a draught; and as Claude Duval felt quite sure that no trick in the way of drugging was played with that bottle, at all events, he followed her example.

The wine was truly delicious.

"This wine," he said, "merits all the encomiums you can possibly pass upon it, madam."

"No doubt of that. I expect that it is exceedingly fine. But now tell me how you sped with Father Garvey. Keep nothing from me. I would like to hear all that passed."

"I can have no motive in concealing anything from you. You shall hear all, and I think you will then admit that no one can possibly have more disposition than I have to do you all the service you can require of me."

"Go on—go on."

"You gave me a poniard, and you told me to follow him. I did so follow him, and as I went I had twenty opportunities if I had chosen to embrace them of compassing the rascal's destruction."

"Why did you not—oh, why did you not?"

"I thought it more consistent with your wishes and your intentions that I should follow him and see what he was about. I knew that at any time I could at once spring upon him and do the deed."

"Ah, true; that was quite right. I had forgotten. My head is rather in a whirl to-night. Go on."

"I followed him, then, to the gloomy passage at the foot of the secret stairs, and then he traversed a rather large open space."

"Yes—yes; I know it well,"

The abbess shuddered as she spoke, and Claude Duval continued—

"He reached the cells or dungeons, call them what you will, and opening one of them he began a threatening discourse with Alicia."

"Ah, as I suspected. The villain!"

"I listened for a little time, just sufficient to hear from him the most atrocious calumnies against you, and the vilest proposals to the young girl; and then at the moment that he was threatening her with force I interfered."

"You killed him!" cried the abbess, springing to her feet; "tell me that you killed him!"

"Why he would not be quiet, and, under such circumstances, I can safe'y say that he lies in one of the cells now, and will trouble you no more."

"'Tis well: I breathe freely now."

She resumed her seat again, and then, after a few moments' silence, she said, suddenly—

"Did you speak to Alicia?"

"I did."

"Ah! and what did you say to her?"

"Bearing in mind the object of my visit here, and the duty that I owe to the Beachem family, I thought it was a good opportunity of asking her to sign the deed that will divide her fortune equally between the church and her dear relations."

"Well, so it was. What said she?"

"I think from what she said, and from the fright she experienced by the threats of Father Garvey, that we shall succeed with her; and the sooner we place the documents before her the better."

"This very hour! Do it now!"

"There is only one little objection."

"Objection! What objection—what possible objection can there be?"

"Just this, that I have not the deed with me. Do not look surprised. It is not far off; I left it, I find, in my travelling valise at the inn at Ealing where I put up before coming on here to the convent. My own feeling is that the best thing I can possibly do is to go now at once and get that important document, and lay it before Alicia to sign, while fright at Father Garvey and gratitude to me occupy her mind."

"This is very provoking," said the abbess.

"It is so."

She played with her fingers up on the table, and looked at Claude Duval for a few moments in silence, and then she said—

"Well, well, it cannot be helped, now; go you must for this deed. The Beachems are too good friends to us for us to neglect their interests. I think with you that the sooner the girl is made, by fair means or by foul, to sign the deed, the better."

"Decidedly so."

"And then, Mr. White, I do hope that you and I will understand each other, and that your visits here will be as frequent as your wishes may dictate."

"I should stay here altogether, then," said Claude, "if that were to be the case."

"Ah, flatterer!"

"No, indeed, I do not flatter. But I may truly say that the man who can really tell himself that he has awakened an interest in the breast of such a person as yourself, with such a world of attractions, may well feel flattered."

"Are you sincere?"

"Oh, on my honour!"

"Well, then, go and get the deed, and then—oh! come back to me as soon as you can, for the time will feel very long till I see you again. Now that I have got rid of that detestable Father Garvey, you do not know how truly I feel for you."

"Yes," thought Claude, "you have, as you think, got him murdered, and you are willing that I should step into his situation. I quite understand you, my lady."

## CHAPTER CCCLVIII.

### THE LADY ABBESS IS COMPLETELY DECEIVED BY CLAUDE DUVAL.

UNDER no other circumstances than those now present would the lady abbess of the convent have been taken in by Claude Duval; but it is no uncommon phenomenon in human nature for the passions completely to blind the judgment for a time.

The fact is, she was, we were going to say, in love with Claude Duval, only that we feel it would be a desecration of the word, love, to apply it to the coarse and despicable vices of the abbess.

No doubt, however, can exist but that it was the existence of the strong feeling of partiality for Claude Duval that had the effect of making her the easy victim of the deceit that was being practised by him.

Although she had given him leave to go to Ealing and get the deed, yet she did not seem to like him to go out of her sight; and, with quite a die-away sort of look, she said—

"You will soon be back?—you will really soon be back, now?"

"Certainly I will. Of course."

"Ah, you are a dear man!"

"Thank you. I will go at once; because, you see, the sooner I do so the sooner I shall be back."

"Yes, of course—of course. I assure you that all the advantages that the late Father Garvey possessed you shall possess."

"That is very delightful to think of," said Duval.

"Ah, yes, you would say so if you knew all."

"All? Do I not know all?"

"I don't think you do. Father Garvey was not a priest."

"Indeed?"

"No. But he was a friend of mine, and you may be that friend, too, if you like."

"If I like? Ah, can you doubt it?"

"Very well; then, you will understand that when all this affair of the Beachems with the girl, Alicia, is settled, and you come here regularly three or four times a week, which I hope you will, I shall introduce you as the confessor of the novices and the young boarders."

"Oh!"

"You understand me, don't you?"

"Hang me if I do," said Claude Duval.

"Oh, how dull you are! As their confessor, you know, you will have so many nice little opportunities of gathering accounts from your situation; and in the way in which you can impose penances, and so on, you can, if you are so minded, rather enjoy the situation and the power you will possess—eh? Do you understand me now?"

"Well, I think I do."

"You think you do? Bah! you know you do. Well—well, we will talk of all that another time; but if you like, you can have good sport in a convent. Father Garvey had."

"Lucky dog!"

"Poh!—poh! Now go and get the document which you ought to have had with you, and be back again as quickly as you can. Stop! I have a thought."

"What is it?"

"Why, I will put you in the way of reaching this room without the necessity of ringing at the outer gate of it, leaving word with the portress, and any one that you may meet, that you are here."

"That will be a great advantage," said Claude; "and I assure you, that such a mode of reaching the convent will have the effect of increasing the number of my visits threefold."

"Will it, indeed? Then I am glad I thought of it. Follow me, now, and I will show you the way. It is a route that has not been used for some time now; for although Father Garvey knew it, he took a superstitious fear of it, and of late—I mean for the last year or so—he always came by the regular porter's gate. You, I don't think, are the sort of man to be afraid of a ghost, are you?"

"Certainly not."

"Follow me, then. This way."

The abbess led the way, carrying a lamp in her hand, into the same passage that led to the chapel; but instead of going there, she turned off into the very same portion of the passage into which Claude Duval so recently had turned by mistake.

Upon reaching the iron door which had stopped his further progress, she said—

"Your key which I gave you will open this door. Have you it about you?"

"Certainly. I would not part with it on any account."

"Try it, then."

The lock of the iron door from disuse was rather rusty and difficult to turn; but in a few minutes Claude Duval succeeded in opening it, and the door creaked upon its hinges as he opened it. All seemed involved in impenetrable darkness beyond it.

"There is a staircase," said the lady abbess. "Follow me, and mind how you go."

She preceded Claude Duval, and he counted that they descended no less a number than thirty stairs, and then they came to another door very similar to the one which was at the head of the steps.

Claude Duval opened this door likewise with his master-key, and then a sudden rush of cold air blew out the lamp.

The darkness was most excessive at that moment; but the abbess said in a low tone of voice—

"Wait a little. This darkness is the gloom of contrast. When we get a little round to it you will see pretty well enough about you. I ought to have left the lamp in the passage."

"Where are we?" said Claude.

"In the convent garden now. You will have to go along one of the gloomiest walks of it, and it will lead you to a portion of the wall, over which you will be



SISTER MARTHA RECEIVES HER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE LADY ABBESS.

able to get with ease, and it will conduct you to a lane. By turning to your right there you will reach the high road again with ease."

"This, then, will be my route?" said Claude.

"Yes; but let me impress upon you the necessity of not straying from it upon any account, for if you do, you will be des'royed!"

"Destroyed! How?"

"There are pitfalls, and there are traps and spring guns; so that certain death would be the result of any one unacquainted with the route attempting to get to the convent in this way."

"I will be careful."



"And they do say," added the abbess, with a shudder, and with a slight change of tone—"they do say—but that is all a delusion—that at times an apparition has been seen in this gloomy portion of the premises."

"You may depend," said Claude, "that it was the guilty and the cowardly fancy of Father Garvey that occasioned such an appearance."

"It may be so."

"At all events, I am not afraid of it; for I swear to you that if a legion of ghosts were to take up their stations here, nothing of the sort should prevent me from returning to the convent as quickly as I could with what I go now to seek."

"Hush! speak lower. I wonder how I shall find my way back in the dark? It is very provoking to have let the light go out."

"I can relieve you from that difficulty," said Claude Duval. "I have the means of relighting it about me."

"Ah, have you so?"

"Yes, some phosphorus matches, which I luckily have, will put that difficulty at rest. Where is the lamp?"

"Here—here."

Claude Duval lit the lamp for the abbess, who took care to place it on one of the stairs out of the draught of the open door.

"I thank you for this accommodation," said the abbess. "I own that I have no liking to traverse any of the gloomy passages of the convent in the dark. You are better provided than I expected."

"It is a great satisfaction to me," said Duval, "that I am able to be useful to so very charming a person."

"Go to—you don't mean what you say, I'm sure!"

"Indeed, but I do. Let me, however, go as soon as possible for the deed that I want, if it be only for the one reason that I shall the sooner be back again."

"Go, then—go."

"Will you not show me the way?"

The abbess hesitated a moment, probably from the distaste she had to come back again alone through the dismal garden walk in the dark, but it was only for a moment, and then she said in a firm voice—

"Yes, I will see you safe to the garden-wall. Come on with me. This is the way we must take. Do not deviate to the right or to the left more than you can possibly help, for there is danger in so doing."

Claude Duval did not implicitly believe all that the abbess said about the pitfalls, and the steel-traps, and the spring-guns in the convent garden. As regarded the guns, they would require the charge to be too often removed in consequence of the damp that would get to the powder to make it at all probable that they were used in such a place, so he looked upon the whole as a fable, though he did not say so to the abbess.

The soft rain that had so recently fallen had made the vegetation in the convent garden smell exceedingly fresh and pleasant, but the path upon which they were was so completely covered in, that it would have taken a rain of many hours' duration before it could have found its way to it.

On one side of this path there was a row of cypress-trees, planted very closely to each other, and of great height. On the other side there were elms, together with some very fine specimens of the mountain ash, and the branches of both species of trees had been artificially bent over towards the cypresses, so as to form quite a canopy overhead.

It was beneath this all but impenetrable shade, then, that Claude Duval slowly paced with the wicked and unscrupulous abbess of the convent.

The abbess had been right in saying that the intensity of the darkness was owing to the sudden contrast from the extinguishing of the light, for every moment enabled them to see better about them, and by the time they reached the

convent-wall there was no longer any difficulty in distinguishing large objects, at all events, one from the other.

"This is the spot," said the abbess. "You will find that there are branches removed in some places and protruding in others on this side of the wall, which will enable you to reach the top, and when you get there, you will creep along till you come to the trunk of a chestnut-tree. Do you attend?"

"Yes. The trunk of a chestnut-tree."

"Exactly. When you get to that spot you will find that there is the same mode of descending the wall to the lane."

"Which way do I take the route to the chestnut-tree? Right or left?"

"To your left. I was rather confused, or I should have told you that. Now, go on as quickly as you can, and believe me I shall expect you with impatience."

"Not more so than I shall look forward to my return."

"How long do you really think you shall be now?"

Claude Duval thought there would be no great difficulty in getting back with his friends in an hour from that time, but he did not by any means wish the lady abbess to be upon the look-out for him, so he said after a little consideration—

"I do not think it possible for me to be upon this spot again in less than two hours and a half from now."

"That is a long, long time."

"It is, but I cannot help it. May I hope that you will sit up till my return?"

"I shall certainly do so. What is the time now?"

Even as the abbess spoke, the church clock at Ealing struck the hour of one. Claude Duval had thought it later, and he was agreeably surprised to find that it was not so. The fact is, we are accustomed to think of time with reference to incidents that take place in it, rather than to its actual progress; but the events which have taken us some time to detail as taking place in the convent, had in reality proceeded with great quickness.

"It is but one, you hear," said Claude Duval, as he approached the wall, and began its ascent; "you may expect me before four at the latest."

"I will be here at this spot," said the abbess, "at three, and I will wait for you from that hour; so you, knowing that, will be quicker if you can."

"I will. Farewell for the present."

Claude Duval obeyed the directions of the abbess, and in a few moments he was quite safe in the lane that ran along the side wall of the garden of the convent.

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## CHAPTER CCCLIX.

### DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE CELLS OF THE CONVENT.

THE fact which the abbess had taken care to announce, that from the hour of three she meant to be upon the spot where she and Duval had parted, waiting for him, had in one sense all the effect she intended it to have, namely, in inducing him to make greater speed.

She did not think, though, that that speed would be for the purpose of getting back again a full hour before the time mentioned.

After a glance around him, to be certain that he was going in the right direction, Duval set off at a swinging kind of trot. He knew that, in the long run, he should get over the ground that lay between him and his friends much easier at some such pace as that than as if he had made a violent rush at once, and so lost breath and strength in the effort.

Nothing occurred to interrupt Claude Duval in the least, and he reached the outskirts of the cluster of trees where he had left his little party in perfect safety. Just as he did so, a voice called out—

“Who goes there?”

It was the voice of Jack, and Claude immediately replied to it—

“Hilloa, Jack, is that you?”

“Ah, it is Claude!” said Jack. “A thousand times welcome back again, and in safety too.”

“Yes, Jack, all’s right. Where are the others?”

“Close at hand.”

“That will do. Lead me to them. There is no time to lose, I can assure you now.”

“This way, then,” said Jack. “I was keeping watch here, that was all.”

“For anything special, Jack?”

“Why, I hardly know what to say to that, Claude. The fact is, that servant of Mr. Field’s has been here, and had a quarrel with his master, who sent him off, and I don’t like the fellow.”

“Dennis, you mean?”

“Yes. That is his name. He don’t seem at all to like what he suspects is going on.”

“Confound his impudence! Upon what ground does he presume to dislike it?”

“That I cannot tell you; but I meant, if he tried to interfere with us any further, to give him a hint that he would get into danger by so doing, if he did not mind what he was about.”

“And so he will too. In good truth, I would not advise him to be too troublesome.”

Young Mr. Field and Dick Turpin were close at hand, and Claude Duval was very soon with them. He rapidly related all that had passed at the convent, and then added—

“You see from this there is no time to lose.”

“You saw my Alicia?” cried Mr. Field. “Oh, tell me, did she look ill? Was she dying?”

“Dying? Nonsense! What put that into your head, Mr. Field?”

“I thought—that is, I am afraid—that—that—”

“Come, come, you must have no fears. I assure you that all will be well, if you will come with us.”

“Take me where you will, so that it lead to Alicia, and I am with you, even if death were certain to be my doom afterwards.”

“There will be no occasion, my good friend, for any such sacrifice, I assure you,” said Claude Duval. “I have every reason to believe what I sincerely hope will come to pass, and that is, that you will soon see your Alicia quite free.”

“Oh, joyous thought!”

“Well, it is so. But now listen to me, all of you, and don’t say one word till I have finished my story.”

They listened with silent attention to what Claude Duval said now, as though their very lives had depended upon every word that fell from his lips, and then, with the feeling strongly upon his mind that there was really not a minute of time to throw away, Claude Duval, with wonderful perspicuity and strictness, related the heads of all that had happened at the convent.

At its conclusion young Mr. Field made a spring forward, and clasped Claude Duval in his arms, exclaiming—

“My friend, my brother! oh, how can I ever hope to repay a hundredth part of the deep obligations that I owe to you!”

“Don’t think of it,” said Claude; “it is not worth thinking of in that way.”

“You are too good—too generous!”

“No at all, Believe me, that it is a great pleasure to me to rescue Alicia and he other victims of priestly and conventual tyranny and oppression from the

dreadful state in which they are in the convent; so now, without any more ado about it, let me beg of you all that you will follow me."

"We will—we will."

"Hush!" said Jack. "Ah, I have you."

Jack made a dash among the trees, and there was a howl as of some one in great distress and trouble, and Jack called out—

"No, you rascal, you don't get away from me quite so easy, I assure you. Come on—come on, or must I provide you with a pistol bullet in your head?"

"Oh, good jontilmen," said a voice, "have mercy upon me, I'm as innocent as a babby that's never to be born."

"Why, it's Dennis again," said Mr. Field.

"Confound him!" cried Turpin, "what the devil shall we do with that fellow? He positively haunts us."

"And for no good, I expect," said Claude Duval.

"Here he is," said Jack, as he dragged Dennis forward, "here is the rascal who, I suspect, has been playing the spy upon us all along. Now, Mr. Field, I have but one piece of advice to offer you regarding this man."

"What is it?"

"To hang him out of hand at once. I feel quite certain if you don't something serious will happen all through his pig-headed stupidity and his treachery. Hang him, say I, and then he will be off your mind."

"I don't know what to do with him, but I'm afraid hanging him would not have the effect of taking him off my mind."

"I'm afraid not," said Claude.

"Oh, master," whined Dennis, "it's yourself that knows I'm the faithful Dennis, any way, and my ancestors were kings of old Ireland, bedad an' sure they were, and it's meself that would scorn the dirty action."

"I don't see that, Dennis, when you have not scorned to disobey my orders and to turn spy."

"Is it disobey your orders that I did?"

"Surely so. Did not I tell you to go to the Lion Hotel at Charing Cross and there to wait for me?"

"The Lion was it, sir?"

"You know well that it was, you rascal."

"Faith, sir, then wasn't I going to that same Lion when this pretty-looking gentlemen came at me like a tiger and stopped me?"

"But you were hiding and listening."

"Is it listening you say, sir?"

"To be sure I do, and you know you are guilty."

"Is it guilty you say, sir?"

"This is insolence," said Claude Duval, impatiently; "I cannot and will not waste time upon this fellow. I have quite made up my mind that in the affair we have in hand he cannot be connected. The only thing we can do with him short of taking his life is to tie him up here until we come back."

"Oh, sir, and sure you wouldn't think of tying up the faithful Dennis? It's myself that will go with the master, and fight like a bravo!"

"Fight the praste, do you mean, Dennis?" said Turpin.

"Is it the praste you say, sir?"

"I do."

"Glory be to the saints and the praste! I shouldn't like to fight the praste. It isn't the praste that can do anything wrong. If I said or did anything against the praste, bedad he'd may be put the curse upon me, and then what would I do?"

"Just so," said Claude Duval. "Secure this fellow, Jack, as effectually as you can. I must be off. I am getting mad at the delay."

Dennis raised a howl as Jack tied him to a tree in such a manner, that escape, unless some one came to his aid, was out of the question, and then saluting him

with three or four hard slashes across the back with a riding whip, Jack said—

“Now, Dennis, if you wish to preserve yourself in a whole skin you will be quiet, and wait here till we come back, for so sure as I am a living man, if you make any disturbance I will hunt you out and shoot you.”

“On, on,” cried Claude Duval. “Follow me.”

They all darted from the wood now, and left Dennis to himself, who after making all the efforts he could to free himself, and finding that by so doing he only made the rope with which Jack had bound him sink deeper into his flesh, he set to blubbing like a great school boy.

“Oh, dear, if I could only get away; but I can't. It's the blessed praste that they may do a mischief too. What if he did go to the young lady, and wish to be kind to her? He was the praste! What if he does take just the drop too much of wine? He is the praste! What if he does put them as won't do just what he wants 'em into a cell, and keeps 'em on bread and water, and now and then drops one or two of them into a well—isn't he the praste? The Lord be good to him! Sure, judgment will come upon them if they meddle with the praste!”

Such was Dennis's idea of the power and the influence of the priesthood of his creed; and we doubt not but that even now, when knowledge and civilization have made such rapid strides among all other classes of the community, the besotted ignorance and degraded subserviency of the lower order of Irish to their priests remains much the same as it did in the time of Gentleman Jack.]

We do not mean to say but that there are good priests. We know that there are men in that capacity who are a credit to human nature, and the blessing of all around them; but they are the exceptions unfortunately; and as in the case of absolute monarchy, which is the very best form of government under the sun provided you can get a good and exalted despot, so is it the most hazardous, on account of the rarity of such characters.

For good or for evil, the catholic priesthood wield an awful power. Pity it is that the evil seems so largely to predominate, that the lesson taught to human nature by it is, to trust no human being with any such authority lest it be cruelly abused.

The reader will pardon us for this little digression, as the subject seemed in an imperative manner to call for it; and we now resume our narrative in its regular course.

Having so recently threaded the road from the convent wall to the little wood in which he had left his friends, Claude Duval was well qualified to take them back to the convent again by the most favourable route.

His impatience to get back again had all its effect upon those who were with him, and it was astonishing in how short a space of time they got back to the lane, from one side of which rose the wall of the convent.

They were rather better pleased with the soft rain that now fell, and with the dense clouds that obscured the sky, than as if the night had been one of clearness and of beauty, for the dingy aspect of everything had the effect of completely enshrouding them in obscurity.

“There is the wall,” said Claude Duval, “and I think we are close to the spot at which it will be quite safe to scale it.”

Duval led the way, and with that strength and agility for which he was so remarkable, and which upon more than one occasion had surprised his foes, and had the effect of saving his life, he sprang up to the low-hanging branch of a tree, and catching it, he in another moment stood upon the convent wall.

“Bravo!” said Turpin.

“Hush! hush! I can now help you all up. You come, Mr. Field, if you please.”

Young Field did not want for strength or agility; but still, without the aid of Claude Duval, he might have found it rather a troublesome job to get to the top of that rather high wall.

In the course of a few moments they had all reached the wall's top, which



was sufficiently wide to let any one stand upon it with ease. Claude found the part where the abbess had shown him that a descent might be made, and a minute more saw the party in the garden.

## CHAPTER CCCLX.

### CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS REACH THE CONVENT IN SAFETY.

"So far all is right," whispered Claude. "Now, don't move either of you hand or foot, till I reconnoitre the way a little."

Bearing in mind what Duval had told them the abbess had said of the means taken to prevent intruders from making their way through the garden, they did not think this excessive caution of Duval's to be at all necessary, but rather regarded it as quite proper; so there they stood like statues, while he crept cautiously on.

Of course, Claude's object was to get into the same path that he had traversed with the abbess, for he did not wish to lose time in the garden, as the secret passage that led to the chapel was what he wanted to reach.

"All is right," he said. "We are in the path. Come on."

"D—n it, what's this?" said Dick.

"Hush! not so loud, Dick. What is the matter?"

"Something is round my leg."

"Be quiet, then."

Claude Duval lit a match, and stooped down, shielding it as well as he could from the rain, and then he saw that a piece of copper wire was twisted round Turpin's foot; but it was easily removed.

"You may depend," said Turpin, "that this belongs to part of the abbess's man-traps, and, thank the fates, the apparatus must be out of order, or I might have suffered."

"You kept the path, Dick?"

"I can't say I did. An infernal great frog or toad, as large as a dinner-plate, crossed my feet, and I naturally set my right foot on to the grass edging of this flower-bed, and that did it, I suppose."

"No doubt of it. Come on, and be more cautious, I beg of you, Dick, and never mind the frogs or the toads. The rain has brought them out, no doubt, in the old garden."

"So it seems."

They now went on for some short distance, and Claude Duval was congratulating himself that all would be well, when a voice said suddenly—

"Hush—hush!"

Claude stopped, and so did the party behind him.

"Is it you, Joseph?" said the voice.

"Yes," said Claude.

"Dear me, what a cold you have got."

"I rather have."

"Well, Joseph, you can't come into the buttery to-night, although it has some splendid pie and cold game in it. The fact is, that the abbess is up still, and seems as restless as the very devil, she does."

"Oh," said Claude.

"So you must go, Joe; but mind you come to-morrow night. Don't stop now, I beg of you, for I don't know what the abbess is about. She seems half out of her wits to-night. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Claude.

"Well, you have got a cold!" said the voice.

They heard a light footstep make its way rapidly in the direction of the convent, and when it was safe to speak, Claude said—

"So, it seems that others of the holy sisterhood, besides the lady abess, have their little indulgences."

"Of course," said Turpin, "nobody ever doubted that fact in connection with convents. We may thank the rain, and the wind, and the darkness of this night, Claude, for your being mistaken for Joe somebody."

"Yes, combined with that sort of feeling of security which is the product of long impunity. I have no doubt but that the lady who spoke to me never dreamt of the possibility of it being any one but her Joe."

How cold, and sloppy, and dreary, the convent garden now was. The rain dropped from leaf to leaf until it reached the lowest stratum of them, and then with melancholy splashes sought the soddened ground.

Now and then, a bird, disturbed from its roost in some old tree by the wet, would fly staggering and uncertain-like across their path, and occasionally a gentle wind would stir the old tree tops, and scatter particles of water in all directions.

It was a night admirably adapted for the expedition Claude Duval and his party had come upon, on account of its many discomforts.

The old convent clock struck something, but the wind at the altitude of the clock-tower appeared to be restive and shifty, so that the sounds were vague and confused, and some of them, no doubt, did not reach the ears of Duval and his friends at all; but by calculation of time he well knew that it could not be yet near the hour for the lady abess to expect him.

The uncertainty of the path they were pursuing—the report from Claude of what the abess had said of unknown dangers being on all sides of them, and strange sighing sounds that the wind made now and then among the trees, all combined to infuse an odd feeling into the minds of the quiet little line of figures that crept so noiselessly along the garden path.

They looked more like spectres than living people at that solemn hour and in that strange place.

It was, probably, upon the constitutionally serious character of Jack that the greatest effect was produced; but he did not let the feeling show itself in any way that could interrupt the progress of the expedition.

The pathway in which they were became more and more gloomy, and Claude Duval felt confident that they had got to that part of it which he had noticed when he was with the abess, and where the tall trees interlaced their branches overhead, and prevented the least vestige of the sky from being visible, and must, even at mid-day, have converted all below them into an impenetrable shade.

"Are you sure you are in the right track?" whispered Jack.

"Quite, Jack."

"That is well. And your key, Claude?"

"I have it here. We are now quite close to the mysterious little door that opens into the secret passage of the convent. I will try to do without a light if I can; but I rather think I shall have to ignite a match to enable me to find the key-hole."

"It may take some time to do so."

"It may; and I don't think that there will be any danger in it."

They now suddenly emerged from the dreary pathway in which they were, and came upon a small open space close to the building, which, amid the darkness of the night, in consequence of having its outline so completely blended with that darkness, looked of uncommon size.

"This should be the place," whispered Claude.

After feeling about the wall for some time, he feared that he might be a long time finding the door that he had to open with his master-key; so, as every moment was now valuable, he determined upon risking the faint light of a phosphorus match.

It would be very unlikely that any one would be sufficiently upon the look-out to see it, so Claude at once ignited it; and then he saw the little low-arched door in the wall.

"This will do," he said, as he placed his hand upon the key-hole, and threw



ALICIA REFUSES TO SIGN THE DEED.

down the match. "Now, my friends, silence as profound as death must be the order of the day, for in another moment we shall be within the convent."

The master-key that Duval had did its duty, and the little door in the wall slowly creaked open upon its seldom used hinges.

"Come on," whispered Duval, "I will leave the door close shut, but not locked, remember, and I will as we go on leave all the doors that I open in the same state, and then if anything should happen to me in the event of a tumult you will require no key to aid you in escaping in this direction."

"Don't think of that," said Mr. Field. "I for one will live or die with you, my friend."

Neither Dick nor Jack said a word. It was not exactly the time of day for them to make any protestations to Claude Duval. They both felt that he knew them too well to need any.

They all passed into the little secret passage, and Duval closed the door, but did not lock it.

"Now," he said, "before we go a step further I think it will be as well that we determine upon what we are to do if attacked by a host of these hags of women, who in this establishment lead a life of vice, and who think that they are called upon to obey the orders of the wretch who presides over them."

"I have been thinking of that," said Dick, "and I for one, if it can be at all avoided, don't like shooting a woman, let her scratch ever so."

"Nor do I," said Jack.

"But," added Dick, "I recollect what was once done in a case where an attack of women took place."

"What was it, Dick?"

"Pistols were loaded with powder, well rammed down with a good hard bit of wadding, and it was found that every one whom we fired at went down at once, and gave herself up as shot."

"Let us do it, then, with some of our arms. It will be well, though, to keep about us some pistols properly loaded."

"No doubt of that, for there is no knowing what may happen, and it is as well to be on the safe side."

Dick Turpin and the others now loaded each a pistol with rather an over-charge of powder, and rammed in very hard a bit of leather instead of a bullet, so that it would hit any one a good rap, but not in reality do any fatal injury. They then considered themselves prepared for any contingency that might occur.

It was quite impossible that darkness could be more intense than it was now as they entered this gloomy passage leading to the convent chapel. Claude Duval now paused for a moment, and spoke in a very low tone to his friends.

"Remember," he said, "that in the course of our progress now we shall pass within half-a-dozen paces of the abbess's room-door, and, therefore, that any sound coming to her ears will assuredly have the effect of bringing her out to see what it is. I don't mean to say that even then her appearance would have the effect of putting a stop to our plan of operations, but it might delay us."

"We should have to quiet her," said Jack.

"Yes, Jack, we would do that, but we don't know exactly what means she may have of giving an alarm to the rest of the convent; and what I specially wish to avoid is, a conflict with the nuns."

"Just so," said Dick; "it would be all kicking and scratching, you may depend upon it."

"Come on, then," said Claude. "I think you understand me now. All you have to do is to follow me in single file, and each of you to tread as lightly as he possibly can, so that his footfall may make no perceptible sound."

In this way, then, they went into the dreary passage, which led round by the route the abbess had shown to Duval to the chapel of the convent. Claude considered that it still, with all the delays that had taken place on account of Dennis and other matters, wanted an hour to the time when the abbess would be expecting him to make his appearance with the deed.

What might not be done by four determined men in an hour? And by such men, too, as those who were now within the convent walls. If the abbess had but had the least idea to whom she had opened the secrets of her establishment, she might well have trembled for its future stability.

But it was passion that had blinded that woman, who, under ordinary circumstances, would never have been deceived by the slight plot that had been brought to bear against her.

It she had not taken the unnatural liking that she had to Claude Duval, she would never have so far stultified her reason as to think that all was right in the

way that it was going on; but when we find that she could go the length of asking Duval to take the life of Father Garvey, so that he should not be in the way of her new amour, we may judge how far gone the abbess was in the criminality of her passions.

## CHAPTER CCCLXI.

### THE RESCUE OF ALICIA AND THE TWO NOVICES, AND THE FATE OF DENNIS.

THE necessity now for preserving the most cautious demeanour, if they would be successful in what they were meditating, was impressed strongly upon the minds of all those who were with Claude Duval upon this momentous occasion.

He had told them that in the course they would pursue they would have to pass so near to the chamber in the actual occupation of the lady abbess, that the least noise might have the effect of calling her forth to challenge them.

Claude went first, feeling his way as best he could, for he was afraid to have a light, lest some wandering ray of it should reach the abbess's observation; and yet he found it exceedingly difficult to get on with anything like facility without one.

Nevertheless he went on as best he could, and reached the foot of the flight of steps which he had before counted, upon the occasion of descending them in company with the abbess.

It was then only that Claude turned, and whispered softly—

"Be cautious. Here are stairs."

"Descending?" asked Turpin.

"No—no—they ascend."

"All's right, Claude. Go on."

"Hush! hush!"

The stairs were passed, a door was opened, and then Claude Duval felt certain that he was in the winding passage, which, in a very short time, would lead him close to the door of the abbess's room.

"Caution! caution!—much caution, now!" he whispered.

They all understood him and made the best possible reply they could to him by obeying the injunction in silence, and then on they went, till Duval suddenly found something in his way, over which he fell.

If he had not been going so exceedingly slow, with his hands stretched out before him, he certainly must have fallen; but, as it was, although he made a slight noise, it was not sufficient to give anything like an alarm.

Feeling, however, convinced that there was some obstruction now to his progress which it would not do to tamper with in the dark, Claude Duval, although he was very much averse to such a course, felt that he must have a light.

The hope he had was, that as the abbess would not be sitting in the dark, she would not see any ray from the little match which he proceeded to ignite, since it would present no contrast to the light in her own room.

"Dick!" whispered Claude, "there is something in the way."

"The deuce there is!"

"I am going to light a match just for a moment."

"Ah, do so."

The phosphorus match lit noiselessly; and when the wood-work was in a flame Claude saw that a stool was placed exactly in the centre of the passage, with a large glass goblet upon it. The goblet had been only slightly moved by the touch he had given to the stool; but another such slight touch would have sent it to the floor, when it must have made quite noise enough in breaking to alarm the abbess.

There could be no doubt but she had placed that obstruction in the way of



Claude's return in order that, without the trouble of waiting for him, she might be let know when he was near at hand.

"Cunning enough, but it won't do," said Duval, as he placed the goblet close to the wall, and put the stool out of the way.

"Does she suspect you?" whispered Mr. Field.

"I think not."

"And I hope not."

"Come on, now—the match is out; and, whether she suspects me or not, we will rescue those whom we came here to save."

Claude Duval, while he had had the phosphorus match alight, had taken a glance in advance of him, and had been quite convinced that there was no further obstruction to his progress, so now he advanced in the dark with much greater confidence than before.

A few moments sufficed to enable him to reach the turn in the secret passage, which would bring him past the panel in the wall of the abbess's room.

To get past that point was everything, for when once that was done, every step would take them further from the chances of any interruption, and nearer to the gloomy cells in which, with more or less patience, rested the victims that they had come to save.

"More caution still," whispered Claude, for he was fearful that not being cognisant of the exact spot where the danger lay, one or other of those he had with him might say something.

Claude started back a step or two, for suddenly a gleam of light shot across the passage.

"Down!" he said.

They all crouched down to the floor, and then the panel in the wall of the abbess's chamber was opened about eight inches or so, and she looked out.

The gleam of light did not come from any lamp she carried in her hand, but from the tall candle that was burning upon the table in the room.

Claude Duval could see her face quite plainly, and her hand, as she held the edge of the panel with it.

"All still," she said, "all still. He comes not yet, but he will come. I am foolish to expect him so soon, or to be so very anxious about him. No doubt he will come, and he mentioned to me the shortest possible space of time that would elapse before I saw him again. I must be patient—patient. All is still."

She closed the panel.

What a relief it was to Duval when he heard the click of the spring of the panel go into its place again, and saw a very thin pencil of light that shone through a crevice, and just revealed where the panel was; nothing was observable of the opening in the wall.

"An escape," he said, in a whisper, "quite an escape. Come on now slowly and surely—come on."

They did not dare any of them to speak to him, but they had not advanced many paces when they heard, or thought they heard, for they could not feel quite sure about it, the faint ringing of a bell as if a long way off.

Claude paused and listened intently, for something came across him to the effect that that ringing of a bell had something to do with the affair he had on hand.

Not many moments elapsed before he was convinced that it not only had something to do with it, but that the something was of great importance.

The abbess's voice came rather sharply upon the silence of the night, being only on the other side of the panel, as she said—

"What is it now? Am I never to be left to myself? How dare you intrude upon me at this hour?"

Claude Duval and his party remained as still as death itself to listen to what might now take place in the abbess's room.

In a very humble voice, indeed, some one replied to the imperious abbess, and

the tone in which the reply was made was so low, that neither Duval nor any of those who were with him could catch the purport even of the words.

When the abbess again spoke, however, in her full, round, commanding voice, there was no sort of difficulty in catching every word she uttered.

"A man wants to see me?" she cried. "What do you mean by disturbing me about him? Who and what is he, pray, that I am to be roused even from my devotions at such an hour as this to see him?"

Again the voice said something in reply in the same low tone as before, and which Claude Duval was very much annoyed to find that he could not catch; but the abbess was kind enough to relieve him from that difficulty, for she cried out in an angry voice—

"Speak up, idiot! Am I to trouble myself to listen to your whimpering?"

"Thank you," thought Claude.

Upon this command, the person who had brought a message to the lady abbess spoke up clearly enough, saying—

"Holy madam, I don't pretend to know who it is at all, nor do I take upon myself to say that you ought to have been disturbed; but Sister Mary thought that it was worth while bringing the message to you, as it might be important."

"Well—well, what is it?"

"A man, then, at the outer gate, who says that his name is Dennis, wishes to see you in order to tell you that there is a plot going on for the purpose of taking a novice from the convent this very night."

"Absurd! What plot? What novice?"

"He declared that he would not tell any one but yourself, or a priest."

"A priest? Why, what sort of a man must he be who waits for a priest before he can make a confidence? Who and what is he?"

"He is an Irishman, and by his language belongs to the lower order of society."

"Stuff! I won't see him."

"Very well, holy mother. I will have him sent away from the gate at once."

"Stop—stop! A plot to take away a novice? Stop a moment. Can it be possible? No—no, surely no—it cannot be. What am I to think? This foolish communication has the effect of distracting me, whether it be true or false. Did he give no further information than what you have told me?"

"None whatever."

"But you say he is an Irishman. Could you not manage to get from him what he has to say without my being troubled with him?"

"I fear not, holy mother. Like the rest of his class, he makes up for the want of education and its advantages by the possession of that low cunning, which is taught to him, and to such as he, from their earliest infancy."

"You are right there. I don't think that there is anything—I don't think that there can be anything in this pretended communication that he has to make to me; but, still, there are circumstances which make it desirable that I should run no risks just now, so I will see him. I have still half an-hour to spare," muttered the abbess to herself, as the attendant left the room.

When the abbess was alone, she paced the room to and fro for its whole length—and that was no trifle—with disordered steps. It was quite evident that the communication which had been made to her had had the effect of distracting her mind very much, and, probably, of giving her doubts of the good faith of the Mr. White of whom she had thought so much.

"What can it mean?" she said—"what can it all mean? A plot for the escape of a novice from this convent? Oh, impossible! We are too well protected here. But, yet, I will hear what this man has to say. It is possible that his arrival here may be the beginning of the plot."

The abbess stopped short in her peregrinations to and fro in the room as this idea struck her. It was not a very unnatural one, considering all things.

"Yes," she added, "there may, indeed, be a plot, and this man's arrival here

the commencement of it. He may be in disguise! Ah! let him beware! Let him attempt, by finesse, to gain any purpose here, and I think he will find me a match for him. I will hear him, and then woe be to him if I suspect him even!"

## CHAPTER CCCLXII.

DENNIS MAKES ALL THE MISCHIEF HE POSSIBLY CAN IN HIS INTERVIEW WITH THE ABBESS.

THIS inopportune visit of Dennis at the convent was to Claude Duval and his party one of the most serious cross accidents that could possibly have happened to them. It was of the utmost importance, too, that they should find out how much Dennis knew of the projected escape from the convent of Alicia, for the amount of that knowledge would be a good index of the amount of his powers of mischief.

Feeling, therefore, that there was but little time to spare in the matter, and that each minute that Alicia and the other young creatures who were imprisoned in the cells beneath the convent must seem as hours of anxiety and suspense, yet Claude Duval was assured that he could not do better just then than remain where he was, and endeavour to find out the full extent of the powers of mischief of Mr. Dennis.

The angry and excited way in which the abbess was now again marching to and fro in the room gave Claude Duval an opportunity of speaking to his friends without the fear of being overheard, for the abbess made by far too much noise by her perambulations, and was by far too much occupied by her own thoughts and muttered suppositions, to hear a cautiously-uttered whisper or two on the other side of the panel in the wall.

"Turpin," whispered Claude Duval, "where are you?"

"Here, Claude; and Jack, and Mr. Field are close to me. We can all hear anything you have to say."

"Did you all hear what passed in the abbess's room?"

"We did, indeed."

"Then such being the case, I hope you will agree with me that the best thing we can all of us do now is to wait a little, and hear the end of it."

"Not a doubt of that," said Jack.

Mr. Field sighed deeply, and Duval hearing him, said to him—

"It is with very great regret, Mr. Field, that I council any delay in your and in our proceeding. If I acted just up to my own feelings in the matter without thought, I should go on at once and seek Alicia in the cells beneath the convent; but reflection tells me that it will be much better we should know what is the amount of information your man, Dennis, possesses, and what is the amount of credence given to it by the abbess."

"You are right—you are right, Duval."

"I am glad you think so, and I don't think you would say so if you did not think it."

"Indeed, I would not. My reason tells me you are right, although you may easily imagine that my feelings are a little at war with that conclusion."

"I can easily imagine it, and I assure you, sir, that you shall not find me delay one moment longer than necessary."

"Hush!" said Turpin, who had placed his ear close to the panel. "Her ladyship, the abbess, is going to give us some further information."

The fall of a glass in the abbess's room at that moment attracted the attention of Duval and his friends, and then they heard her say—

"How nervous I am to-night. I tremble so that I cannot even hold a glass. Who is there?"

The voice of the attendant now sounded upon the ears of the listeners, saying—

“The man is here, holy mother.”

“Admit him, but do you remain close to the door in the passage yonder, so that you may have no difficulty in hearing my bell if I should sound it.”

“Yes, holy mother.”

There was a slight bustle at the door of the abbess's room, and then the listeners heard Dennis, in a whispering manner, saying—

“Oh, by all the holy saints, and isn't it a mighty great thing for me to have the honour of an interview with your mightiness. The saints be good to us all! Amen! amen! amen!”

“Silence.”

“Yes, ma'am, if you please, ma'am, it's silent I'll be. I come of a silent family, ma'am. The Ballgudries of Tipperary, ma'am. Saints look down on us!”

“You profess our holy faith?”

“Surely, ma'am, yes, I do. What the priest says is right, ma'am, so you see it saves a poor man a world of trouble, you see, ma'am.”

“That is true. You take quite a correct view of the case. And now, they tell me that you know something of a plot to take a novice from the convent.”

“Faith, then, I do, ma'am. They say that this convent is no better, ma'am, than it ought to be, but what's the odd's as long as it is a holy place, ma'am? And sure if the prastes, and the abbesses, and the likes of yourself, ma'am, choose to do anything by way of a little amusement, it's all right with the saints and the holy people, you see, ma'am, and it isn't for the likes of me to say black is the white of your eye, you know, ma'am, an' I'm quite sure that no luck comes from going to thwart the praste or the ladies of the convent, ma'am. That's what I think, ma'am.”

“Your thoughts do you credit so far as they go; but tell me, who is the novice you suspect is to be taken from the convent?”

“It's Alicia, ma'am, they call her.”

“Alicia?”

“Truth, ma'am, and that same was the name I heard 'em call her over and over again, ma'am, and it's myself would scorn to tell you a lie, ma'am; about it.”

“Go on—go on, I wish to hear all.”

“Well, ma'am, they wanted to make out that you wanted to get her money, and that the holy man of a praste was rather fond of her, ma'am; but, as I say, if you do wish to get her money I'd like to know who has a greater right to it than the holy church that saves souls? and if the praste, blessed man, does look with the corner of his holy eye at a pretty girl, where's the harm? and it's quite a sin of anybody to interfere with his reverence's little amusements, and she needn't be so mighty particular.”

“True—true, that is all correct; but who are the people you speak of that say such things?”

“Well, my lady, I tried to find out, but they began to talk about something else just as I was getting all the news. My master, ma'am, has got them to help him and no mistake, though.”

“Who is your master?”

“Truth, ma'am, and it's Mr. Field that's me master.”

“Field? I know that name. Then there is some truth in your communication. I remember that name well. I rather think, though, that I have an ally in Mr. White, the attorney, who will get the better of him. But tell me, what is Mr. Field's plan of operation?”

“The operation, ma'am?”

“Yes—yes.”

“The—a—the plan, ma'am?”

“Yes; do you not understand me? You say they intend to try to get the

novies, Alicia, out of the convent, and I want to know how they mean to try to do it."

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Well, then, that I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Bedud no, ma'am. The cunning of 'em, ma'am, bates all the world, and knowing that they are going to come here to-night and interfere with your ladyship and the other holy people, I don't know how they mane to do it."

"Then you have arrived at the end of your communication?"

"The end of what, ma'am?"

"Of your statement."

"Oh, yes. The end of it did you say, ma'am? Which end, ma'am?"

"Idiot! I mean, that you have now nothing more to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am—that's it is it, ma'am? Well, then, all I have to say is, that there's four of 'em now, along with the master—that's Mr. Field, as I told you, ma'am—and they mane to try something to-night, as safe as potatoes, ma'am; so I thought that, just for the good of the holy father, I'd come and tell you, and may be, thought I, it will be good service done to the saints, after all."

"It will—it will. I am much beholden to you, and will reward you well."

"Many thanks to you, my lady. It's a hard case indeed that the holy fathers can't amuse themselves a little with a heretic of a girl but there it to be a riot and a raskit about it."

"Can you fight?"

"Is it fight, ma'am? Hubaboo! Wnoop! Yes, ma'am, I'm of the rale coid fighting stock, ma'am, any way."

"Then if ever you fought in your life it is your duty to fight for your church."

"Yes, ma'am, and I will, faith. There is only one of the fellows with the master that one may be much afraid of, and truth, then, he seems to be a born devil he does."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know who he is, my lady, but he is a fellow that it's much better to put a bullet in from behind a hedge quiet and easy than to come to hasty cuffs with."

"Is he so powerful a man?"

"Why, my lady, praise be to the saints, he is not so mighty big as he is a cute and knowing-looking sort of fellow, and he is good-looking, too, in his way, with his black locks of long hair, and his fine moustachoes, my lady, and his elegant lawn cravat—"

"Hold! What do you say? His moustachoes? Has he rather large and handsome black eyes?"

"True for you, he has, my lady."

"And a dark but clear complexion? And when he smiles does he look like—like—"

"A mighty good-looking fellow, my lady."

"Yes—yes."

"Then that's the same man, my lady, any way, and he is the leader of the whole of them, and is telling of 'em what to do, and a mighty ugly creature, I'm after thinking, he would be, my lady."

"Ruined! Lost—lost! Ruined!" sobbed the abbess, as she clasped her hands over her face and rocked to and fro in an agony of rage and apprehension.

"Is it ruined you are, ma'am? Well, I shouldn't have thought it."

"Oh, horror—horror! All is over—over now!"

"You don't say so, ma'am?"

"Oh, all other misfortunes were nothing to this. I have had misfortunes, but this one is the worst of all."

"And you have had misfortunes, ma'am, really now? Did any of 'em live?"

"Sir? What do you mean?"





THE LADY ABBESS POINTS OUT THE SECRET PASSAGE TO CLAUDE.

"The misfortunes, ma'am. We call 'em misfortunes in ould Ireland, ma'am, whether they are girls or boys, ma'am."

"Wretch, how dare you insult me! My vengeance shall at least reach you. If I cannot be revenged upon the villain that I would fain have in my grasp, I will at least embrace the one that is so."

"Oh, murder, my lady! Don't be after making a victim of me! Murder! Oh, there, be easy."

"Stop!"

"Yes, my lady."

"You say you can fight?"

"Bedad, yes, my lady."

"You shall, then."

"With all the pleasure in life, my lady. Only put me in the way of it, and it is myself that will fight—only show me the thick hedge to get behind, and a gun in my hand, and then won't I fight like a lion, my lady, and hit down the man that little expects it as he goes along, fine and aisy, on the other side."

The abbess rose and paced to a remote corner of the room, and opening a cupboard that was there, she took from it a double-barrelled, rather short gun, and placed it in the hands of Dennis.

"Go," she said. "There is not a moment to lose. Go down the lane till you see the branches of a tree projecting over the wall. Hide yourself any way you can, and wait till the man you have described comes to that spot. Let him get to the top of the wall, and then shoot him."

"Shoot him?"

"Yes, shoot him. He will fall into the garden if you manage well, and I shall have the pleasure of looking at his dead body. Go. When the deed is done, come to me here again for your reward."

"Trust me for that, my lady."

"Go at once. Take this ring. The production of it to the porter at the gate will pass you here again upon your return. You will find an attendant in waiting, who will show you out. There is not a moment to lose."

Dennis left the room, and the abbess, with a scream of rage and disappointment, fell to the floor.

## CHAPTER CCCLXIII.

### THE HORRORS OF THE CONVENT WELL ARE BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

This mode of tactics that was adopted by the abbess happened to suit Claude Duval and his friends very well indeed, considering that they had made good their entrance to the convent, and stood in no sort of fear of the gun with which Dennis was armed to repel any attack from without with.

If Dennis had happened to have arrived at the convent a little sooner, say an hour or so, they might have run some risk from the murderous way in which he would, no doubt, have carried out the abbess's orders.

"Now," whispered Claude to his friends—"now that we know all that there is to know regarding Dennis and his operations, let us at once proceed on our mission. It is evident that the abbess has no notion that we have already got within the convent walls."

"Not the least," said young Field, in a tone of joy, although he took good care at the same time not to speak loud enough for there to be any danger of his being overheard by the abbess—"not the least; and I do, indeed, now think that I shall soon behold my Alicia."

They now passed the secret little panelled door leading from the abbess's room to the dark and dreary passage with which, no doubt, the convent was, as such places usually are, well provided; and as at each step that they now took they discovered the danger of being overheard by the abbess, they felt their heads grow lighter, and a strange and more fearful assurance growing upon them that they would not succeed in rescuing the fair victims of the conventual system from the terrors that surrounded them.

Claude Duval quickened his pace now each moment and soon reached the door that opened into the chapel behind the altar. The moment he opened it, a rush of cool, grateful fresh air came upon their faces, and they stepped from the now gloomy passage with a feeling of thankfulness to escape from it.

A strange feeling of awe came over Turpin and Jack and Mr. Field as they now found themselves in what, in truth, was the rather large extent of the chapel.

There was a dreamy sort of stillness in the air which might have produced that effect, or was it from the fact that places dedicated to the worship of the Great Being who is the Creator and the Lord of Heaven and of Earth carry with them a feeling of sanctity, which even the most wicked and corrupt cannot shake off?

It may be so.

"And this is the chapel?" said Dick.

"It is," whispered Claude.

"How still and solemn!"

"My flesh creeps upon my bones," said Jack.

"How chill the air is, too."

"Come, come," said Claude Duval, "don't let the silence and the strangeness of this place infect you both with unknown fears."

"No, no."

"Forward! Follow me! We are behind what they call the high altar, now; but there is no possible occasion for us to linger in this place."

"On—on, then!" said Jack.

Claude Duval went forward carefully, for he recollected that there was a short flight of stairs to descend from the place in which he was in order to reach the body of the chapel. Fearing that his comrades might, if not in time warned of their existence, fall over them and so make more noise than would be at all desirable, he turned and said—

"Steps!"

That one word was sufficient to induce them to use the greatest caution in proceeding, so that they all descended from the raised portion of the chapel on which the altar stood with perfect safety.

"Now," said Claude, "we are not far from Alicia."

"Oh! joyful thought!" said Field.

"Hush!" said Turpin; "I am not accustomed to this place, of course, and it is possible that some accidental noise may have deceived me, but I thought I heard a groan."

"Let us all listen."

Jack bent his head right down to the floor of the chapel to listen; and then they all heard very clearly and distinctly a deep, hollow groan.

Claude Duval started.

"Did you hear it, Turpin?"

"I did."

"And you, Mr. Field?"

"Yes, yes."

"Can any of you fix the locality of it?"

They were all at fault in that particular. They had all heard the groan, but it seemed as if it floated in the very air of the chapel; and, at all events, it was quite impossible that any of them should take upon himself to point out any particular spot and say, "It is from there."

After listening for a few moments longer and finding that the groan was not repeated, Claude Duval spoke in a low and cautious tone of voice.

"I do not think," he said "we ought to let this circumstance stop us in our enterprise. Heaven only knows to what an extent these villanous conventual mysteries are carried on in this place, and what may be the amount of suffering contingent upon it; but as far as we are concerned we have now a distinct enterprise before us, and we should pursue it heedless of what may stand in the way."

How grateful young Field felt to Claude Duval for those few words!

"I agree with you," said Turpin; "we will follow you, Claude."

"This way, then."

With the master-key in his grasp that would open the mysterious door by the side of the confessional, Claude Duval crept along the aisle of the chapel in which that door was situated, and soon, as he thought, came to the confessional.

"This is the place," he said.

They all came to a halt.

Claude Duval now felt with great care all along the wall; but with the utmost caution and carefulness that he could use, he could not find the key-hole in the door, and wondered much what could be the cause of its disappearance.

"Can't you get on?" whispered Turpin.

"No, Dick."

"What's the matter?"

"I can't find the key-hole of the door, and I suppose the only plan will be to have a light at any risk. Just light a match, Dick, and hold it for me here, as I have the key in my hand."

"Yes, in a moment."

Dick Turpin quickly ignited a little match, and when the flame caught the wood Claude Duval could see the cause of his disappointment easily enough. There were several confessionals in a row, and the one that he had stopped at was not the one that was close to the portion of the wall which opened to the gloomy vaults and cells beneath the convent.

"I see, now," said Claude, "it is further on."

Mr. Field drew a long breath of relief. He was afraid when he saw the hesitation of Claude that the secret door in the wall was much too carefully hidden to be found again, and that it was just possible his Alicia might not be saved by those even who were willing to risk so much for her.

"Can you see it now?" he said, as Claude paused again, just as the match was going out.

"Yes."

"Oh, thank Heaven!"

"You should not have despaired, Mr. Field, even if the door had eluded all possible observation."

"But what could we have done?"

"What could we have done? I would have had up the floor of the chapel; and if that would not have succeeded, I would go outside and begin upon the convent brick by brick and stone by stone till I had revealed to the world the secrets of this most vile and detestable prison-house."

"Oh, my friend, the more I know of you the more surely do I feel that you will place my Alicia in my arms again."

"I will."

Claude opened the door in the chapel wall easily enough now, and just as the match burnt to the last portion, and Dick Turpin was compelled to drop it from between his fingers, they all caught a glimpse of the dark and gloomy-looking region which lay in the direction of the vaults, and directly through the door that Claude Duval had opened with his master-key.

"Let us descend a few steps," said Claude, "so as to get clear of the chapel, and then, Jack, you can light the little hand-lantern you have with you."

"I can," said Jack.

"Be careful of the steps. They are both narrow and steep."

This caution was really well needed, for the steps were both narrow and steep, and, besides, so dusty that the foot could hardly get a firm hold of them in descending.

After they had got about six steps down, Claude closed the door, and said to Jack—

"Quick with your lantern, now, Jack, I wish to see if there be any fastening to the door upon this side, for if so, I will take good care that we are not interrupted by the lady abbess or any of the old nuns while we are here."

Jack had in his pocket one of those small well-made hand-lanterns with a powerful bull's-eye lever, and a good reflector, so that when he lit it he could throw a strong stream of light upon any object that it was requisite to examine.

"Now, Jack, turn the light upon the door."

Jack did so, and by moving the lantern slowly up and down he showed the door plainly to Duval, and at the same time plainly showed him that there were no means of fastening it on the inner side.

"We must take our chance," said Duval. "Come on."

The impatience of Claude now to reach the cells, and to assure the unhappy prisoners there confined of their safety was very great, and he made good speed to the foot of the steep staircase. When there, the lantern did not burn so brightly as it had done above, which was a sufficient indication of the badness of the air, even if their own sensations had not sufficiently informed them of that fact.

"This is a terrible place," said Jack.

"Alas! it is," said Mr. Field. "Oh, gentlemen, only think of a young and innocent girl, who has been accustomed to all the luxuries and all the amenities of life being suddenly snatched from the world and shut up in such a region as this. Alicia—my Alicia, how can I ever make amends to you for your sufferings?"

"The joy of deliverance from this prison-house," said Claude, "will obliterate all the pangs of the past. This way—on—on."

Duval strode on quickly, closely followed by Jack, who held the lantern in such a position that it spread the greatest amount of light upon the pathway that he, Claude, was pursuing, and in this way the open space where the well was situated was gained, and they all paused a moment to look up at the vaulted roof of that strange-looking abode.

"This," said Claude, "is beneath the floor of the chapel, no doubt. This way, Mr. Field. Follow me closely, sir."

"It did not need many injuntions to induce Field to follow Claude Duval closely, and the latter made his way at once to the cell in which Alicia, with the young novice as her companion, had been left.

"Call to her," said Claude to Mr. Field.

With a shriek of joy, the young lover shouted—"Alicia—Alicia!"

Scarcely had the sound time to echo through the vaulted roof of that dismal place than there was an answering cry, and from the cell in which Claude Duval had advised Alicia to remain, she rushed forth into her lover's arms.

Claude Duval and his friends stepped back a pace or two in respect to the gush of feeling which was called forth by this truly happy meeting.

For some seconds neither of the young lovers spoke; but deep sobs came from the heart of Field as he wound his arm round the fair form of the young girl whom he loved so well, while she seemed hardly able to believe in the reality of the fact that she was once more with him, and that he had come to save her.

When he could speak it was only in disjointed words and sentences that he could utter the full joy that was at his heart.

"My darling—my own Alicia—my beautiful—my own dearest! Is this a dream, or do I, indeed, hold you again to my heart?"

"Save me! save me!" she cried.

"Yes—yes, I will save you! Oh, look up, and let me once more see that dear face."

"It cannot be!" sobbed Alicia. "This is some mockery—some vision, and I am mad!"

Claude Duval now stepped forward, and in a soft and gentle voice, he said—

"Do you remember me?"

Still convulsively clinging to her lover, Alicia turned and looked at him. The tears streamed down her cheeks then, and releasing Field from her nervous grasp, she clasped her hands, and replied—

"Oh, yes. God bless you! You have, indeed, saved me."

"It is no dream," said Claude. "I have accompanied Mr. Field to this place in order that he may snatch you from it. Believe me, Alicia, that you



will be free. There are enough of us to save you. But how is your young companion?"

"I have two companions now. Oh, there has been a fearful scene enacted here."

#### CHAPTER CCCLXIV.

##### THE ESCAPE FROM THE CONVENT CELLS IS ENVIRONED BY DANGERS.

WHEN Claude Duval spoke of her young companion he meant the novice whom he had placed with Alicia, and who he was glad happened to be in the cells to keep her company, and when Alicia said that a fearful scene had been enacted there, she alluded to the young creature who had been taken to the cells by the order of the abbess, after Claude Duval had left them.

"What scene do you allude to, dearest?" said Field. "Have you suffered further privations since this gentleman saw you?"

"Oh, no—no! but much terrors. Come this way, and then I will tell you all."

Alicia led them to the cell which she had so recently left, and when the light of Jack's lantern fell upon its gloomy interior, they all stood for a few moments transfixed, regarding the scene that was there to be observed.

Kneeling upon the floor of the cell was the young novice that Claude Duval had left with Alicia, and lying with her head upon her lap was the young creature who with such blows and violence had been dragged to that place by the orders of the abbess.

That poor young girl seemed to be dead, and the novice was shedding tears, which fell upon her face.

"There," said Alicia, sobbing, "is the sight that I wanted you to see."

"It is woeful," said Claude.

"Are we all to die now?" said the novice, looking up with such an expression of grief and resignation, that it was truly sad to look at her.

"No, no, dear friend," said Alicia. "Look at this gentleman. Do you not know him? He has come to save us."

"To save me?—oh, God!"

"Yes, to save you. From this moment, with the exception that it will take some little time to get from the place, you are free."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is true," said Claude.

The girl sobbed as though her heart would break. Never until that moment had she been able to comprehend the full possibility of being carried from the convent cells; but when she heard that Alicia believed it, and when she saw what appeared to her a crowd of well armed and valiant men at the door of the cell, and heard that they were resolved to take her from the convent, she could no longer doubt the fact of her deliverance, and the pent up feelings of her heart could only find a vent in tears.

"Let her weep," said Alicia.

"Yes," said Claude, "those are tears of joy."

"They are indeed," said Mr. Field. "But is that young creature who lies so still, really dead?"

"I hope not."

"No," said Alicia, "she is not dead, but she is in a sort of trance from which we have sought in vain to arouse her."

"Poor girl."

"I will tell you how it all happened," added Alicia, sobbing at the mere recollection of the misery that the young creature had gone through.

"Stop a moment," said Claude. "Let us try if we cannot recover her. I have

taken care to have with me a restorative in case of need ; for coming into such a gloomy place as this, I did not know what possible necessities might arise."

By the aid of Alicia and the novice, the unhappy girl, who had been condemned to death in those cells for what she had said to the wicked abbess of the convent, was raised to a sitting posture, and then Claude bathed her temples with brandy, and placed some upon her lips.

It was some few minutes before even the power of the strong spirit had any effect in recovering her from the state of stupor into which she had fallen.

"Couldn't you give her a little drop of the brandy?" said Jack.

"No—no, it would choke her."

"Well, it might, poor girl."

"Look—she moves," said Turpin.

"You speak to her, Alicia," said Mr. Field. "Does she know you?"

"Oh, yes, she loved me well."

"Ah, all love you!"

With a shudder, the girl opened her eyes, and looked wildly about her and then in a low wailing voice she said—

"Cruel, cruel to kill me because, I would not do wrong. Oh, God, is there no justice in Heaven for these people? Help! oh, help!"

"Dear Helen," said Alicia, as she took her hand. "Do you not know me? I am your friend, Alicia."

The girl looked at her, and then shaking her head, she said—

"Yes, I will forgive you."

"For what, Helen? Oh! surely you do not mock me with such speeches! I, too, am a victim of the abbess's, and am here now to save you, along with these dear friends, who will aid us both."

The girl dashed aside the clustering ringlets of her hair, and looked with surprise upon one and the other of the faces around her.

"Oh! do not—do not!" she sobbed.

"Do not what?"

"Do not deceive me, I beg of you, or you will kill me!"

"Dear friend," said Alicia, "I am not deceiving you. Here is Mr. Field, of whom you have heard me speak, and these are friends of his who have come with him, making their way through difficulty and danger into the convent to save us. They will take us out of the power of the abbess; and the law of England, which guards, at all events, the liberty of those who appeal to it, will protect us."

The girl flung herself into the arms of Alicia, and laughed and sobbed by turns upon her bosom.

"Now I do believe," she said, "that it is not a dream. Oh, God! I shall see the blessed sunshine once again!—I shall once again look upon kindly faces that I love, and I shall yet be happy!"

"You will, dear friend, you will."

Claude and his friends looked at each other and then stepped aside a moment, to let the feelings of the young girls have free play. They, too, were deeply affected by the scene of mingled joy and sorrow that was pictured in the strange place.

"Oh, what a system must this be," said Duval, "that permits one portion of human nature to assume so awful an authority over another!"

"It is truly dreadful!" said Turpin. "I would have every convent, if I had my own way, levelled with the ground."

"And I!" said Jack.

"Amen, say I!" responded Claude.

Mr. Field now touched Claude Duval upon the arm.

"My good friend," he said, "I think that our invalid prisoner has sufficiently recovered to proceed. Shall we now proceed to leave this place, which can only be full of the most painful recollections to us all?"

"Yes, at once."

The three young girls, with faces now radiant with hope, stood ready to pro-

ceed with their deliverers. They seemed to think that they were now beyond all chances of any ill; and, in the faith they had in the power and prowess of those who had reached them in those gloomy vaults, they found the greatest argument to believe that with success they would take them from the dreary region they were in to liberty and light.

There needed no impulse to Claude Duval and his friends to do their best to bring this adventure to a happy termination; but if anything could have added to their resolve to do so, it certainly would be found in the confidence with which the young girls regarded them.

"At another time, Alicia," said Claude, "you shall tell us all that has happened in this miserable place since I was here last. At present, let us think of nothing but your deliverance from duress here."

The order in which they proposed to leave the cells was now duly arranged by Claude Duval.

"You, Mr. Field," he said, "will, of course, take care of Alicia—you, Dick, attend to one of the young ladies, and you, Jack, to the other. I will go first, as I know the way well by this time, and as I have the key that opens all the doors that may be in our way."

When thus arranged, they formed quite a little procession, and Claude said, with a smile—

"I think that if we meet any of the old nuns; who merely came into this convent on account of despairing of ever getting husbands, they will be ready to die with envy to see us all."

The novices smiled, and looked as happy as one may well suppose people to look who are being saved from torments and, perhaps, death.

"We all look like your children," said Mr. Field, "and as if we were following you for a walk."

"Thank you," said Duval; "now, really, I did not think I had such a fatherly look about me; but, I suppose, I must put up with that on account of the credit of being supposed to have such a fine family."

This little badinage raised the spirits of the poor captives, and they smiled through their tears, and felt happier than they had been for many a day.

Claude Duval, as he passed the well, cast a glance at it, and looked at Mr. Field, as he said, in a low tone—

"That holds a few secrets, no doubt?"

"It does, indeed."

The girls trembled as they passed that well, for they knew that several of the nuns, who had turned refractory to the orders of the abbess, had disappeared suddenly; and the idea that they had been cast down that well was the one most prevalent in the convent among the novices.

Claude rushed on at the head of the procession, and Jack still carried the lantern, until they came to the little staircase that led up into the chapel, and then Duval paused a moment.

"Let me caution you all," he said, "now to be as careful as you can not to give any alarm as we proceed through the chapel."

"We will."

"It is not that I think there is any force here that can possibly compete with us; but I do not wish to provoke a conflict, which might be one of life and death, and would cost us dear, although we might gain the victory. I have good reason to know, too, that the abbess has fire-arms."

"I approve of your caution," said Mr. Field. "It will be everything to get out of the convent by stratagem instead of force."

"Come on, then, cautiously."

Claude Duval slowly ascended the narrow stairs towards the door leading into the chapel, and they all followed him. It was not till he got within some half dozen steps of the top of the stairs, that he heard a strange, grinding kind of noise from the chapel, and he paused to listen to it.

The noise was as if some one were at work with some carpenter's tools in the

place, and yet nothing could very well be more improbable than that anything of the sort should be going on in the chapel.

"Is anything amiss?" said Turpin.

"I hardly know."

"Do you hear anything?" said Mr. Field.



THE ABBESS PLACES CLAUDE IN AMBUSH TO ASSASSINATE THE CONFESSOR.

"Hush! Speak low, and come forward here both of you, and listen. There is a very odd noise in the chapel."

"Oh, Heaven help us!" said Helen.

"Hush! I beg of you, ladies," said Claude. "Any indiscretion now, may place us in a very awkward position. Let me beg of you to be silent."

"We will—we will."

"Hush! hush!"

The silence in the mysterious passage was now very profound, indeed; so much so, that it would have been positively painful to have continued it for long; but, happily, there was no occasion for so doing, inasmuch as the noise in the chapel was of a character that quickly explained itself, and Claude Duval said, in a whisper, to those who were with him—

"Don't be alarmed. I don't myself consider that it is of much consequence; but it is quite clear that they are nailing up the door leading from here into the chapel."

"Then we are lost!"

"No, no, Alicia. Do not say that."

"But what can we do?"

"Of that we will think forthwith; and, in the meantime, let me beg of you to take heart, and by no means to despair."

"We will never despair while you do not," said young Field.

"Well spoke," said Turpin. "Hush! They are at it again."

Bang! bang! bang! came three terrible blows upon the door, and then they heard a voice say—"It is finished."

#### CHAPTER CCCLXV.

THE ABBESS, BY THE AID OF DENNIS, TRIES HER BEST TO DESTROY  
HER FOES.

THERE was no difficulty in detecting to whom that voice belonged. It was the voice of the abbess of the convent; and what she said meant, that she had given the finishing stroke to the fastening up of the door leading to the vaults and the cells.

Before, then, Claude Duval and his friends could address a word to each other, or come to any definite conclusion as to what to do, they heard some one say—

"Yes, my lady; and, bedad, you may say that, wid your own swate lips, my lady, and divil a bit of a lie."

"Silence!" said the abbess.

That Dennis was now with the abbess again, and that in some way she had learnt that Duval was actually in the vaults with his friends, there could be no doubt. The only mystery was, as regarded how she had managed to make that discovery, and recall Dennis so quickly from the garden wall, whither, it will be recollected, she had sent him to wait for the arrival of those whose object in coming to the convent she was so very anxious to defeat.

But, still, the how she had got her information was of little consequence, compared to the fact that she had got it, and was acting upon it, to the extent of her abilities and means; and as regarded the rapidity of her movements, that was a matter that was much more apparent than real, for, to tell the truth, Claude Duval and his friends had been longer in the gloomy regions beneath the chapel than they thought.

Time to the wisest gets measured much more by its events than by its actual progress, so the abbess had had plenty of leisure to increase her information and to act upon it.

How she had received it was one of the mysteries of the convent that still remained to be solved.

Claude Duval now spoke in a low tone to his friends, saying, as he turned to them—

"It seems to me to be very improbable that the abbess, even with the assistance of Dennis, has been able to fasten the door leading to the chapel so firmly as to



resist all our endeavours to force it, and I advise that we wait a little until there may be the chance of her leaving the spot, and then make the attempt."

"Be it so," said Field.

"Be careful, though," said Alicia; "you do not know that desperate and revengeful woman yet."

"As how?" said Claude.

"I mean to say, that she will adopt any possible mode of accomplishing her desire for revenge, and what she seems to be actually about, is sometimes the furthest from her evil intentions."

"Is she so very cunning?"

"Indeed she is."

"Ah, yes," said the other two girls.

"Well, well, don't despair," said Claude. "What I think of doing now, is to make an attempt on the door; so just wait quietly for me where you are, all of you, till I report progress."

This they promised to do, and Jack quite extinguished the little light he had, so that it should not by any possibility be seen in the chapel, and then Claude advanced alone to the door, and placed his ear against it and listened.

All seemed to be as still as the very grave in the chapel.

"Is this silence real or assumed?" said Claude to himself. "I wonder if, relying upon the strength of the door, and the efficiency of the means she has used to fasten it, this woman really thinks that we are to be left here quietly to die of starvation. She must be mad to dream that we can be so utterly destitute of all resources."

Again he listened, but not the smallest sound disturbed the intense stillness of the chapel, so that he at last began to think that it must be deserted by the abbess and the nuns.

With this idea, Claude Duval drew back, and then suddenly brought all his weight and all his strength to bear against the door, which shook a little beneath the force it was subjected to.

"Ah, it is fast, indeed," said Claude.

The words had hardly escaped his lips when there was a loud report of the discharge of some fire-arms, and he felt a sudden blow which sent him staggering down two or three of the stairs.

"Hit, by Heaven!" he said.

The impression of Duval was fully and clearly that he was hit by a bullet in the breast, and the only wonder that possessed him was that he felt no pain beyond a stunning sensation, and a slight sickness, for the wound had seemed to be just at the region of the stomach.

It was clear that some one was in the chapel waiting for some such an attempt to burst open the door to be made as Claude had made, and then had fired a gun or a pistol through one of its panels.

Claude now staggered down the remainder of the stairs to where his friends were waiting for him, and Turpin said—

"Did you fire, Claude?"

"No—no."

"But we heard a shot, surely."

"Yes, it was at me. I am hit, I think."

"Hit? Don't say that. A light—a light, Jack! Oh, quick! If this be so, Duval, it is the worst chance that has happened to us yet, or that could, by any possibility, happen to us."

Jack eagerly got a light, and when he held it towards Claude they all found that beyond looking rather pale he did not seem so much amiss, and Turpin said to him—

"Where are you hit, Claude? I don't see any blood."

"Nor I," said Jack.

The girls looked as sympathetic as possible, and Mr. Field seemed in a perfect agony of apprehension.

"Upon my life," said Claude Duval, drawing a long breath, "I cannot give you any further information than that a shot was fired through the door, and I felt it hit me; and yet here I am."

"And none the worse?"

"I was the worse, but, strange to say, I am getting better. The bullet, or something very like it, did hit me, for it threw me, by the force of it, actually down several stairs."

"This is quite inexplicable. You are not the sort of man to fancy you are shot, Claude, just because you happen to hear the discharge of a pistol. Where did it hit you?"

"Here," said Duval, as he placed his hand upon his chest. "Ah! what is this? In my waistcoat pocket here is something. Oh, I recollect now. It is a crown piece that I put there some few days ago. Why—why—Look here, Dick. Bring the light a little nearer, Jack."

They both looked eagerly at the crown piece that Claude Duval took from his pocket, and then Dick Turpin said—

"The mystery is solved."

"It is, indeed," said Jack.

"Oh, what is it?" said Alicia.

"It is easily explained," said Claude. "Look at the indentation in this crown piece. You see it is quite shrunk hollow into the form of a cup. The bullet, by good fortune, struck it as it was in my pocket, and gave me the blow that I felt without being able to do me any further mischief."

"Ah, what an escape!" said Alicia.

"It is, indeed."

"Heaven be thanked," said Helen. "I do now, indeed, believe that Heaven is with us in this enterprise, or you, sir, would never have been preserved so miraculously as that."

"It has been a narrow escape, indeed," said Duval, with a smile; "but a miss, as far as a bullet is concerned, is as good as a mile. I don't at all like the state of affairs in the chapel, though, for it is quite clear to me that fire arms are relied upon more than the fastening of the chapel door."

"And that rascal, Dennis," said Mr. Field, "is at the bottom of all this. Oh, if I catch him!"

"Never mind him," said Claude. "It is possible enough that, before this night's affair is over, even Dennis may get his deserts; but, after all, he is only a fool, who is made the dupe of the bolder and wickeder spirit that directs him."

"The abbess?"

"Yes. It is she, and not her poor tool, Dennis, that we now have really to dread."

"But what are we to do?" said the young friend of Alicia's—"oh, what are we to do? You must not again, sir, risk your life by going nearer to that door in the wall of the chapel."

"No, certainly not. But what I propose in the first place is to do the best we can to fasten it on our side."

"Fasten it on our side!" said Jack, in surprise.

"Yes; for it will not be well to give them the chance of stepping down here after us, while we are in the open space beneath the chapel making our arrangements to leave it by some other mode than this, which, no doubt, they are foolish enough to think is about the only one we would think of attempting."

"I see—I see."

"Come, then, Jack, and let us try what we can do in that way. I saw that some of the planking at the foot of the stairs here, that hold up a portion of the wall of the passage, that appears to have at one time fallen, or shown a disposition so to do, were loose. Let us get one of those pieces, and see what we can do with it."

"I understand you," said Jack.

"And so do I," said Dick.

Jack went right to the foot of the stairs, and soon returned with a piece of wood-work of about eight feet in length.

"Will this do?"

"Yes, comfortably," said Claude. "Come along with the light."

Jack lit him to the work he was about, and with great silence and caution, Claude Duval managed to place the plank of wood in such a position from the stairs to the door, that completely wedged up the latter, and any attempt to force it from without would only have the effect of tightening the plank in its place.

"Now," said Duval, "I think that we may take upon ourselves to enter quite fearlessly into the cells, and see what progress we can safely make towards our liberation from this place."

## CHAPTER CCCLXVI.

### THE CONVENT WELL GIVES UP ONE OF ITS TERRIBLE SECRETS.

THE confident and cheerful manner in which Claude Duval spoke, evidently had the effect of immediately reviving the spirits of the little party.

It was by no means striving at a conclusion to come to the certainty that he had in his own mind some plan of operation which not only rendered the closing of the door leading into the chapel by the abbess and her emissaries of little or no consequence, but rendered the keeping of that door fast since it had once been closed by them an essential thing.

The confidence that Jack and Turpin evidently had in the marvellous resources of Claude Duval, infected the others with the same feeling, and they all looked up to him as the person who was yet to triumph over all the obstacles in the way of deliverance from the vaults and fearful cells, and as the individual who would in time take them to the light of day.

The miraculous way in which Claude had been saved from the consequences of the bullet that had been fired through the door at him, doubtless by the abbess, or by her emissaries, contributed largely to the conviction, and to the maintenance of the confidence they all had in him.

Alicia and the two novices could not believe it possible that a man so specially protected by Heaven in what he was about should fail.

And yet, with all this, it was with perceptible shudders that they again sought the dreary abode, which but a short few minutes before they had thought to take their last look at.

Claude saw this feeling in them and he said—

"Courage, ladies—courage. You should consider now, that this is the way to freedom, not to imprisonment. I do not, for a moment, doubt but that soon all will be well."

"You do think," said Alicia, "that you can save us?"

"I do, indeed."

"If any one can, it will be you," said Field. "Recollect that I place myself entirely at your disposal, Mr. Duval, and you have but to order me what to do."

"Come on, then, and fear nothing."

Claude himself led the way, but Jack followed him closely with the little lantern, and so once again they stood beneath the lofty roof of that portion of the gloomy underground region, that was immediately beneath the floor of the convent chapel.

"Here we halt," said Claude.

Without a word the party came to a stand-still; and then Duval, taking the lamp from Jack, said—

"How high do you think the roof is?"

"About thirty feet."

"So I thought, and the upper portion of it is quite lost, in obscurity. Dick, look about you, and see if it be possible to find any means of getting a little nearer to the roof, to see of what it is composed."

They all looked about them for that purpose, but it was some time before they found anything to aid them, and then it struck Turpin, that he could accomplish it in a strange sort of way.

"Look you here, Claude," he said, "the walls of this place are supported in several instances by planks of great length, and of tolerable strength; now what is to hinder us from taking two of them, and making a long slanting passage up to the roof, since it is your object to get there?"

"How do you mean, Dick?"

"Why, I would place the two pieces of flat tall timber together at the upper ends, so that they made the shape of the letter A, and then I do think that with a little dexterity one of us may climb up to the top and get sufficiently near to the roof to have a good look at it."

"Good; that will do."

The possibility of this project was one that Claude Duval saw in a moment, and he was anxious that it should as soon as possible be carried out.

To three men such as Duval, Jack, and Turpin, used as they had been to make the greatest exertions, and to the constant exercise of their ingenuity under all sorts of troublesome circumstances, this little project of Dick's for getting to the roof of the place they were in presented no difficulties, provided the materials were at hand.

The long pieces of planking that Dick referred to were evidently of service in keeping some portions of the old wall of the place they were in from bulging forward, but although the removal of them seemed to compromise the safety of the wall, yet they did not suppose that for the short space of time they hoped only to pass in that place that any serious consequences would be likely to arise.

Dick and Jack soon got two planks, each of about twenty feet in length, and they placed them with Claude's assistance in the situation agreed upon.

When so placed it seemed to be quite clear that they reached nearly half way to the roof. By compressing the lower ends into the earth firmly they got the affair tolerably steady, and then Dick said—

"Now, if you, Claude, will hold one of these planks, and you the other, Jack, I will try to get up."

"Excuse me, Dick," said Duval, with a smile, "but you have but one object, I know, in all this, and that is, that we should succeed in what we are about. I am a lighter weight than you are, you know."

"I understand you, Claude. You think you can manage climbing up the planks better than I can, and it is no doubt true, so I will hold one of them for you."

"Besides, Claude is taller when he reaches the top," said Jack.

"He is—he is. Now, Mr. Field, you help us likewise, if you please."

"Yes, with pleasure."

"We will all help," said Alicia. "Can we do nothing to aid you in this matter?"

"I think not," said Claude, "except keep out of the way, in case I should come down rather quicker than I go up. Leave us to manage this affair likewise, I beg of you, ladies, and pray get close to yonder wall."

"We obey."

Claude Duval was now satisfied that the girls were in safety, so he took off his boots; and, considering that he would get a firmer hold upon the boards with his stocking soles merely, he commenced the rather perilous ascent.

The angle at which the boards had been put together was rather an acute one; but then, when they placed them end to end in the shape we have described, they felt that the further they drew them apart below, the lower they brought the top

of them; and, therefore, they had probably gone to the very extreme in their calculations.

It was with difficulty, but still with certainty, that Claude Duval ascended the slanting boards, and, finally, in the course of about two minutes he was at the top; and then placing his left foot upon the junction of the pieces of wood, he contrived to steady himself pretty well, and to draw himself up to his full height in that rather awkward position.

Duval was pleased to find that they had made a rather wrong estimate of the height of the roof, or of the length of the boards; for, where he stood up, as we have described, he was really within about five or six feet at the utmost of the roof.

"Jack?" said Claude.

"Yes, Claude?"

"Can Mr. Field and Dick spare you while they hold the planks steady, do you think?"

"Yes."

"Then come forward and try if you can throw me up the lantern. I think I can catch it if you will be careful to throw it well and cleverly up to me."

"I will try, Claude."

This was really a hazardous experiment; but everything was so dark and dreary up above that Claude Duval could not see what he went up to see, namely, a something that appeared to be sticking to the ceiling.

Jack took the lantern; and, after calculating the distance he had to throw it, he said—

"Are you ready, Claude?"

"Quite ready. Now for it!"

With more skill than any one would exactly have given Jack credit for possessing, Jack threw up the lantern; and Claude Duval caught it tightly and carefully, without in the slightest degree shifting his position, or making any stir upon the two planks of wood, upon the top of which he stood in so very ticklish a position.

"All right, Claude?"

"Yes, all right, I have it. Now hold steady all of you, for I have something else to attend to."

There was a complete silence now while Claude Duval turned the light of the lantern upon the roof of the place.

That roof was crossed and recrossed by many beams of heavy timber, and to his satisfaction the object that appeared to be fastened to the roof of the miserable abode was evidently some contrivance for letting people up or down through a trap in the ceiling, that was quite apparent.

The object consisted of a square wooden box, very shallow, but yet with sides sufficient to prevent any one from slipping off it; but how it got down or up was the mystery.

Close to it in the wood-work of the ceiling there were two very large pulleys, and over them passed two ropes, that seemed then to go horizontally a long way across the ceiling; but situated as he was, Claude could not find out where they went to.

Moving the lantern about in all directions, Duval strove all he could to find out the mystery of this curious construction in the roof, but, for a time, it baffled him, despite all the conjectures that came to his mind upon the subject.



## CHAPTER CCCLXVII.

## FATHER GABVEY APPEARS UPON THE SCENE AGAIN.

THE little party, likewise, were rather puzzled to know what Claude Duval could be at, and after a time Dick Turpin said—

“Claude, is there anything amiss?”

“No, Dick, not amiss, but I am a little puzzled, that’s all. There is some conjuration up here that I don’t quite comprehend.”

“Danger?” said Jack.

“Oh, no—no. It is some mechanical contrivance for getting up to a trap-door that is here in the roof, and which can lead nowhere but to the chapel.”

Upon this information they looked at each other with curiosity, and Jack cried out—

“Why, Claude, if there is a trap-door there it is the very thing for us, I should say.”

“Yes, provided we could get through it.”

“Hem!” said Turpin, “that certainly is rather an essential consideration, I must confess. What does it look like?”

“A box.”

“A box? Why you are joking now, Claude.”

“I never was more serious in all my life. But I say, Jack, my friend?”

“Yes, Claude—yes?”

“I want you to catch the lantern again.”

“All’s right. Throw it now. I have it.”

Jack caught the lantern, and then Claude said—

“Now I want you to manage to tie it at the end of as long a stick, or anything else that will hold it as nearly as you can up to the ceiling, as you can contrive.”

“I’ll do it. We must get the means somehow or another.”

“I will tell you where, then,” said Mr. Field. “By the side of the stairs leading from the chapel there is a long, narrow, iron rod, partially let into the wall at places. If you can pull it away, it will just do.”

“Capital,” said Jack. “Ladies and gentlemen, will you have any serious objection to being kept in the dark for a little time?”

“None—none,” said Claude. “Go at once, Jack.”

Jack did not wait another moment, but started off in search of the iron rod that Mr. Field had spoken of. The little lantern did not, while it was present, seem as if it had given much light; but when it was gone, the gloom—the awful darkness that fell upon the place, and upon every one in it, seemed to be something truly terrific.

It was quite in vain that from his elevated position Claude Duval strove to catch a sight, even dimly, of those below him on the floor of the dismal place.

The probability is, that the alarm of Alicia and her young friends was now much greater than they would have liked those who had so generously encountered so much in their service to know or to suspect; but be that as it may, she and the other two young creatures in the gloomy abode of priestly tyranny did not give utterance to any of the feelings of dread that had taken possession of their hearts.

Claude Duval, though, was about to say something which he intended should be to them of a cheering character—for, although they did not give any expression to their fears, he yet could not help feeling that they must have them—when he was stopped by a singular noise that arose in the place.

They must all have heard it as well as he. It resembled some one at work upon an iron-bar with a file more than anything else, and Claude was puzzled to know what on earth it could possibly proceed from.



THE TERROR-STRIKEN CONFESSOR IN THE DUNGEONS OF THE NUNNERY.

It was Dick who, in a whisper, said to him—

“Do you hear that odd noise, Claude?”

“I do certainly, Dick, and I should feel very much obliged to you, if you could give me any idea of from what it proceeds?”

“Ah, that I cannot.”

The noise increased, and then there was a sudden snap, as though something had been broken. After that all was still.

“This won’t do,” said Dick “we must find out what is going on. Where can Jack be with the light? I hope no harm has come to him.”

“No,” said Claude. “I can see him, or rather the faint reflection of the light, coming even now.”

They were all glad enough to hear this, and in another couple of seconds the flash of the lantern fell upon the roof and walls of the dismal abode, as Jack made his appearance with a long piece of the rough balustrade of the little staircase.

"I have it," said Jack.

"Hush!" said Claude, "we have heard strange sounds since you have been gone."

"Strange sounds?"

"Yes, Jack; and none of us can make out where they come from. It is a puzzle to me."

"Surely it is not that rascally confessor trying to get out of the cell in which you threw him?"

"By Jove, yes!" said Claude. "I never thought of him. You have hit it, Jack. It is Father Garvey, who has sufficiently recovered to make an attempt at escape from the cell. I had quite forgotten that there was such a person in the world."

"Yes," said Dick, "and it strikes me it would have been safer, after all, to have carried out the abbess's kind instructions towards him."

"It would; but we are not capable of such acts, Dick. Neither you nor I are assassins. Father Garvey, though, will keep, if I mistake not, awhile longer. Jack, what scheme have you?"

"You will soon see. What do you think of that?"

Jack had fastened the lantern to the end of the long iron rod that he procured, and succeeded now in hoisting it right up to the roof of the chapel.

"Good. Hold it steady now, Jack."

"Yes, I will."

"Now move along in a line towards the stairs, and go as gently as you can. That's it—that's it. All right—all right. Stop!"

Jack stopped, and as he did so, he came bump against the wall of the place, and down fell the lantern and the iron rod. In a minute all was darkness.

"The deuce take it," said Jack, "I might have been just a little more careful where I was going."

"Never mind," said Claude—"never mind; find the lantern and light it again. I daresay it has come to no sort of harm from its fall."

Jack, after groping about for some distance, found the lantern, and with one of the phosphorus matches he had, he lighted it, but it took some few minutes to burn up, and even then its flame was rather weak and unsteady.

Claude appeared to be upon the point of saying something, when a voice shouted out—

"Now, you wretches, I will bring upon you the vengeance you deserve! He is a dead man who stops me!"

With a sudden rush a figure darted along the place, and not seeing the two boards which were raised up there, came with a crash against them, that knocked them both over, and sent himself rolling to the farther end of the large open space.

All was confusion in a moment. Dick made a dart after the fugitive, and Jack cried out—

"Claude will be killed. He has fallen—he must have fallen."

The girls screamed, and Mr. Field, who had been thrown down with the boards, looked thoroughly bewildered.

"The light, Jack!" said Duval, in a calm, clear voice, as though nothing were the matter. "Silence, ladies—silence, if you please. There is nothing gained by screaming."

It is truly extraordinary how the presence of mind of one person will have an effect upon the feelings and the actions of many, and induce calmness instead of agitation. The manner in which Claude spoke, while it let everybody know that he was not hurt by the fearful fall that they all made quite sure he must have had, likewise convinced them that he saw what to do.

With a bound he reached that portion of the subterranean abode to which

the figure that had made the sudden rush had rolled, and before Father Garvey, for it was indeed he, could struggle half way to his feet, Claude had him by the throat quite securely.

"Now, Jack, the light."

"Yes, Claude."

Jack, and, indeed, the whole party, now made their way up to the spot where the confessor was writhing in the grasp of Duval. The confessor's face was pale as death itself, save a streak of blood that oozed from a wound in his forehead, that he had received from the blow he had struck himself against the edge of one of the planks. His vestments were torn, and he was covered with fragments of the damp straw that was in the cell where Claude Duval had left him, as he thought, in a tolerable state of security and repose.

"Unhand me, villain!" said Father Garvey—"unhand me, I say, or you shall rue the day you looked upon me!"

"No, master confessor," said Claude, "I won't unhand you; and as for ruing, I rather think that is what will be your fate."

The priest was half-mad evidently, for, despite the powerful grip that Claude Duval had of him, and despite the numbers he saw around him, he began to kick and plunge, and bite and scratch, in such a wild sort of way, that Claude was compelled to say—

"Dick, be so good as to tie this gentleman's legs together, and his hands behind his back."

Dick made a dart at the legs of the reverend father, and soon tied them firmly together: Jack did the same by his hands, and then Claude let him go; and he rolled upon the floor, and cursed and swore in a way that none but a priest could curse and swear.

"You may amuse yourself, holy sir, at that kind of fun as long as you like," said Claude; "it don't affect us in the least; only mark me, if you make too much noise it will be necessary to put a stop to it."

This significant hint was not lost upon Father Garvey, and he lay partly in a state of exhaustion, and partly in a state of prudential stillness, only that he glared at Claude Duval as if he would have eaten him, had he the power so to do.

The alarm of the young girls was by no means decreased by all this; and it was found that the youngest of the novices had fainted.

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## CHAPTER CCCLXVIII.

### THE ABBESS TRIES A NEW PLAN OF OPERATIONS AGAINST THE INTRUDERS.

"Oh, help! help!" said Alicia; "I do think that Helen is dead! Oh, bring the light here!"

Upon this cry they speedily brought the light to the spot, and then sure enough they found that the young creature was completely insensible, and hanging upon the arm of Alicia.

"She is not dead," said Duval; "she has fainted. But we must not let her remain in that state, as in the bad air of this place it is impossible to say what catastrophe might not ensue.

"How are we to recover her?" said Field. "What are we to do, Alicia, to restore her?"

"We want water," said Alicia. "Cold water would, no doubt, bring her to herself again."

"I'm afraid that is not to be had here."

"There is a well," said Jack, "close at hand. I cast a stone into it as I came along, and there was a disunct splash of water consequent upon its fall. Surely

there is some mode of getting up some of the water; and if so, I will warrant its being cold enough."

"Go and see," said Claude—"go and see what you can do, Jack. Here, Miss Alicia, let the young creature lie down. She is not very heavy, I daresay; but she is still too heavy for you to support for a length of time."

As he spoke, Claude slipped off his coat and spread it upon the ground for the young girl to lie upon. Alicia thanked him by a look which expressed much more than words could say upon the subject, and then she knelt upon the coat and supported the head of the novice upon her lap, which was certainly much easier than holding her up, as she had been doing.

"I will go and help Jack to get the water from the well," said Claude. "There is no danger, and Mr. Field will stay with you, and we shall hear if you want anything."

Both Jack and Dick Turpin had gone to the well to see what could be done in the way of getting up some cold water for the use of the fainting novice, and when Claude arrived they were slowly hauling up a bucket that they had found there, and which they had attached to a rope that they found, but of the strength of which they had rather serious doubts.

"The water is a long way down," said Jack, "but we have got some, I can tell by the weight."

"Pull slowly and quietly," said Dick.

The bucket came up to the surface, and then Claude stretched out his hand and got hold of it.

"All's right," he said, "I have it."

He drew it towards him, and then in rather an odd voice, he said—

"The light, Jack."

Jack picked up the lantern from the floor and held it over the bucket, and then they all three looked in silent horror at what it disclosed to them.

Floating in the water they had got up from the well was a portion of an infant's hand and arm, and a large piece of a skull with hair still upon it. The water itself had a shiny, oily look, and upon its surface floated fatty globules, and what appeared to be pieces of half decomposed flesh.

"Horrible!" said Claude.

Jack turned aside sick and faint at the sight.

"Good God!" said Dick.

Duval held the bucket over the brink of the well, and let go of it. Far down with a sullen kind of splash it reached the water, and then all was still.

The three friends looked at each other now for several moments in silence, and then Claude said in a whisper—

"We must not tell this to the ladies. It will kill them with terror. Surely now we must believe to the utmost in all the horrors that are recorded of convent criminality. This well seems to be the receptacle of the bodies of infants."

"Yes, infants born in the convent," said Jack. "There can be no doubt of it. Of course, they must be disposed of somehow or another."

"That is true," said Dick; "and if any one tells me that a score or two of idle, well-fed women come to such an abode as this, and leave their passions at the gates, and turn saints when they enter a convent, I shall have no hesitation in saying that it is a lie."

"This is truly sickening," said Claude.

"I am quite faint," said Jack.

"Come away from the brink of the well," said Dick. "I fancy, now, that horrible and noisome odours arise from it. We shall be poisoned if we remain any longer close to it. But, amid other mysteries, and stranger things, Claude Duval, there is one which we want an explanation of from you, and that is, how you came so neatly to the floor when the planks were knocked from under you without doing yourself any apparent injury whatever?"

"Yes; that," said Jack, "is, indeed, a mystery to me."



"It is one that I can easily explain," said Claude. "I came down quite easily and comfortably; for when the boards went from under me, I had hold of something else."

"Something else! What else?"

"Listen. While I was up there looking at the roof, I saw that there was some mode of reaching this place by means of a kind of basket or box, that was secured under a trap-door opening from the chapel. I could not see how it was made to act, till you, Jack, held up the lantern by the aid of the iron rod, and then I perceived that there were two ropes over two pulleys going in the direction you intended when you ran against the wall, and two in the other direction. As you went, I saw that at the end of the roof there were two other pulleys, and that the ropes went over them; so I came to the conclusion at once that there must be some counterpoise to any weight upon the descending platform or box. At the moment that the pieces of planking were knocked from under me, I clutched at the lower part of that box, and down I came quite easily and rapidly, with it in my grasp."

"I see," said Jack.

"And so do I," said Dick. "When you left go of it, up it went again, I suppose?"

"It did."

"Then, we are saved!"

"I hope so. I suppose that the abbess knows of this little mechanical arrangement; but, no doubt, she considers the idea of our getting to the roof of the place as quite out of the question, and so don't trouble herself about that part of the matter at all."

"That is it, you may depend; but her ladyship don't exactly know the sort of people she has got to deal with. What would be a difficulty to many, is none to us, or, at all events, it is one that can be easily got over. Let us see how our young friend the novice is."

When they got back to where Mr. Field was staying with the young girls, they just said that they had been unsuccessful in getting some water from the well, and Dick proposed just wetting the lips of the fainting girl with a little brandy of which he had a flask full in his pocket.

In the absence of any other means of trying to recover her, they were perforce compelled to adopt that, and the effect so far justified it, that in a few moments she began to breathe, and to open her eyes.

"Oh, save me—save me!" she cried. "I have done nothing to deserve this cruel treatment."

"Be calm," said Alicia, "you are with friends."

"Oh, no—no. Do not—oh, holy lady abbess, I cannot bear it—indeed, I cannot. Do not subject me to this really fearful punishment."

"She raves," said Alicia. "Alas! poor girl."

"I will promise," added the young creature, "to tell of nothing that I have seen or heard here. I will swear it, and, indeed, and in truth, you may rely upon my oath, for I have not yet seen enough of the wickedness of this place, to be callous to an oath."

"Listen to me," said Alicia. "Do you not know me?"

"Yes—yes, you will obey the orders of the abbess."

"No—no. Indeed I will not."

"And you will punish me. I know that you are all preparing so to do. I shall be stretched upon that dreadful machine, and my hands and feet tied, and then I shall be cruelly beaten. Oh, do not, I implore you! The pain—the agony is great!"

The affected young girl burst into tears.

"She will recover now," said Alicia.

"This is enough to melt a heart of stone," said Field. "Does she allude to punishments that the abbess inflicts upon the novices?"

"Yes," said Alicia. "I cannot describe them to you, but the abbess and

some of the older nuns take a delight in inflicting pain upon the novices, and that is what fills the imagination of our poor young friend with such terrors."

The tears of the novice seemed to wash away the cloud that had been before her perceptions, and she was able to comprehend where she was, and to feel that there was no danger.

So blissful a state of things made a wonderful change in her aspect, and half laughing and half crying, she clung to Alicia, and implored Heaven to bless those who were doing so much to save her from misery, pain, and degradation.

"Hush!" said Jack suddenly, as he laid his hand upon the arm of Claude Duval. "What is that?"

"What? what? Ah! Let us listen."

Some sound now like the tapping of some pieces of metal against each other evidently came from the chapel above. At first Claude thought that it was from the part of the roof where was the trap door; but he soon traced the sound to quite another part of the ceiling. It ceased, though, before they could come to any conclusion as to what it was, or what it portended.

"This place," said Turpin, "is as full of mysteries as of dangers. Come, now, Claude, do you think that it will be safe to try the ascent to the chapel by the trap door?"

"Safe or not safe, we will do it; but before we commence operations, tell me, Alicia, do you think that there is any possibility of another prisoner being in the cells?"

"Alas, I know not, but I would gladly urge you to search them all before leaving."

"It is a duty. Come you with me, Jack, and we will go together. We will make our search as rapidly as we can, and lose no time."

## CHAPTER CCCLXIX.

### THE SECRETS OF THE CELLS APPAL JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL.

THERE was, in reality, no time lost in the search of the cells that Claude and Jack now undertook, for Claude wished to acquaint his friend exactly with the mode of operation that he thought would answer with the cords and the pulleys connected with the trap-door in the roof.

One thing in connection with that trap-door was quite clear, and that was—that the principle of its construction was such that it had been only intended for the purpose of facilitating the descent of any one from the chapel, and not the ascent of any one from the gloomy region below.

It required a weight in the square box attached to the ropes to overcome the weights that no doubt would be found attached to the ends of them; but when the box reached the ground, and the unhappy object either fell or got out of it, then it would ascend again, because the weights became the heavier.

When it had ascended it was quite clear, that unless the chapel door was to be found, and along with finding it the means of opening it were found, the victims must soon perish in the vaults from starvation, if from no other cause.

The problem, then, that Jack and Claude and Dick had to solve in connection with the trap-door and its appendages was, to make it useful as a means of ascent as well as descent, and that was rather difficult.

Before deciding upon what mode of immediate operation they could bring to bear upon that subject, they proceeded to the cells one after the other.

The only fear they had was lest there should be some of the cells in a secret situation which their time would not allow them just then to look for; but, still, they must do something, if they could not do all they wished, and so they dashed open the door of the first cell they came to.

It was empty.

"That is a relief," said Jack. "Now for this one! Ah! look—look, Claude!"

"What is it?"

"Some one is there. We come to save you, be you whom you may; for your presence in one of these cells is sufficient proof that you are an enemy to the abbess of the convent."

No answer was returned to this speech of Jack's, and yet they could both of them see pretty plainly that there was something like a human being at the farther end of the cell.

"Give me the light," said Claude; and, taking it from Jack, he advanced right into the cell. It did not take him more than two steps to get to the farther end of it; and then the sight that he saw made him quickly recoil again.

Fastened by the waist to the wall by a short chain that did not permit it to fall to the floor was the dead body of a nun. The convent costume still clung to the faded skeleton form; but the flesh had dropped from the face, leaving the hideous, yellow, discoloured bones plainly perceptible.

"Horrible! horrible!" said Claude.

"What is it?"

"Take the light and look for yourself. I cannot give you any description of the sight."

One glance was quite enough for Jack; and, without a word, he turned from the loathsome spectacle, and shut the cell door.

In no other cell but one more did they find anything that was so fearful to look upon; and in that they saw the body of a man lying upon its face. A number of loathsome flies, of immense size, were feasting upon the remains of that unhappy human being, who, no doubt, had been decoyed into the convent by the abbess, and then safely disposed of, for some reason or another, in that house of death.

"There are no more cells," said Jack. "Let us return to our friends now, Claude; and they may, in truth, when we tell them what we have seen, congratulate themselves upon escaping the duty we have been upon."

"They may, indeed, Jack."

Claude Duval and Jack now returned to the party they had left, not far from the spot above which was the trap-door in the floor of the chapel. Without describing what he had seen, Claude satisfied himself by saying, that there was no other human being alive but themselves in the place.

"And now, Dick and Jack, you both help me, and I think I have found a mode of getting the square box down here."

"Yes," said Dick, "that may be; but to get it up again with a weight in it is the difficulty."

"Which we must meet by adding weight to the other end of the ropes. But let us get it down first. I expect that but a small force is requisite for that purpose. Where is the iron rail, Jack, with which you elevated the lantern so cleverly?"

"It is here."

The iron rail was very much rusted indeed; but Claude Duval used it very tenderly, and after snapping off a piece of about six inches at the end, he found the rest of it in not so bad a condition, and that it would bear being bent into a hook at the end.

"Now," he said, "if I can catch hold of the lower part or the rim of the strange kind of tray that is up there under the trap-door, down it will come."

With great care Claude elevated the iron rod, and got a hold of the platform; and as he had surmised, it required but very little force, indeed, to bring it down to the floor. The weights attached to the ends of the ropes evidently did not much more than overbalance it, and cause it to ascend, when no force was used to keep it down.

"Here we are," said Claude.

"Ha!—ha!" laughed a hideous voice. "Lost!—lost!—lost! Make your

peace with offended Heaven, ye Philistines, for you surely die now! Ha! —ha!"

"The devil!" said Claude.

Jack turned so sharply round at the sound of this terrible voice, which appeared to fill the whole place, that he struck the lantern against Dick Turpin, and knocked the light out; but all was not darkness in the gloomy vault. Not far from the roof, and close above the spot where they had heard the mysterious metallic tapping a short time since, they saw a strange dubious sort of light; but what it was, or where it came from, was a mystery that they saw no means just then of solving. Now and then a spark from the strange light would dart out of the mass of it and fall to the floor, generally going out before it reached it; and then some of the light seemed to be making an odd, crackling kind of noise, that could not by the adventurers in the vault be at all accounted for in any reasonable way.

"Never mind," said Claude Duval, "it is very kind of the abbess to provide us with a light. We shall see all the better what we are about now."

"Much better," said Mr. Field.

"So we shall," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, rather dubiously; "but I doubt whether upon the whole we shall find it any advantage."

"Never mind. You, Jack, go to one of the ropes that hang down the wall with the weights at the end of them, and you, Dick, go to another on the other side. It appears to me that, with very little trouble, you will be able to haul me up to the ceiling. The united leverage caused by two men using their utmost exertion would be sufficient to hoist me much higher than the chapel-floor, therefore it will be a comparatively easy task for the three of you to raise me, and it will not require much force to keep me there when I once touch the roof."

"We may do that," said Jack.

They saw at once how this could be done, and without another word departed to do it. They found that, pulling in unison, Claude and the little box began to go up—up—up gradually to the roof, and that they could maintain his position there without any serious difficulty at all.

It was no part of Duval's system to delay when nothing was to be got by it, and he set to work upon the trap-door in the roof in earnest. It was fastened on the outer side; but by the aid of a powerful small crow-bar, with a very sharp edge to it, Claude soon lifted it, and pushed it on one side. He was rather surprised that all seemed as dark now as it had been before, and that he found no change of atmosphere above the trap-door, which, to all appearance, opened into the chapel.

Duval put up his hand as high as he could reach, and found no obstruction, so that he felt satisfied he must be in the chapel, and yet there was something very strange about the fact that it should be so completely deserted and silent as it was.

"Claude—Claude!" called Dick.

"Yes, Dick?"

"Is all right there?"

"Well—I—hope so. It's rather confusing."

"Come down, Claude—come down!"

"Ascertain, if you can, what the obstruction is, before you come down."

"Oh, God! what is it?" said Alicia. "We shall all die!"

"No—no, it will go off," said Mr. Field. "It cannot hurt; and yet it is strange."

"What on earth are you all talking about?" said Claude, as he strove to look clearly down into the vaulted place.

"There's a suffocating vapour here," said Turpin, "that is half choking us



CLAUDE FOLLOWS THE CONFESSOR TO ALICIA'S CELL.

all, and we don't know what to make of it. Don't you feel any of it up there Claude ?"

"No."

"Nor smell anything ?"

"Certainly not. The air don't seem to be amiss up here at all. What can you be dreaming about ?"

"It is no dream, Claude Duval. The mysterious light yonder near to the middle of the roof is some process by which some deleterious kind of gas is evolved, which must be heavier than the atmospheric air, and so sinks, which is the reason you don't smell it where you are ; but I can tell you, old fellow, that we can't live in it long."



"Let me down at once. Let go of the ropes. Let me down. By Heaven! I fancied something of the sort."

They were unwilling enough, as may be supposed, to involve Claude Duval in the same disagreeable state of things that oppressed them in that wretched place; but as it was impossible that he could have any correct notion of the state of the atmosphere below in the situation he was in, they gradually relaxed the ropes, and let him safely descend to the level of the floor of the huge cavernous place again.

It was a great object though, now, not to allow the movable piece of platform to go up to the roof again, which it, of course, would have done the moment it got free from the weight of Claude Duval; so he said to Jack—

"Stand upon this, Jack. What we have to say, we may say just as well with your weight here as otherwise."

Jack stood upon the platform at once, and that sufficed to keep it down, and then as Claude Duval stepped off it to the ground, there came a gush of the noxious vapour, with which the place was filling, right across his mouth, and he staggered and nearly fell beneath its deadly influence.

## CHAPTER CCLXX.

THE DANGERS OF CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS INCREASE, AND FATHER GARVEY TRIUMPHS EXCEEDINGLY.

"By Heavens!" said Claude Duval, "it is the intention of that hag of an abbess to smother us."

"Very like it, indeed," said Turpin. "Only I for one beg to decline the operation."

"But what are we to do?" said Jack.

"Make a bold attempt at once at the door leading to the chapel," cried Turpin. "I won't stay here and be gradually choked any longer, for that is the sort of operation that I feel is now going on with us."

As he spoke, Dick Turpin began to make his way out of the place, in the direction of the passage leading to the flight of steps, above which was that door which there was every rational reason to believe was well guarded by the lady abbess and her emissaries.

"Hold!" said Claude.

"Yes, to my life I will," said Dick Turpin.

"Nay, hear me."

"Go on, then. What have you to say that is better than such a mode of operation?"

"Much."

"Out with it then, Claude."

"There is, of course, a route to the chapel by the platform. I propose that by such means we reach it, and not by the door. There can be no doubt at all but that we are expected to make an attack upon the door, rather than stay here to be suffocated, and do you think, for a moment, that with such an expectation, a woman of the foreseeing and cunning disposition of the lady abbess would leave that door unguarded? No, you may depend that it would be certain destruction to some of us to go to that door, and those who might be destroyed might be those, who, as men, we should most lament."

As Claude Duval spoke, he glanced at the helpless females who were with them, and Dick Turpin felt the effect in all its force.

"You are right, Claude. By Jove, you are right."

"I knew you would say so."

"Yes; if we were only men here, I should say let us go by the door; but now, I bethink me, we have others to look to. Have the matter all your own

way; but in the name of all that's delightful, let us have a mouthful of fresh air as soon as possible."

"I faint," said one of the novices.

"No—no! Don't," cried Jack. "There is no time, I assure you, my good girl. We are not in circumstances to allow you to faint."

Claude could scarcely forbear a smile at this odd mode of addressing the novice that Jack adopted; but he, too, felt that there was no time to lose, so he said—

"Now draw me up again. I see what has to be done, and done it shall be quickly. Do not ask me any questions; but do as I ask you, and I will pledge my word to save you all."

Both Jack and Turpin had quite confidence sufficient in the courage and in the extraordinary tact of Claude Duval in adopting the best possible mode of getting clear of any set of adverse circumstances to obey his orders when he gave them with such confidence; so they proceeded at once to the ropes again, after he had placed himself upon the movable platform.

It did not take many minutes to raise Claude right up to the roof again, and then he commenced operations with alacrity.

Upon the former occasion when he had been up that height he had felt that his hand and arm passed up into a hollow space, which ought to have been the chapel itself, since it was beyond the roof, but which yet could not be it, since the darkness was intense, and there was not fresh air enough to lead to the supposition that such was the case.

This was a little puzzling, to be sure; but the state of affairs below were of such a character that it would not do to stop and consider about what was to be done.

Promptitude of action now was really everything.

It will be recollected that Father Garvey had been tied neck and heels by Jack and Turpin; so that he lay upon the floor of the place totally harmless, and now and then, when his passion got the better of his prudence, uttering vehement expressions of anger, and sending those who had got thus the better of him to the full enjoyment of all those pains and penalties of another life which persons of most, if not of all denominations know so perfectly well how to make the most of.

Of course, neither Claude nor his friends troubled themselves not one jot about the denunciations of Father Garvey, so long as he did not make so much noise as to disturb them, and that he did not certainly do, for even in the midst of his rage he did not forget that—

"Discretion is the better part of valour."

The two young novices seemed to be more deeply affected by the terrible suffocating vapour that the lady abbess had succeeded in calling to her aid against her foes than any of the party.

As for Claude, the higher he got up from the floor of the gloomy and death-dealing region the more free he felt himself from the vapour, so that it was quite evident it was one of those deleterious gases which are heavier than atmospheric air, and so descend through it.

That the abbess should use such a vapour as that showed the extreme art of the woman, for if it had been of a more volatile tendency it would, of course, have had the likely effect of filling the chapel and the whole convent with its death-dealing fumes; but as it was, it just was doing the duty she intended of it and no more.

With the crowbar in his hand—the same crowbar that had enabled him to knock away the portion of the roof of the subterranean place that was immediately above the movable box or platform, call it which you will—Claude now tried to work upon what further obstacles there were that stopped his way to the chapel.

With the crowbar, though, in his hand he found he could only just reach to

the roof of the sort of building that was over the orifice leading to the vaults, and for the life of him he could not make out what it was.

While he was thus trying, without much effect, his skill to get out of the place, Jack called up to him—

“ Claude—Claude ?”

“ Yes, Jack ?”

“ We can't live here any longer. We are dying. The poisonous vapour is taking possession of our senses.”

“ Don't say that.”

“ Alas—alas ! it is true. Farewell—farewell, Claude. Provide for your own safety, if you can, and don't heed us.”

“ Is Father Garvey dead ? I hear no complaints from him.”

“ I don't know. He lies upon his back, too, and ought to be getting the most of the vapour. I daresay he is no more.”

“ Stop a bit,” cried Dick Turpin—“ stop a bit ; I have found out how the holy father manages. He is all alive and well, for he is tying, now, a handkerchief over his mouth and nose, that he has had tied in one direction for some time ; he is only now shifting it to a fresh part of the handkerchief. Let us do the same and we are safe, if he is so.”

“ Try it at once,” cried Claude, “ for the love of heaven !”

The hope that this might be a means of saving them from the worst effects of the deleterious air that was evolved from the substance in the brazier that had been let a little way down from the chapel into the vaults assailed them all for a moment or two with new vigour.

They luckily found that one of the novices had a dress of rather closely woven muslin, which was just the thing : so, with her full and free consent, they tore it up into long pieces, and each of them tied a portion round their mouth and nose, so that the air that they admitted to their lungs was, in good truth, thoroughly and completely filtered by passing through the several folds of the muslin.

Now, it is quite a well understood fact, and one which it is as well that every one should know, that air may be filtered quite as easily as water, because in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred what is with the air and vitiates it is of a much more material character than the real air itself, and will be arrested by an obstruction that allows the pure air to pass.

This is precisely the principle upon which nature, in a common filter made of gravel and charcoal, permits only pure and limpid water to pass through it, and keeps back all grosser particles of matter.

The effect, then, of what we may truly call these muslin filters of air upon the half-fainting occupants of the vaults of the convent was great, indeed. In the course of a few moments the feeling of lassitude that was so like death, and which in a short time would have passed into that state, wore off, and the blood once more freely circulated in their veins.

“ Oh, this is Heaven in comparison with our former state !” said Alicia.

“ It is—it is !” cried the novices.

“ Upon my life,” said Dick, “ it is delightful ! We do not value simple delights till we have been deprived of them for a time. I never could have believed that to draw a long breath without the feeling that you were half-choked by the process was such a truly delightful feeling as it is.”

“ Nor I,” said Jack. “ But we must let Claude know that all is well with us now, and that we can wait a little.”

“ Do so.”

“ Claude ?” called Jack—“ Claude ?”

“ Yes, Jack ? How are you all now ?”

“ Much better.”

“ I am so glad to hear it !”

“ Yes, we can wait now ; so, don't do anything precipitous that may be done better and more effectually by taking your time about it.”

"All's right! I am working away! Ah! what's that?"

"You abominable wretches!" said the deep, hollow, sepulchral kind of voice that had before sounded in the place, and which evidently came from somewhere contiguous to it. "You abominable, vile, and sacrilegious wretches! Already must you be in the pangs of that dissolution, which will only be the precursor of the still greater torments that you will suffer in the world which is to come! Death is your portion!"

The voice ceased.

"Don't reply," said Claude. "It is quite as well that the very amiable individual who thus spoke should think that we are suffering all the pangs she or he supposes, as then it will not seem necessary to adopt any other means of quickly and comfortably disposing of us."

Acting upon this hint, they were all quite still in the vaults. But Father Garvey, having his wits about him, and from the first not having suffered from the deleterious vapour, the nature of which he understood, no doubt, quite well, called out in loud accents—

"No—no! They will escape! They will escape!"

"Stop his mouth!" said Claude.

The most prompt and effectual way that struck Jack of stopping the mouth of the father-confessor was to thrust something into it, so he made up to him, and, despite his resistance, crammed the handkerchief the reverend confessor had been holding directly to his mouth and nose right into the former, so that while it still acted as a filter to him for the foul air, he could not shut his mouth at all, nor utter a word.

It was found, too, that Father Garvey had got one of his hands at liberty, and that Jack took good care to secure again.

"Now, master father-confessor," said Jack, "I rather think that you are in about as helpless a condition as you very well can be in. Don't kick, for if you do, you will only draw a little tighter the cord that holds your legs together. Don't struggle with your hands, for if you do you will have a good chance of dislocating your shoulders. Don't try to bawl out, for if you do you will infallibly choke yourself."

All these troubles come so home to the mind of the father-confessor, that he did not attempt to commit any one of the imprudent acts that Jack portended, but only lay upon his back goggling his eyes, and looking as though the last threatened catastrophe, namely, the choking one, was much nearer at hand than Jack intended, or his reverence would wish for.

## CHAPTER CCCLXXI.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE ORIFICE IN THE ROOF IS EXPLAINED.

WHILE all this was going on below, Claude was far from being idle upon his rather exalted perch above.

Finding that all was for the present safe, comparatively speaking, at all events, with his friends upon the floor of the vault, Duval took his work much more deliberately, for he felt quite sure that nothing was to be gained by percipitancy, while everything was to be lost.

He was satisfied that the roof over the orifice in the chapel floor was of a rectangular form, and to give a very familiar description of it, it seemed after Claude had got away the lower part of it, to be something like a very large chest reversed, and placed over the hole in the floor of the chapel leading to the vaults.

With this impression, then, of the shape of the obstacle that was in the way of his reaching the chapel, Claude Duval felt, with care and gentleness, for what

might be called the sides of the reversed chest, and he soon felt them, just situated as might be expected.

One of these sides presented a firm resistance to the pressure of the crowbar; but to his great surprise, the other yielded before it in a moment, and, indeed, it did so with such readiness, that Claude Duval very nearly fell from the platform owing to not finding the resistance he expected.

It was, indeed, a fortunate thing for him that he was tolerably well upon his guard, or he must have had rather a severe tumble.

Upon finding, then, that this side, as it were, of the square chest over the opening in the roof of the vaulted place and the floor of the chapel gave way on one side, Claude carefully examined the how and the why it so gave way, and he was not long in satisfying himself that he knew all about it.

That side he found to be about four feet in height, and it was evidently hinged on to the upper or flat portion of the chest by those description of hinges which would go both ways, according as any force was applied to the flap or door with which they were connected.

"Good, so far," cried Claude to himself, and then raising his body up by a rather powerful effort, he found that there would be no difficulty in crawling through that hinged piece of wood, and on the instant he did so, his hands fell upon the cold marble floor of the chapel.

The air, too, was cool and refreshing, and, in comparison with the darkness of the place immediately below him, the chapel was quite light.

Several candles, that burnt day and night before an image of the Virgin, that was in a nick about the centre of the principal aisle of the chapel, shed their light through the whole space, which, to Claude Duval, presented so great a contrast to the darkness from whence he had issued.

One steady glance around him, now, made him familiar with all that had seemed to be so full of perplexity and mystery.

The chest-like construction, which had so puzzled him from below, was nothing more nor less in appearance, when you viewed it from the chapel, than a tomb, apparently of stone, with the effigy of some highly-sanctified individual reposing at full length upon the top of it. The top and one of the sides and the two ends were of stone, but the flap or door-way, if it might be called such, through which Claude Duval came into the chapel, was of wood, painted very finely to look just like the rest of the construction.

In lieu of a tomb, then the whole affair was but a blind, to cover up that mode of descent to the vaults below.

The comprehension of the whole affair was quite easy.

If any one got upon the floor, and chose to roll against the wooden door at the side of the seeming tomb, it would, on account of opening either way upon its well-hung hinges, give way with them, and they would come upon the piece of wood-work in the roof, which Duval had before displaced with the crowbar, and which was hinged so as to open downwards, and to close again by a spring. Through, or rather past that they would go, and so on to the descending platform, which with their weight would go plump at once to the floor of the vault, and then the job was done.

The person would either roll out in the progress of the fall, or be jerked out upon reaching the floor, or immediately get out, and in either case up would go the platform again, in consequence of the counterpoise weights acting upon it, and the whole apparatus would be quite ready for the use of any one else who might choose to go down, or who might be forced down, not choosing it at all.

In working away the lower piece of wood-work, Claude Duval had found that there was some iron-work in his way, and now he quite understood what it had been.

"So," he said to himself in a whisper, "I have now come at the secret mode by which any victim might at a few moments' notice be spirited, as it were, away from the chapel, and no one know whither they had gone, except those entrusted with the fearful secret of this seeming tomb."



That the abness, or some one in her interests, might be in the chapel, was a proposition so very likely to be true, that Claude was prudently careful not only not to utter a sound that might betray his presence, but likewise not to let his head be seen above the level of the edge of the mock tomb.

That such caution was very much called for under the circumstances, very quickly became apparent enough; for as Claude was just, with all the care possible, projecting the top of his forehead high enough above the tomb to let his eyes get clear of the rim of it, there came a sudden flash of light over the chapel, and he heard a voice, which he knew at once as that of the lady abness, say—

“Dennis—Dennis!”

There was no reply.

“Dennis—Dennis!” she said again, in rather louder tones; and then, in a half sleepy tone, Dennis replied—

“An’ faith, sir, it’s meself that will be the faithful servant, and follow you, sir, through fire and water, sir, an’ please you.”

“Dennis, I say! You dream.”

“Eh? Oh, dear!”

“Fool! awake.”

“Yes. Bedad, my lady abness, and it was dreaming I was, surely. I thought I was talking to the master, you see, ma’am, that’s all; but, bedad, it’s meself that knows where I am now all among the saints, any how.”

“Silence!”

“Yes, ma’am, if you please, ma’am.”

There was now a pause of a few minutes’ duration, after which the lady abness said, in a low and anxious tone—

“It is strange—very strange, indeed.”

“Yes, ma’am, it is.”

“Hold your tongue, idiot!”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Do not presume to speak, except in reply to me.”

“No, ma’am.”

“I placed you here to watch, did I not?”

“Faith, then, ma’am, you never said a truer thing than that, any how.”

“And instead of watching, you fell asleep?”

“Asleep, ma’am?”

“Yes, asleep.”

“Is it asleep, ma’am, you say? Oh, bedad, then, that’s a mighty great mistake, my lady, any way. It was only thinking I was, my lady; but it isn’t the likes of me that would go to sleep in this a-place, my lady, more by token that you tould me to watch and listen; and how could I do them same things if I was to be going off to sleep, my lady?”

“That is just what I should like to know,” said the abness. “If you have not slept you have watched; if you have watched you have heard something, for it is not in reason that all this time should pass and no sound indicative of death coming from those below.”

“Certainly not, ma’am, as you say, it isn’t in reason.”

“What have you heard, then?”

“What have I heard, is it?”

“Yes, fellow.”

“Why, ma’am, infidels and heathens like them as is below in the cellar, ma’am, is not to be accounted for any way.”

“Then you heard nothing, and so I know that you slept upon your post.”

“Slept on a post, ma’am?”

“Fool! You slept here in the chapel instead of watching and listening as I tould you to do to the slightest sound that might disturb its stillness.”

“Oh, no, ma’am.”

"Now, I tell you that you did. Do not provoke me, or your life is not worth a moment's purchase, and you die, too, without absolution."

"Don't be after saying that, ma'am, and threatening a poor fellow with the going out of the world without the clergy, ma'am. I will tell you all I heard ma'am, which was a shrieking and a groaning."

"Ah! A shrieking and a groaning?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That is music to me to hear of."

"Yes, ma'am, and after a while, you see, ma'am, there was a knocking and a rumbling, as though the ould gentleman himself was coming; and then, after that, ma'am, everything went quiet and aisy, and nothing woke me up—I mean, nothing disturbed me, as I sat here thinking of ould Ireland."

"They are dead, then?"

"I should say uncommonly dead, ma'am."

"My vengeance is complete. Ha—ha—ha!"

"Ha—ha!" laughed Dennis. "Mighty droll it is, any way. Her ladyship's vengeance is complete. Ha—ha!"

"Silence, idiot!"

The tone in which this command was given pretty clearly let even Dennis know that he went upon rather dangerous ground when he presumed to laugh at the same time and at the same thing as the lady abess did. He was silent on the moment.

The abess, then, lifted the lamp she carried from a stand on which she had placed it, and approached the door in the wall of the chapel, and placed her ear to it and listened.

"All is still as the grave," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," said Dennis.

"Peace! Yes, all is still as the grave; and why not? for it is a grave to them. They are surely all dead now, and I have my revenge upon them all. Well, that is something. I must write to the sovereign pontiff to appoint a new confessor to the convent, since Garvey has been so well got rid of."

"Yes, ma'am," said Dennis.

"Silence, on your life!"

"Oh, dear!"

The abess now rather alarmed Claude Duval by coming at a slow and solemn step towards the very mock tomb, through the side of which he had made his way into the chapel. With great speed and dexterity, and yet with no sort of flurry, for that might at once have discovered the fact of his presence there, Claude passed through the hinged doorway of the tomb and so on to the top of the platform, upon which he crouched as low as he could.

The only thing that Claude Duval now dreaded was that Jack or Dick Turpin might call up to him something, in which case a full discovery of all that was taking place would most likely ensue, and all the powers of mischief of the abess might be brought to bear upon the new train of circumstances that would open to her mind, and of which she had now no conception at all.

The idea did occur to Claude of just making a sudden dart and laying hold of her and making her a prisoner there and then upon the spot; but, still, he did not quite feel that that would suit him, for her outcries and the fright that would ensue with her would, in all probability, alarm the convent, and then the contest with the old nuns, which he wished for the sake of the females of his own party to avoid, would ensue.

As he lay, he considered that he was tolerably safe from the observation of the abess, especially as she had, evidently, no sort of suspicion that any one was there; so he kept quiet, thinking that it would be time to be violent if any chance discovery of his presence there should take place.

As he suspected, the abess had come to the tomb to listen if she could catch any sounds from below through its side.

Steoping close to the tomb, after placing her lamp upon the top of it, she

pushed the hinged side of it open, and inclined her ear towards it for a few moments, which seemed a long time to Claude Duval.

Lucily no one spoke from below; but Father Greyve uttered a groan.



CLAUDE FORCING THE CONFESSOR INTO THE CELL.

## CHAPTER CCCLXXII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CONVENT, AND THE ABBESS'S DISCOMFITURE.

THE abbess, in order the better to hear if any sound came from the vaults, very materially aided the concealment of Claude Duval, for she inclined her ear and not her eyes in the direction where he lay.

The groan that Father Garvey uttered in the anger and the despair of his spirit reached her, and was music to her ears.

"Ah, I hear them," she said—"I hear them now. They are dying—they are now dying!"

"True for you, ma'am," said Dennis.

The abbess started to her feet, for she had no desire to make Dennis acquainted with the secrets of the convent further than necessary, although she had retained him in the service of the unscrupulous system.

"Keep back!" she said, imperiously. "How dare you follow me, idiot?"

"Keep back is it, ma'am?"

"Yes, yes."

"Oh, then, ma'am, that's what I'll do. Me whole family has lost many and lots of honours all their lives by not going forward. But modesty, you see, ma'am, and diffidence is the great fault of me countrymen, and they can't help it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, ma'am; that's true for you."

The abbess had let the door at the side of the tomb fall shut when she rose from her attitude of listening, so that about Claude Duval all was the most intense and impenetrable darkness again; but, situated as he was, he could hear every word that the abbess or Dennis thought proper to say.

"Their doom is fixed," said the abbess, "and you shall receive the reward that your faithful services to the church entitles you to."

"Many thanks to you, ma'am. Deed and faith, ma'am, it's a great thing to be able to serve the saints in this way, and to get the better of the heretics."

"It is—it is!"

"An' it's meself, ma'am, that would be glad to be always doing that same."

"Then you have no objection at all to remaining here permanently in the service of the convent, have you, Dennis?"

"No, ma'am."

"You will understand, then, that if you do so, you will have no foolish scruples about what you do?"

"Sure no, ma'am."

"Even what the world without calls murder must to you be a duty in this place, if you are called upon to do it."

"If the praste, ma'am, says that it's right, it isn't for the likes of me to say no to it. Surely, ma'am, his reverence knows what is right in all things, and it's his look-out, you know, ma'am, if it isn't."

"That is true, Dennis. In those few words you have embodied the one great principle of Catholicism, and for which the holy church has been contending ever since it was a church. The laity have no right to think at all about religion, or anything else that the clergy choose to decide about. All they have to do is to obey."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Dennis, you will suit us very well. You will reside here within the convent walls, and attend a little to the garden, and make yourself generally useful."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You will eat and drink of the very best, for nothing will be shut up from you in that respect."

"Bedad, ma'am, that will suit me."

"I should think it would; and, in addition to that, you will be well paid, and all you have to do is to obey our orders, be they what they may, without a doubt, a hesitation, or a question."

"Certainly, ma'am."

No doubt the abbess considered that in Dennis she had really met with a capital assistant in what further villainies and atrocities the progress of events might give rise to in the convent.

We can only wonder that superstition could so take hold of any human mind as to make it, like Dennis's, the slave of another person's iniquity, and induce it to give up the one great and indefeasible right that belongs to the whole human race—the right of thinking for itself.

But, as the lady abbess truly said, in that was to be found the one great principle of Catholicism for which the Church of Rome had ever fought, and for which it will ever fight.

Claude Duval was rather amused by the dialogue that he had had such a good opportunity of listening to between the abbess and Dennis; but he was in the hope now that they would both leave the chapel, so that he might be able to give notice to his friends below that the coast was clear, and commence forthwith concocting measures with them for an escape from the vaults.

In this hope Duval was disappointed, for in a few minutes he heard the abbess say gloomily, as she paced to and fro past the tomb—

"They will surely all die, and then this poor fool who has so freely entered into my service must go and cast them all into the well. Yes, the well—the well! How many secrets of this house does that hide!"

Claude remembered with a shudder what had come up in the bucket of the well, when an attempt had been made to get some water for the fainting novice.

"Dennis!" cried the abbess, sharply.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You will still keep watch here for some few hours."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And do not go to sleep. The fire-arms are still so placed that if you should hear any one at the door yonder trying to break it open, you can discharge them with a touch, and death must be the instant fate of any one or more persons on the other side."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Now I commend you to the saints. Farewell!"

"Amen!"

The lady abbess, like a ghost, stalked from the chapel, leaving Dennis on guard within it, and relying upon his stupidity and his superstition to keep him true and faithful to her.

When she was gone, Dennis took a turn up and down one of the aisles, and then he spoke to himself, saying—

"Bedad, then, this is a mighty quare change in me fortunes. Here I am in the service of the saints, and it's quite a blessed thing to think that I shall be on such mighty good terms with them that they will keep me quite out of purgatory when I get there, for I take it we can't all go there, if it is for ever so short a time. Well, it's a good thing I heard what that atheist of a Master Field was about with the bad lot that he picked up to help him, any way, and was able to tell all that same to the lady abbess. Oh, then, it's a holy woman she is, any way! I'll just sit down here, and try to keep awake by saying my prayers in the holy place, which can't fail to be pleasing to the saints hereaway. What if her ladyship does smother a few heretics and Orangemen in the cellars down below—isn't it all for the good of religion? To be sure it is—to be sure."

With this opinion, Dennis sat down very composedly to try to keep awake, and began the mumbling of some Latin prayer, of the meaning of which he had not the most distant conception in the world.

This process, though, instead of having the effect of keeping Dennis awake, had just the contrary one, for it sent him to sleep, and in the course of five minutes more Claude Duval had the gratification of hearing him snore away at a great rate.

"That will do," said Duval.

It was now the object of Claude to let his friends below know that he was



all right, and that if ever a time had come when they might fairly expect to escape from the convent without creating any alarm, now was that time.

Leaning over the side of the little platform upon which he was, Claude called very gently to Jack—

“Jack—Jack!”

“Yes, Claude?”

“You and Dick can let me down now. Let go of the ropes, and I shall come easy enough to the ground, I daresay.”

“All’s right; wait a minute.”

It was not to be supposed that during all this time Jack and Dick had been personally holding the ropes that held up the platform, with the weight of Claude Duval upon it. They had found a means of securing them in the proper place after hauling him, Duval, up to the roof.

It took them a minute or two to undo the knots they had made in the ropes, and then they let Claude carefully down.

During that time that they had been undoing the rope Duval had tied his handkerchief over his mouth, so that he was prepared against the effects of the noxious vapour that was in the lower part of the vaults beneath him.

Notwithstanding this precaution against the positively deadly consequences of breathing the noxious air that was below, Claude Duval felt, the moment he got into that had atmosphere, the great difference there was between it and the cool air in the chapel above, and he was all the more anxious to get his friends into a better state of things.

“Has anything happened,” he said, “since I have been away from you?”

“No, Claude,” said Jack; “but we have been in a state of great apprehension concerning you. We thought we heard voices above, and strange lights appeared, too, upon the roof, but as we heard nothing from you we thought it prudent to be perfectly quiet.”

“It was indeed prudent. If you had spoken all might have been lost.”

“All lost?”

“Yes. Listen to me, and I will tell you exactly the state of affairs above us in the chapel.”

Claude Duval, then, very briefly but amply told them what he had overheard between the lady abbess and Dennis, and concluded by saying—

“Now that the abbess has left the chapel, and that Dennis is asleep in it, I think that the time has come when we should attempt to escape from here.”

“But how?”

“I will tell you. You, Jack, and you, Dick, are quite strong enough to raise, by the aid of the ropes, the platform with me upon it and one of our fair friends here, and, therefore, I propose that I take them up to the chapel one after another in that way until all are safely there.”

“That will do,” said Dick; “but I propose that you take Mr. Field up first and show him the way, and then he will be there as a protection to the ladies, for should the abbess return or that rascal Dennis awaken, you know, and none of us be there, we don’t know how much mischief a few seconds might produce.”

“True—true, that is a good thought. Mr. Field, will you come?”

“Yes, at once.”

“Alicia shall follow you.”

“No—no,” said Alicia; “my poor young friend, who is really very unwell, shall go next; she has more need of a little fresh air than I have by a great deal. You will guard her?”

“I will,” said Field, “with my life.”

“Settle what order of precedence you all like best,” said Claude Duval; “it don’t matter to me one jot, for I am resolved that, if I live, you shall be free from this place. Now, Jack and Dick, come on, and let me show Mr. Field, since he is to go first, where he is to take up his position so as to aid and defend the ladies should he be called upon so to do.”

Before Mr. Field went upon the platform with Claude Duval there was a silent pressure of the hand between him and Alicia, but they did not speak. The affection subsisting between them, and which the dangerous circumstances in which they were placed had tended to strengthen, wanted no words to make it well and truly understood.

Jack and Dick were not backward in attending to the ropes, and in another moment, Claude Duval and Mr. Field were slowly, but surely, going up to the roof of the vault.

When they reached there, Claude at once showed Field how to get into the chapel, and then he said to him in a whisper—

“Of course, you will be of the most material assistance to the ladies when I bring them up, and I pray that you direct them to keep here upon this spot, just beneath the level of this tomb, for I don't think Master Dennis is sleeping quite so soundly as we could wish.”

“He shall sleep soundly enough,” replied Mr. Field, in a similarly cautious tone of voice, “if he dares to interfere with me, or with any of those who will be soon, I hope, under my protection.”

“That will do,” said Claude.

Duval then called cautiously to Jack and Dick to let him down, which they did on the instant, and then he took up one of the novices in the same way that he had taken up Field, and by the aid of the latter she was safely got into the chapel, without any noise.

By repeating this process, the other novice and Alicia were placed in comparative safety, so that there remained in the vaults only Claude Duval and his two friends, Jack and Dick.

“Well, Claude,” said Dick, “how are we to manage?”

“I have thought of that.”

“Have you?” said Jack. “Well, I am glad to hear it.”

“The ropes,” added Claude, “can just be got hold of, I find, from above, and I think that if two of us get hold of them there we shall find no difficulty in hauling up any one man who may be here.”

“That will do, then,” said Dick Turpin. “Now do you and Jack go up together, for my experience of the power requisite to draw up the platform convinces me I can do it alone.”

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXIII.

### FATHER GARVEY REMONSTRATES AGAINST THE PROGRESS OF AFFAIRS IN THE VAULTS.

CLAUDE DUVAL, although he had no sort of doubt upon his mind about the possibility of leaning through the opening at the bottom portion of the tomb in the chapel, and so pulling up the platform, still did not like the idea of leaving Dick Turpin the last in the vaults, and he said—

“No, Dick, no. If one person can pull the ropes from below here so as, by the aid of the weights that are attached to them, the platform can be fairly raised, let that person be me.”

“Why so, Claude?”

“Because it is I who have brought about all this danger, and I think I ought to be the last in this place.”

“Stuff—stuff! There is a good reason why you should go, now.”

“What is it?”

“You have been enduring all the fatigue of going up and down, and of opening the tomb above, and I have been quite resting, comparatively speaking, here, so go at once.”

"Dick is right," said Jack, "and I say, go at once. I do not myself offer to be the last to stay, because I think, and indeed I know, that my strength would be unequal to the task of pulling up the platform by the aid of the ropes here alone."

"Come on, then, Jack," said Claude; "we will delay no longer in the matter. Come on, old friend, at once."

Both Jack and Claude now got upon the platform; but before Dick Turpin could lay hold of the ropes to pull it up, they were all attracted by the extraordinary and agonizing contortions of the priest, who lay upon the floor with the handkerchief thrust into his mouth, just as he had been left for some time past.

The unhappy wretch managed to utter the most horrible groans, and to roll over and over, as though he were in a fearful agony of pain.

Claude Duval looked at him for a few moments, and then he said—

"Jack, I don't like that."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Dick Turpin.

"It is true," added Claude, "that this is a very bad fellow, and that, if right were done, there is scarcely any amount of suffering that he don't deserve; but yet it is so truly awful to see a human being suffering such pangs, that I beg of you to relieve him, if you can, Jack."

"I will," said Dick Turpin. "Don't you get off the platform now that you are once on it, Jack. It is the handkerchief in his mouth that is choking him, I suppose. I will relieve him of it."

With this intention, Dick Turpin laid hold of the end of the handkerchief that was a little way out of the mouth of the confessor, and pulled it out entirely, when the unhappy man gasped several times, and lay perfectly still for a few seconds.

"He is dying," said Claude.

"I am afraid he is," said Jack.

The confessor opened his blood-shot eyes, and turning them upon Claude Duval and his friends, he said feebly—

"Mercy! mercy!"

"What can we do for you?" said Claude. "All that you now suffer, or that you have suffered, you have brought upon yourself, unhappy man that you are, by your conduct in this most villanous abode. Thank yourself for your sufferings."

"Oh, no—no! Have some mercy upon me!"

"What would you have me do?"

"Release me from these cords. They cut my flesh, and kill me. Oh, you will not leave me to die in this frightful place?"

"We cannot aid you."

"Yes—yes, you can—you can! Oh, yes, you know you can. It is easy to release me from these bonds. You are going yourselves away from here, and you will leave me to starve to death. Is that christian?"

"No, if we were going to do such a thing, your reproach would be just enough," said Claude Duval; "but we are not."

"You are—you are!"

"Not at all."

"But I see you all going—I see you now!"

"It does not fellow, because we are going, that you are to starve to death here. For your consolation—for I would not have even such a man as you suffer the pangs of experiencing such a death—I can tell you, that your mistress, the lady abess—"

The confessor howled with rage at the mention of the abess's name.

"Your mistress, the lady abess, fancying that we shall all be dead, in the morning intends to send some one here to throw our bodies down the well."

"No—no!"

"But I say yes ; I heard her say so."

"She will forget."

"Then it is her fault, and not ours ; and, once for all, I tell you, Sir Priest, that you will not be released further than you are now by us, for we will not trust you with the free use of your arms and your legs. Give him his handkerchief Dick, so that he may keep the noxious vapours of this place from his lungs, and then let him be."

"I don't think he is in any danger," said Dick, as he threw the handkerchief to the priest. "The savour of the vapour, which so nearly killed us all before we found out how to guard against it, seems to be dried up, and I don't think any more of it is being evolved now."

"Then he has really nothing to complain of."

"Nothing in the world."

"Wretches ! Beasts !" cried the priest, as he strove in vain to rise from the attitude he was in. "I consign you all to perdition ! May you all fail not to feel doubly and trebly the torments that I feel ! I solemnly curse you all in sleeping and waking—in sitting and in lying—in standing and in walking—at home and abroad—in eating and in drinking ! Curse you all ! Amen !"

"My dear sir," said Dick, "if it be any amusement to you to curse us, pray go on at it as long as you think proper."

"Perdition catch you all !"

"Very good, sir, only you will recollect, if you please, the old proverb to the effect, that curses are like chickens—they always, sooner or later, come home to roost."

"Bah !"

'You may say 'bah !' as much as you like, but if you look at us you will not fail, with your great sagacity, to see that—

'Notwithstanding this terrible curse,  
We don't yet feel a penny the worse ;'

so good night, sir, and I hope you and the rats will be hearty company for each other."

The father-confessor only glared at Dick Turpin, now, as though he would have eaten him up if he could, and Dick, taking no further notice of him or his rage, went to the ropes for the purpose of exerting his strength to draw up Jack and Claude Duval to the opening in the roof.

There was no great difficulty in doing this, and Dick had the pleasure of seeing them both in safety at the roof of the vault, and after that pass into the chapel itself. He then let down the platform for his own accommodation, but it could hardly have been possible for any human being not to feel some sort of sensation of terror and of loneliness in the situation that Dick Turpin was now left.

We should very much wrong Dick if for one moment we were to insinuate a doubt of the good faith of his friends above. Turpin knew well that rather than leave him there they would all come down again and stay with him, let the consequences be what they might.

It was not the feeling that he was deserted that crept over the soul of Turpin in that dismal abode, but it was a kind of shuddering one at finding that he was, to all social intents, alone in a region which had been, no doubt, for so long a time consecrated to the Demon of Murder.

To be sure, the father-confessor was there ; but we cannot wonder that he, as company, did not occupy a very large share of the attention of Dick Turpin.

After a few moments the voice of Claude Duval came clearly down to him, although Claude still spoke only in the most cautious of whispers.

"Dick—Dick ?"

"All right, Claude."

"Do you see me ?"

"Dimly I do. Is all right above?"

"Yes, Dick; get on to the platform now, and let Jack and I draw you up."

"Do you think you can do it?"

"We will do it, so we don't intend to think about it, I assure you, Dick. Are you ready?"

"Yes, quite ready."

Dick Turpin could not conceal from himself the fact that the old ropes that connected the platform with the roof had creaked very ominously as Jack and Claude went up, and the idea now came across him that nothing was much more probable than that at this the last moment they might break and let him down. In that case, even if he escaped personal injury of a serious character from the fall, his situation in the vaults would be rather critical.

To be sure, there was the door at the head of the stairs, leading into the chapel, by the side of the confessionals, and by that his friends above might, admitting them to have the power to do so, release him; but, upon the whole, Dick would very much rather be with them in the chapel.

With such feelings and such apprehensions, rational and likely as they were, it may be guessed that Dick did not much enjoy his little voyage from the floor of the vaults to the ceiling.

It was not the easiest thing in the world for Claude Duval and Jack even, although they were as efficiently as he could do so assisted by Mr. Field, to draw Dick Turpin up to the orifice in the tomb.

Nothing but their thorough determination to pull him up, if it was at all possible to do so, prevailed over the difficulties they had to encounter, which difficulties were mainly on account of the very awkward position they were forced to get into to bring any strength to bear upon the ropes at all.

"Take it easy," said Dick, when he was about half way up. "Take it easy. The old ropes are straining fearfully."

"The deuce they are," said Claude.

"Yes, yes. I hear them."

"And so do I," said Jack.

"Hush!" whispered Duval. "Don't say another word, Jack, but pull him up."

A few more minutes sufficed to bring Dick nearly to the top of the place, and then he stretched up his hands and made a clutch at the rim of the orifice, close to where Claude and Jack were leaning over the sides. Fortunately, the clutch was successful, and the principal weight of Dick Turpin was no longer on the little platform.

"Give me a little help, and I am with you," said Dick.

Claude clutched him by the collar, and with a great exertion of strength, fairly pulled him through the side of the mock tomb, and placed him in safety in the chapel.

Dick Turpin then drew a long breath, and shook his head, as he said—

"I wonder what could tempt me to go down and come up again upon that frail concern."

"Thank the fates," said Claude, "you have no need so to do, nor have any of us, either."

"You forget the necessity of caution," said Jack. "I pray you to speak low, Claude. It is true that Dennis's nose, by the tune that it is playing, lets us know that he is fast asleep; but yet, it is just as well that we should be as careful as possible."

"It is better to be so, Jack. Now, let me see. Are we all assembled here and ready for a start?"

"All—all!"

"And the ladies are recovered, I hope, from the sufferings of the dismal place from which we have so happily escaped?"

"Oh, yes," said Alicia, "we are quite well now, and happy."

"Then, gentlemen," said Claude, "look to your arms, for we will now,





THE REUNION OF ALICIA AND THE NOVICE IN THE CONVENT DUNGEONS

despite any sort of resistance that can be offered to us, leave this place. I, for one, will fight to the last, and I am quite sure you will all do so likewise."

"We will!" they replied.

It was at this moment that the convent bell began to toll dismally, and they were all so astonished at the sounds at such an hour, that they crouched down behind the mock tomb with a feeling of consternation, and something like dismay.

Of course, the most natural idea in the world was, that the tolling of the bell was some sort of alarm given of their presence in the chapel; but they soon found cause to alter that opinion.

The monotonous tolling of the bell continued for the space of about three minutes, during which Claude Duval and his party looked at each other as well as they could in the faint light that the chapel afforded them, as though each would ask of each some kind of explanation of what it really meant.

It was one of the young novices who then, in a tone of alarm, said—

"I know what this means—oh, I know too well!"

"What does it mean?" said Claude Duval. "I charge you to tell us at once."

"It is what the abbess calls an early chapel, and is held one hour before sunrise, to try some guilty nun or novice for some offence against her."

## CHAPTER CCCLXXIV.

### THE TRIAL OF THE DELINQUENT NOVICE IN THE CONVENT CHAPEL.

WHEN the young girl gave this explanation of the cause of the ringing of the convent bell in so dismal a manner, it suddenly ceased, and the stillness that succeeded had something awful and solemn in it.

Claude Duval turned to Alicia, saying—

"Do you, too, think that the explanation we have heard of the cause of the ringing of the convent bell is the correct one?"

"Alas, I know not. I have not been sufficiently long an inmate of the place, thank Heaven, to become acquainted with all its manners and customs."

"It is so, I assure you," said the novice, and then she appealed to the other one, who was rather unwell, as she it was who had fainted in the vaults, and her statement was at once by her confirmed.

"Well," said Duval, "it don't matter to us, that is one comfort, and perhaps it is all the better that the abbess should be occupied with her own affairs, so that she won't have any time to interfere with ours. There can be no doubt but that she thinks us by this time all dead in the vaults, and so feels herself at full liberty to go on with her regular devotions, without troubling herself further about us."

"Oh, sir," said the novice, "but how shall we escape hence?"

"Escape hence? Why, by leaving this place. I propose to wait here now for a few minutes longer until we can fairly assume that the abbess is quite busy tending the conference or council you speak of, and then we will make our way into the garden, and be off at once."

"But, good gracious," cried the novice, in a tone of voice that, considering the neighbourhood of even the slumbering Dennis, was not a prudent one to trust to the still air of the chapel, "it is here that the trial will be held."

"Here?"

"Yes, here, in the chapel."

"The deuce it is."

"There is danger, you see, sir."

"I do, indeed. What the deuce is to be done now, I wonder? This is rather awkward. Never mind, though, they are not here yet, and we may still, if we are quick about it, have time to escape. This way—this way!"

"Hush," said Jack. "Look there."

Jack pointed to the steps of the altar, down which the abbess was now slowly coming, guarding the lamp she held in her hand against the draughts in the chapel. It was, no doubt, to the fact that the little flickering flame of the lamp demanded all her attention that Claude Duval and his friends escaped the penetrating glance which she otherwise would have sent round the chapel.

"Stoop, all of you," whispered Claude.

They all shrank down, now, below the level of the top of the tomb, so that

even if the abbess were to pause and look in that direction, she would not see them amid the dusky air of the place.

"What is to be done?" whispered Mr. Field.

"Hush," said Alicia, "speak only in whispers, for the love of life! If we could get about twenty feet to the right of this spot we should reach the confessionals, and two of them would hold us all. It is very unlikely that they would be visited by any one, and as there is no Father Garvey to take possession of one of them we should be safe there until the trial was over."

"We will try it," said Claude Duval, "at all events."

"Do so—oh, do so," said Mr. Field.

The abbess reached the foot of the altar steps, and then, still shading her lamp with her hand, she said, in a low voice—

"Dennis—Dennis?"

A loud note of anything but a musical character from the nose of the slumbering Dennis was the only answer to the lady abbess's call.

"Dennis—Dennis, I say?"

Another snoring sound was the reply.

"The wretch sleeps," said the abbess.

It was, no doubt, the anger of the lady abbess that made her quite forgetful of the fact that the little lamp she carried in her hand was, from some cause or another, burning very feebly and required great care to keep alight, for with hasty steps, and without shading it at all from any sudden rush of air, she advanced towards where the nasal sounds convinced her that the slumbering Dennis gave so loud an idea of vigilance upon his part, and the lamp instantly went out.

We are afraid that at this juncture the abbess of the convent uttered an exclamation that was much more strong than polite.

"What can be the matter with the lamp?" she then said, in a more subdued tone. "It was wont to burn well. Father Garvey, when he was alive—ha! ha! now he is dead—but when he was alive, he used to say, that the well in the vaults gave forth poisonous exhalations, and that such hindered the burning of the wax tapers in the altar sconces; but I never believed him."

After, with some dexterity, and once with partial effect, trying to blow the lamp into a flame again, which may be done sometimes, if done with tact, she found that there was no recourse but to go to the farther end of the chapel, where the dim light was burning before the effigy of the Virgin Mary in a niche, and by its aid re-illuminate her hand lamp.

Dennis went on swearing, certainly, at a most awful rate, and the abbess, after shaking her clenched hand at him, went with quick steps to the little image of the Virgin with the lamp.

Neither Claude Duval nor his friends could have the least difficulty in being cognizant of all these proceedings on the part of the abbess, and amid the stillness that was in the chapel, they could hear, with the greatest ease, everything that she said. When the abbess moved off to the far end of the chapel in quest of a light, Claude felt that then was the opportunity, and the only one, that in all probability they could have of concealing themselves in the confessionals.

In quite a low, anxious whisper, he spoke to Alicia, saying—

"If you can manage to guide us to the confessionals you speak of, do so now, if you please. If they are close at hand, and if there should be no difficulty in getting admission to them, now is the time."

"It is—it is. Come."

They had all heard what Claude said to Alicia, so there was no time lost in any explanation, and they followed her along the aisle with rapidity. They took good care to keep in stooping attitudes, so that they might not be seen by any accident; and then Alicia opened one of the confessional doors, saying—

"This will hold some of us."

"It will hold us all," said the novice, who had fainted in the vaults below.

"It will hold us all."

"Nay!"

"Yes—yes, it will. There is an inner chamber to this one confessional, which Father Garvey used often to sleep in."

It certainly was possible that the confessional, without an inner chamber at all, might have hold them all ; but in order to make it do so, they would have had to stand up rather closely to each other. The novice, though, was well aware that at the back of the confessional there was a little door that opened to a chamber, about twelve feet square, in which the holy father used to repose after the labour of attending to the confessions of his penitents at the convent. Upon one occasion, curiosity prompted her to make the most diligent search for that little door, and she had not only found out its exact position, but had made herself acquainted with the secret spring by the aid of which it was opened.

This knowledge stood her in good stead now.

Imagine then, the whole party, which now consisted of no less than seven persons, safely in the confessional, and the door closed. The novice found the spring of the door in the wall, leading to the other chamber, and there they had plenty of room.

All this did not occupy many moments in accomplishing, and it was well that it did not, for Claude Duval felt rather uneasy every minute that the lady abess was out of his sight.

There was one great advantage, though, connected with getting into the chapel, and that was, that the girls could have a good rest in the priest's chamber, which was very luxuriously and handsomely furnished.

To be sure, the darkness there was something that might, indeed, be called profound ; but if they felt around them, almost wherever they did so they found some soft sofas or easy chairs, in which one might sit and doze the hours pleasantly enough away.

"Now, for Heaven's sake," said Claude Duval, "be quiet, ladies, while we men look into the chapel as well as we can from the door of the confessional, and see what goes on there."

"There is no occasion to look from the door," said Alicia ; "there is a grated window which will afford you an easy view. It is covered with wire gauze, too, so that you can see out from here, and, while there is no light in the confessional, no one can see you."

"The very thing," said Claude.

As he spoke, the convent bell began to toll again, and the novice said—

"That is the second bell. The nuns will assemble now, and bring in their prisoner at once."

Claude Duval was exceedingly anxious to see all that might transpire in the chapel, and along with Dick Turpin, Jack, and Mr. Field, who, by-the-bye, converted himself into a sort of general intelligencer between the ladies in the priest's room and the confessional, through the gauze wire of which the proceedings in the chapel could be seen, took up their posts at that spot.

This second time that the bell rang was for a very short time indeed, and then there was a shuffling of feet in the corridor leading to the chapel, but as yet no one but the abess was to be seen within its walls.

The abess had re-illuminated her hand lamp at the little shrine of the Virgin, and had approached Dennis, to whom she administered two or three kicks, and he woke up, saying—

"Murder ! murder ! Oh, bedad, and what's that same——"

"Wretch !

"Oh, ma'am, and then, sure, is it you ?"

"Beast !"

"Is it a baste, ma'am, you are after calling me ?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then, ma'am, I'd rather not, for sure and it don't seem fine and aisy for such a lady as yourself, ma'am, to be destroying your elegant mouth with such words."

"You are an idle, good-for-nothing fool, and your life ought to pay the penalty of your folly. How dare you come here and undertake a duty, and then neglect it?"

"Neglect it, ma'am?"

"Yes, neglect it."

"And pray, ma'am, if it's all the same to you, what was the duty, ma'am?"

"To keep the most diligent watch in the chapel."

"And didn't I, ma'am?"

"You know you did not. You slept as soon as my back was turned."

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"Oh, no? But I say, oh, yes."

"Bedad then, ma'am it isn't right to contradict your ladyship, but I only slept with one eye, and I assure you, my lady, that the other was continually rolling round and round, and doing the duty of twenty soldiers, ma'am, all on duty with a sword and a blunderbuss each of them, ma'am."

"Idiot!"

"Yes, ma'am—I'm sure, ma'am, it's quite a pleasure to be anything your ladyship may happen to like best."

There was a decided tone of insolence about Dennis now. That inevitable effect upon a small mind of being useful was beginning to take its course with him. He was beginning to improve upon it, and to fancy that he might say and do things that otherwise he would not have dreamt of.

Nothing but the ignorance of this man could possibly have induced him to act in this way, for after what he knew of the proceedings within the convent was it likely that such a woman as the abbess would, for long, endure either his presence or his insolence?

No. The danger of the position in which Dennis stood was such that any one with a very little more sense than he had must have seen it, and the look that the abbess gave him was truly that of the basilisk, for it promised death to him.

"Very well, Dennis," she said, quite mildly. "I daresay you are quite right."

"True for you, ma'am."

"And so, as the business that I come to the chapel upon now is rather of a private nature, you will oblige me by going up the steps of the altar and making your way behind it, where you will see a door in the wall. By pursuing the passage beyond that door you will come to my apartment."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Wine is on the table. I need say no more."

"Troth, ma'am, and you need not, any way. Good luck to you, ma'am."

Dennis left the chapel by the route indicated to him by the abbess, while from an arched door at the farther end of the aisle there entered the building a long row of nuns in the habit of their order, and with their arms crossed over their breasts, and walking slowly like people who are given to somnambulism

## CHAPTER CCCLXXV.

### CLAUDE DUVAL STAYS THE EXECUTION OF A JUDICIAL SENTENCE.

CLAUDE DUVAL thought that surely there must be something more in the character of these proceedings, so full of formality as they were, than the mere passing sentence upon one whose crime was only a crime affecting the peculiar position in which she was placed, and who might be adjudged to any punishment the person in power chose, without even the fraction of an examination into the circumstances of the case.

It seemed as if, to use a common expression, the abbess, who reigned in that



convent, certainly, with absolute authority, was making much ado about nothing in this trial of the novice.

But when we come to consider that catholicity, as understood by the Church of Rome, is a system, and that in all its parts it abounds with ceremonials of the most sombre, as well as of the most glittering character, and that without those ceremonials it is nothing, we shall see how even those who are united, with absolute authority, under its jurisdiction, have to conform to those general principles by which the whole of the system is carried on.

The trials, too, of the inmates of convents and of nunneries were considered by the Catholic Church as useful in another point of view. They taught those who were present at them what was the peculiar crime that had to be avoided; and this was a knowledge that, with all the concomitants and ceremonies of a trial, was advanced at much greater length than as if it had merely stated that so and so was punished by order of the superiors for such and such conduct.

Besides, these forms and ceremonies kept up the semblance of something like a regal state; for what would be regality without its nice ceremonies?

Thus, then, was it that the abbess of the convent took the trouble of solemnly trying, or seeming solemnly to try, one over whom she had sovereign authority, and whom she had quite made up her mind beforehand to adjudge guilty; the amount of punishment that she was to receive had, no doubt, been completely settled in the mind of the abbess.

This was the only way in which Claude Duval could to his own mind, in anything like a satisfactory manner, account for the vast trouble that was taken to make something that, in reality, was quite arbitrary, appear to be something strictly in accordance with justice, always assuming that the affair was really an offence.

The long and really solemn procession of nuns came slowly along the aisle, and what with their sombre dresses, the dim religious light of the place, and the strange ghost-like manner in which they glided along, Claude could not help admitting to himself, that the catholic was indeed the faith that, of all others, mostly took the imagination prisoner.

The nuns soon arranged themselves in a circle round the steps of the altar, or rather, we should say, round the space of the chapel immediately in front of those steps; and then a chair of an ancient looking form, with much gilding upon it, and a carved angel's head at the corners both of the seat and back, was placed in the centre of the half circle of nuns, rather close to the steps of the altar.

The seat, of course, was for the lady abbess.

A death-like stillness now reigned in the chapel, for the bell had ceased to toll, and the abbess was hidden somewhere. It suited her better not to appear till all the nuns were assembled, and then she could do so with effect; and so, from behind the altar she made her appearance.

The nuns all bowed reverently before her.

Claude Duval, if he had not enjoyed the rather frequent opportunities that he had of seeing the abbess, certainly would not have known her now, in her robes of office.

From some receptacle at the back of the altar where they were kept, she had procured them, and placed then over her other apparel, so that she presented rather a gorgeous appearance as she stepped forward to take her place in the seat of authority that had been placed for her.

"Silence!" cried the abbess, after rather a long pause. "Have you prayed?"

"We have," said all the nuns.

"Sisters, have you remembered the sinner in your prayers?"

"We have."

"Do you think, sisters, that in the time which is to come, and which will be without end, she will find favour?"

"She will."

"That is well. We would have it so from the bottom of our hearts."

An old nun now stepped forward from the rest, and kneeling at the feet of the abbess, she said—

“Holy mother, it is true that the sinner shall find peace and mercy in the world which is to come, through the intercession of the church; but that state can only arise after she has passed the bar of human justice.”

“What would you have?” said the abbess.

“Her trial.”

“Whose trial?”

“The novice, Frances.”

“Be it so.”

Now, all this was repeated in such a style that it was quite evident to Claude Duval and his friends that it was nothing in the world but a regularly established farce; so that when one of the nuns or novices was tried for any offence, real or supposed, the abbess should be able to say that she had been called upon by all the sisterhood, in full chapter assembled, to take that course.

When the abbess had said, “Be it so,” the old nun rose from her knees, and retired among the sisters.

After a few moments’ thought, then, the abbess gave out the words of a kind of hymn of praise, which was sung in the space of about three minutes by the nuns; and then, as the echo of the voices died away, she said—

“Bring the culprit hither.”

There was a considerable stir among some of the old nuns now, and then about half a dozen of them started upon the errand in search of her whom the abbess was pleased at that early stage of the proceedings to call the culprit, although professed only to be sitting there to try her for alleged offences.

During this pause in the proceedings Claude Duval took the opportunity of asking Alicia if she knew a novice by the name of Frances.

“Oh, yes,” she replied. “She is a beautiful young girl, and has only been in the convent about a month.”

“What is her age?”

“Not exceeding sixteen, I should say, and she has the greatest dislike to a conventual life, and has expressed as much.”

“How came she here, then?”

“She has been forced here by her friends, being originally deceived into the idea that it was a boarding school.”

“Then her offence for which she is about to be tried is, no doubt, just for expressing a dislike to the convent?”

“Oh, no—no!”

“No? What else can she have done?”

“Something that you will, no doubt, hear alleged against her, whether it be true or not; but that is not the offence. If that were to make a high cause of, the lady abbess would have nothing in the world to do but to hold chapters for the trial of all the novices in the convent.”

“And the nuns—do they never grow uneasy?”

“Yes; but the punishment of anything in the way of apparent repentance of having taken the vows to which they would be subjected is so severe, that they are terrified into silence; and after a long time the mind gets vitiated and habituated to this sort of life, and from weeping and wailing in secret over their own sufferings, they get to take a pleasure in inflicting them upon others.”

“No doubt.”

“Claude—Claude,” said Turpin, “come to the grating here—come now.”

Claude hastily applied his eye to the wire gauze once again, and he heard a great shuffling noise in the immediate vicinity of the chapel as he did so.

A door in the wall was flung open, and then the old nuns who had left to seek her whom the abbess had called the culprit made their appearance, dragging some one with them.

“Help! Oh, have mercy upon me!” cried a voice.

Claude Duval felt the hot blood of indignation rise to his face, and he placed his hand upon the door of the confessional.

"Hold," whispered Jack.

"But can I hear this?"

"Yes. Wait a bit. Remember that we have it in our power, at any moment, to step forward to the release of the young girl."

"Yes; but——"

"Nay, Claude, be patient yet awhile."

"I will try to be so."

The old nuns dragged into the chapel a young and beautiful girl, whose long hair hung down to her waist, and one of the old hags had a mass of it twisted round her hand, with which she gave the poor girl such tugs that it was a wonder she did not pull that quantity out by the roots.

The other old nuns followed and kept striking her severe blows about the head, neck, and shoulders.

"On—on," cried the hag that had hold of the girl by the hair. "Come on, wretch—come on, heretic! Ha—ha! I have you!"

"Release me—oh, release me! I will follow you if it be to death, but do not torture me thus!"

"I will torture you, you wretch. So, you think because you have a pretty face that you won't stay in the convent, do you?"

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Take that, and that."

The old hag tugged at the young girl's hair as she spoke, and Claude said, in a whisper—

"Jack, get your head on one side."

"What for?"

"I am going to shoot that old devil."

"No—no. Look!"

Goaded at last to desperation by the suffering she endured and the torments of the old nun, the young girl rushed forward and sent her sprawling upon the pavement of the chapel, against which her head came with an ominous sort of crack.

The old hag, to try to save herself, let go of the hair of the young girl, who, thus being free for a moment, bounded forward, and kneeling at the feet of the lady abbess, she cried—

"Madam, you are the superior of this convent, and your word is law. If I have done anything for which you feel that you have a right to punish me, let me hear what it is, but do not sit there and suffer me to be ill-treated by these persons whom I both hate and despise."

The abbess looked coldly at the young girl.

"The sisters of the convent are not," she said, "to be hated and despised."

"Yes, if they are hateful, and if they do despicable things."

"Silence!"

The novice rose from her kneeling posture and looked around her with disdain upon her countenance, and Claude Duval, as he looked at her, thought her certainly the sweetest creature of her age that he had ever seen.

"Let me kill her—let me kill her!" cried a voice.

At the same moment the old hag who had had the tumble upon the cold and hard pavement of the chapel, half blinded by her rage and her dishevelled locks, made a rush at the novice, but the young girl dexterously slipped aside, and the hag, unable to stop herself, or really not seeing where she was going, flew right in the abbess's face and imprinted half a dozen terrible long scratches upon her, to the great danger of her eyes, at the same time that she cuffed her about the ears with the other hand in a most vicious manner.

The abbess was so completely taken by surprise, and confounded by the sudden character of this attack, that she had got all the worst of it before she could recover herself sufficiently to resist it. Then, with a shriek of rage, and

pain, she laid hold of the hag by the throat and dashed her to the floor, and kicked and struck her with such ardour, that sense or life seemed to leave the old woman, and she lay passive and covered with blood at the feet of the revengeful abbes.



FRANCES BROUGHT BEFORE THE ABBESS ON A CHARGE OF HERESY.

### CHAPTER CCCCLXXVI.

THE FOOM OF THE YOUNG NOVICE IS PRONOUNCED.

This most infuriate encounter between the abbes and the old hag, who had told the novice, Frances, so ill, was so delightful to Claude Duval and his friends

hat they actually danced again while it was going on, and Claude himself had the greatest difficulty to prevent himself from calling out in a loud voice—

“Bravo—bravo!”

Prudence, however, and a desire to hear what might further take place, restrained him, so he listened and watched the proceedings in the chapel with still greater interest than before.

The wild rage of the abbess was such that it was some time before she could command her voice to speak, and when she did it was more in a scream than in any other sort of tone.

“Is the wretch dead? Is she dead?” she cried.

As she spoke, she jumped upon the body of the old nun again, and evidently very much enjoyed the doing so.

The other nuns looked aghast at all this, and then, with one accord, they called out in reply—

“Dead—dead! Yes, she is dead.”

The abbess sunk back into her chair again, and applied her handkerchief to the long bleeding scratches in her face, and then, in a quiet tone, she said—

“And you all stood by and saw me thus treated. Yes, none of you moved an inch.”

They all dropped on their knees, and were beginning some sort of lamentation; but the abbess, by an impressive gesture, stopped them, saying—

“Peace—peace, I say! Be still.”

They all rose.

“Take this wretch,” added the abbess, pointing to the insensible form of the old hag—“take this wretch, and, whether she be alive or dead, cast her through the bishop’s tomb into the vault.”

Even the old nuns looked at each other, and shuddered.

“Do my bidding, or woe be to you all!” cried the abbess.

It was evident that they did not consider this an idle threat, or as one that could with any degree of safety be disregarded, for they advanced, and lifted the body of the old nun from the floor.

“Away with her!” shouted the abbess. “Away with her, and let me never look upon her hideous face again.”

The nuns lifted the hag, and as they did so, she showed some slight signs of returning consciousness; but they all bore her to the tomb, which covered the opening to the vaults, by the aid of which Claude Duval and his party had reached the chapel. They laid her upon the floor at full length, by the side of the swinging side of the tomb.

“Away with her!” cried the abbess.

They kicked her against the swinging board, and in another moment she was gone!

This was, in sober and plain truth, rather an awkward state of affairs to have to contend against. Claude Duval hardly felt satisfied not to interfere while murder was going on before his very face in this sort of way; and yet as the mischief was all confined to those with whom he could not have any special sympathy, he did not like to step forth, and say—“I will put a stop to this.”

The nuns, when they had pushed the body of the old hag through the opening in the vaulted roof, stood for a few moments listening. There was then a strange wailing noise as the platform descended with her, and then there was a piercing shriek!

The nuns started.

“She was alive!” cried the abbess, as she clapped her hands together in joy at the thought, for from that fact she considered her triumph and her revenge to be all the greater. “She was alive! Ha! ha! she was alive!”

“She was,” said the nuns.

“’Tis well—oh, ’tis very well! Now she will suffer, and may she feel the weight of my greatest curse!”

“Amen!” said the nuns.



"Come now, sisters," said the abbess, "come to me, and let us forget the wretch, of whom we are so well rid, while we proceed to investigate the crimes of the novice now before us. Come hither! come hither!"

The thought that she would be so fully and so amply revenged upon the old hag who had scratched and buffeted her at such a rate seemed to give the lady abbess pleasure sufficient to obliterate for the moment the sense of the injuries she had received, and she had spoken in much of her usual tone of voice.

The nuns, in pursuance of the orders they received, again collected in a half circle round the abbess, and the young prisoner, looking pale and anxious, for she fully expected death, stood in the centre of them, and facing the abbess.

A kind of established form was now proceeded with in the accusation of the young novice, for the abbess pointing to her, said—

"Who is this?"

"A novice of the convent," said one of the nuns.

"Her name?"

"Child Frances."

The novices generally were called child so-and-so, whatever their names might be, and the nuns were called sisters.

"Why is she here?"

"For sin committed."

"Is this so?"

"No!" said Frances.

"She says no?"

"But she ought to say, yes. It is the devil that has whispered to her to say no to the charge."

"Alas!" said the abbess, "unhappy girl! why do you not at once and heartily confess your great sin, and upon your knees ask for the forgiveness of the church, and of us? It might be then that your punishment would not be so very severe; but if you are obstinate, there is no saying how far the saints may wish us to go against you."

"With what am I charged?" said the young girl. "What is the meaning of all this? Tell me what it is you charge me with doing that I had not the most perfect right in the world to do?"

"Silence! you are a prisoner."

"Alas! I know it. I have been ever since I set foot within this dreadful place."

"That is contumaciousness," said a nun.

"It is," said the abbess; "but we will proceed, not heeding it just now. It seems to me that the charge against you, is this."

As she spoke, she took a written paper from her bosom, and handed it to one of the nuns, who in a drawling tone read as follows from it—

"This certifies that Child Frances is a novice in this holy house, and that on the Wednesday of the last week, instigated by the devil, she threw over the wall of the garden a certain written paper, highly to the injury of the saints and the Holy Catholic Church."

"You hear, Child Frances?" said the abbess. "That is the accusation."

"I do hear."

"And what have you to say to it?"

"You know well what I have to say to it. I am here a prisoner. I am kept here against my will, and denying the right of every one so to imprison me. I say that I have the right to do all I can to obtain my liberty."

"Is that your answer?"

"It is."

"Unhappy girl! you know not what you say."

"I do know."

"Peace—peace! Read the letter which, by quite a miracle, owing to the saints being continually heaping favours upon this convent, we found by one

who brought it to me, instead of carrying it to any heretic, who would, no doubt, have made use of it against us."

The nun who had made the accusation now produced another note, which she read as follows:—

"This is addressed to any one who may find it, and who, with Christian feeling, may be disposed to aid the writer. My name is Frances Atherton, and I am confined against my will in the convent at the corner of the lane—it is called Berrymead. What I wish is that the finder of this note would go to some magistrate and place it in his hands, so that he may feel it to be his duty, as, no doubt, it will likewise be his intention, to take such steps as will release me from the odious and unjust imprisonment that I suffer.

"May Heaven reward you for aiding me,  
"FRANCES ATHERTON."

"Is that your writing?" asked the superior of the novice.

"It is."

"And what were your expectations consequent upon that being found?"

"My expectations were what I mention in it."

"Wretch!"

"The wretches are those who forced me, in self defence, to write it, and who now insult me for so doing."

"Ha—ha! you are bold."

"I am."

"And yet you are here."

"And yet, as you say, madam, I am here. You think that I am in your power, but surely heaven will not look down upon us all this day and suffer me to be sacrificed."

"You will see."

"I hope so, and that the seeing will consist of some aid coming to me."

"Holy sisters," said the superior, "you have heard the accusation against this Child Frances, and you have heard that she admits her guilt. What say you—is she a guilty one, or is common-sense and light a delusion?"

"Guilty!"

"'Tis well."

The whole of the nuns had spoken at once, and the echo of their voices had a strange effect in the old chapel. Poor Frances seemed hardly able to support herself, and the courage with which she had hitherto spoken and borne her trial appeared to be giving way. She turned very pale, and as her eye ran over the array of countenances around her she could see no glance of compassion in any of them.

Then she looked at the abbess who was in deep thought, with her head resting upon her hands, or who affected to be so and assumed that position.

"Madam," said Frances, "madam?"

"Go on."

"I cannot see that my offence is one that is not so natural that your own sense of justice must acquit me of any frailty. What would you do if you were a prisoner anywhere? What would you do but try all manner of means in order to effect your escape, if possible?"

"Peace!"

The abbess looked up, and there was such an awful expression upon her face that even some of the oldest nuns started back a pace or two and regarded her with terror as they guessed what was coming.

"Sisters!" said the abbess.

They all very reverently bowed their heads.

"Sisters!" she said again, "it is necessary in this convent that some terrible example should be made."

"Amen!" said the nuns.

"The spirit of disaffection and of dissatisfaction is abroad," continued the

abbess, "and it must be checked. The saints have whispered counsel to me, and the sentence I now pass upon the culprit here before us is theirs, not mine."

"Amen!"

"Bring the feather couches!"

There was a movement among the nuns as though a shock of electricity had passed through them all.

"Bring the feather couches!" said the abbess again.

"Amen!" said one.

The rest struck their breasts, and then all said—"Amen!" Half a dozen of them left the chapel, and Frances looked about her with an unknown dread, for she did not know what fetching the feather couches really meant, and in what way they concerned her.

In the course of five minutes the nuns who had left the chapel came back, bearing with them two large feather beds. One of them they laid exactly at the feet of the abbess, and flattened it out. The other they then laid by the side of the first one, and likewise flattened it out.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Frances.

"You will soon know," said one of the nuns.

"Silence!" cried the abbess.

"But this is absurd," said Frances. "I protest against any punishment which you would seek to inflict upon me, and I bid you beware of the consequences. If there be law and justice in England, you will hear of it."

"Peace, girl! Peace, I say!"

"I will not hold my peace, and so seem to submit to your capricious and unfeeling dictates. I will not!"

"Seize her, and bind her!"

The nuns made a rush at the young novice, and held her arms.

## CHAPTER CCCLXXVII.

### DETAILS THE PROJECTED MURDER AT THE OLD CONVENT.

If Frances, the young novice, was surprised at the rather singular preparations that were being made, and in which she was evidently the principal person concerned, Claude Duval and his friends were not less so.

With very great interest, because all the proceedings were very new and very strange, they had listened to the mockery of a trial that had taken place in the chapel; but what was to be done with the two feather beds that the abbess had sent for was beyond their ability to conjecture.

"Dick?" whispered Claude.

"Yes, Claude?"

"What do you think of this?"

"I don't know what to think. It gets the better of me altogether. Have you any idea about its meaning?"

"Not the least."

"Let's wait, then, quietly."

"Be it so; but upon the least evidence of any real danger to that young girl, it seems to me now that we must risk everything, and show ourselves. Do you agree to that, all of you?"

"We do—we do!" they all said.

"Very well, then; will you leave it to me to say when the interference is to be undertaken? I do not ask from any feeling of vanity, but just because it must be left, you know, to some one."

"We leave all to you," said Mr. Field.

Both Jack and Dick concurred in this by a few short words, so that Claude Duval felt that the fate of the young novice remained in his hands, and he only

wanted before actually interfering to hear what extraordinary villainy the lady abbess was going to give utterance to, in the shape of a command.

They had not to wait long for the denouement of the affair. The abbess had for some few minutes affected to be in deep thought, or prayer, again ; and then she looked up with her face frightfully pale, save where the red streaks of the scratches that the old woman who had been tumbled headlong into the vaults had given her shone up in strong relief, and said—

“ Is all ready ? ”

“ All ready,” said the nuns.

“ Ready for what ? ” cried Frances.

“ Bind her.”

Some one of the nuns produced a cord, by the aid of which they bound the hands of Frances behind her, so that it was out of the question that she could make any effectual resistance to what they were about to do.

“ The letter,” said the abbess. “ Where is it ? ”

“ Here, holy sister.”

The letter that Frances had written and thrown over the convent wall was handed to the abbess, who thereupon cast it upon the feather bed that was nearest to her.

“ Place her there ! ” said the abbess.

The nuns began to force Frances towards the bed, but she cried out for help, and, pinioned as her hands were, she still managed to give them a good deal of trouble to get her along. By dint of violence, however, they were pretty sure to succeed, and they forced her to the side of the bed.

“ Help ! help ! ” she cried. “ Oh, is there no help ? ”

“ None ! ”

“ Oh, is this possible, that of all here there is not one human heart that can feel for me ? What is it you would do ? At least, tell me what I have to expect.”

The abbess made a gesture with her head, and the nuns flung Frances violently on to the bed.

“ No—no ! Oh, God ! mercy ! ” she cried. “ What are you about to do ? ”

The abbess made another gesture, and then they turned her over on to her face, so that her cries were partially smothered. Then the abbess rose to her feet, and looking like a demon, and speaking with what we might well suppose would be the accent of one, she cried out—

“ Do your duty. Quick—quick ! Kill her ! kill her ! ”

Some half dozen of the nuns who were not holding the novice down upon the bed nearest to the abbess lifted the other one, and placed it upon her in a moment. A smothered shriek came from the girl.

It was not till that instant of time that Claude Duval felt perfectly sure of what they were about to do ; but then there was no doubt but that the intention was actually to smother her between the two feather beds.

So monstrous an act might well stagger any one who saw it in contemplation ; and for the space of time you might have counted four in, Claude Duval was petrified with horror and amazement. Then with one dash of his hand he flung the door of the confessional wide open, and with a spring that brought him into the midst of the nuns, he appeared before the astonished eyes of the abbess and the hags of nuns.

“ Hold, wretches ! ” he shouted in a voice of thunder. “ Hold, I say ! I will not see this vile murder done ! ”

Jack, Dick Turpin, and Mr. Field, were by his side now in a moment, and they each had a pistol in their hands ready for use.

It would be quite impossible for any pen to adequately describe the consternation of the abbess and the nuns at the unexpected appearance in the midst of them in this most extraordinary manner of four well-armed and resolute men. The effect for the moment was perfectly overpowering.

Before, however, the abbess or any one could speak, or even had time to think

of what to do, Claude had laid hold of the corner of the upper feather-bed and drawn it off the novice, crying out as he did so—

“ Rise, Frances—rise ; you are saved ! you are saved ! ”

The young girl uttered piercing shrieks, for she had but the moment before been under the full and perfect impression that she was doomed to the horrible death from which it did not seem possible that any human agency could now save her.

The scene of confusion that ensued was positively awful. The old nuns who had assembled at the call of their villanous abbess, and who had evidently exulted in the act of cruelty and murder that had been so purposely attempted to be carried out in all its horrors, fled along the chapel in all directions.

At first, Dick Turpin was for intercepting them in their flight, but Claude Duval called out him—

“ Let the hags go, Dick—let them go.”

“ Yes,” said Jack, “ and a good riddance too.”

The few lights that had cast some sort of radiance upon the scene were, with one exception, knocked down and extinguished, and when Claude Duval, after placing Frances in the arms of Jack, made a spring over the two beds that were on the floor, in order to catch hold of the abbess, for he thought it expedient to take her prisoner, at all events, he found that it was not so easy a thing to do as he had anticipated.

With a scream of rage, such as might well have come from the throat of some wild animal from whom its prey had been but nearly snatched, the abbess produced from somewhere in her apparel, where she had it hidden, a dagger, and just as Claude Duval was upon the point of seizing her by the arm, she raised it, and made a plunge at his heart with it, crying out as she did so—

“ Wretch ! take the reward of your interference. Death—death, at least, to you ! and then, let who will take my life, I shall, at least, feel that I am avenged.”

It was fortunate that the flash of the keen and highly-polished blade of the dagger shone in the eyes of Claude Duval for a moment ; and he was able to swerve on one side, so that the blade only inflicted a slight wound on his shoulder.

This swerving, though, had the effect of freeing the abbess from the slight hold he had got of her ; and so, without pausing there a moment to see if she had inflicted any serious injury upon him or not, she dropped the dagger, and turning, she flew up the steps of the altar, and disappeared behind it in a moment.

Claude Duval heard the snap of the spring of the little secret door at the back of the altar in a moment ; and he did not doubt but that she had taken good care to fasten it on the other side.

“ Are you hurt, Claude ? ” said Dick.

“ Oh, no—no.”

“ But she has escaped ? ”

“ Never mind her ; let her go. It would have been a very difficult matter to know what to do with her if I had taken her prisoner ; so, after all, perhaps it is better that she has really got away. Where are the nuns ? ”

“ Oh, they have all disappeared somewhere.”

“ Then we are masters of the field of battle, I suppose ? ”

“ It looks like it, certainly. No one seems to be here to dispute a supremacy.”

“ Victory ! victory ! ” cried Claude.

Hearing the cry of victory from the lips of Claude Duval, the young novice stepped forward from the confessional, and with eager joy embraced Frances, who really was so much astonished and bewildered by what had taken place that she looked around her, as if she feared that, after all, the seeming deliverance that she had had from the murderous abbess would turn out to be nothing but a delusion.

“ You are saved !—you are saved, Frances ! ” said Alicia. “ Do you not know that you are saved from death ? ”



"Are you Alicia?"

"Yes; and here is Helen. Do you not know us?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

The young girl could control her feelings no longer, but burst into a complete passion of tears, so that they had great difficulty in calming her at all.

"Never mind her tears," said Jack. "You may depend upon it that there is nothing that will recover her more rapidly and readily than they."

"Yes," said Claude; "let her weep."

Dick Turpin now set about lighting one or two of the other lights about the chapel; for they were in such a state of semi-darkness, that he feared the old nuns or the abbess might think it a good opportunity of attempting to do them some sort of mischief.

"What are you about, Dick?" said Claude. "Don't make such an illumination."

"I am afraid of being left in the dark," said Dick. "If they found we had only one light, perhaps it would not seem to them a very difficult thing to find some means of putting it out; but if there are half a dozen it will be quite a different affair. There, now, I think we shall be able to see what we are about."

The candles burnt up quickly, and as they did so, they shone upon rather a strange scene in that chapel.

There was Claude Duval and his friends, and there was young Mr. Field, and there was Alicia and the two novices and Frances, who still could hardly believe the evidence of her own senses to the effect that she was free, although she had left off weeping.

Upon the floor were the two mattresses that had been brought into the chapel for the horrible purpose of committing one of the most hideous of murders, and beside them lay, here and there, a veil and a rosary, which the old nuns had dropped in their flight, as they made so hasty a retreat from the place.

Close to the steps of the altar, too, was the seat of judgment which the abbess had occupied during the mock trial of Frances; and there lay, too, the dagger with which at the last moment she had tried to take the life of Duval.

"Well," said Dick Turpin as he looked around him, "I think, Claude, that this is about our most curious adventure."

"It is, Dick."

"Never mind that," said Jack. "Let us go."

"You are right Jack, we will go at once, for we have those now in our care whom we ought to take out of the danger of this place as quickly as possible."

With these words, Claude Duval approached Frances, and spoke kindly to her saying—

"You are now quite safe from the abbess, and your life will be protected by ours. What I wish to know of you is, if you are strong enough and sufficiently recovered from the shock you must have received to leave this place."

"Oh, yes—yes. It is the staying here that will drive me mad."

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXVIII.

DENNIS TRIES AN EXPERIMENT ON THE CREDULITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

"We are all ready," said Alicia, "Let us go at once."

Frances rose from the breast of Alicia, upon which she had been reposing, and approaching Claude Duval, she placed both her hands upon his arm, saying—

"You have saved me, sir, from such a death as is truly horrible to think of. Will you, oh, will you teach me how to thank you!"

"I am more than thanked."

"No, no. If all my life I were to try to do you kindness—if I pray for you

while I have breath to do so, I cannot hope to repay this great, this deep and lasting obligation."

"I pray you to say no more about it," said Claude. "It is of little moment, I assure you. Don't speak of it."

Frances was really a very beautiful girl, and it was by quite a momentary impulse now, and with perfect innocence of purpose, that Claude Duval placed his arm for a moment around her and kissed her.



"As a dear sister," he said, "I thus salute you."

"You will, then, let me think of you as a brother?"

"Yes, if you will."

"Ah, I will, indeed; and where in all the world is there a brother coequal to you?"

"Now for it, Claude," said Jack, rather impatiently. "This is the way to the chapel door, I think."

Claude turned in the direction that Jack intimated, but before they could

any of them move a step, a loud, bawling voice cried out—

"Oh, bedad! and isn't this the joy of poor Dennis's heart! Do I look at my master, or don't I? Oh, the saints be good to us all! and haven't I been grieving about him, till I thought I hadn't any eyes left in me head wid crying. Oh, master—master, don't you know your faithful Dennis, who has had so many adventures in the search after you, that they have been enough to make all the hair drop off his head? Bedad! then, I feel as if I had come into my ancestors' property in ould Ireland again, now that I see you, sir."

With this congratulatory speech, of the sincerity of which the reader, from his previous knowledge of Dennis's proceedings, is able to come to so good an opinion, Dennis had the impudence to come from behind the altar, and to walk down the steps of it as if nothing were at all amiss, and as if he had only to make a few professions of regard for his master and his friends to put himself again upon capital terms with him.

"Why, it's Dennis," said Dick.

"Dennis, by all that's abominable!" said Mr. Field.

"Yes, sir," said Dennis, "it is, sure enough, your own faithful Dennis, who is willing, the saints be praised, to follow you, sir, to life or death."

"Of the latter proposition I have no doubt," said Mr. Field.

"Many thanks to you, sir, for not doubting your faithful Dennis, and, bedad! now I look about me, here are all our old friends, sir. Oh, then, it's the joy of my heart, that is ready to come right out of my eyes, sir, and to go rolling down my nose and my cheeks, to see you wid such a good company, sir."

Claude looked at Dick and Jack, and they both looked at him, and then Duval said—

"Can impudence go further than this?"

"Impossible," said Dick.

"Wait a bit," said Jack, "there is some plan in all this."

"Think you so?"

"I do, indeed."

"But what?"

"My opinion is, that this rascal is sent by the abness."

"Ah!"

"Yes; so it will be just as well to look to him well."

"It will—it will. Mr. Field?"

"Yes, my friend?"

Claude Duval whispered his suspicions in Mr. Field's ear, at the same time advising him to humour Dennis a little, in order to get out of him, if possible, what was the diabolical scheme of which he was to be the abject tool.

"I will," said Field. "Well, Dennis?"

"Yes, your honour? Oh, then, it gives me quite a joy all around my true, innocent heart, sir, to hear you speak again in this world."

"Come here, Dennis."

"Yes, sir; it's myself that will come. Oh, the holy! oh——"

"What's the matter?"

"It's the eyes of me that are forced to go on winking like nothing at all, at all, at the sight of all these young beauties, sir. Bedad! and where, sir, did all these lovely young females, sir, come from?"

"Never mind that, Dennis. I want to know where you came from?"

"Where I came from, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I thought you would want to know."

"You thought right."

"Then, sir, I'm mightily glad I am right, sir; for it ain't often, sir, that a poor fellow is right when he is with all this quality, sir."

"But how came you here?" said Claude.

"How came I here, sir?"

"Yes."

"After the master, sir; at the same time, sir, it's mighty glad I am to see your own good-looking face, sir, to the face. And it's a fine looking man you are, sir. Sure, and the girls, sir, have been pulling caps about you where you come from, sir, no doubt. Master, don't you think, sir, that it would be as well to get out of this place?"

"Better than well, Dennis. Can you show us the way?"

"Well, sir, then I can."

"That's it," whispered Jack to Claude.

"What?"

"He will lead us all into some danger by order of the abness."

"Hush!"

"Well, Dennis," said Mr. Field, "if you can show us the way out of this place, we shall be much indebted to you."

"Well, sir, then, it's the oddest thing in the whole world, sir, that I can do so at all—at all; but you see, sir, just in an accidental kind of way I do know this

way out; and if you will all follow me, ladies and gentlemen, I will lead you fair and easy away."

"Go on, Dennis."

"This was, sir—this way."

Dennis went to a corner of the chapel, and opened with a key that he had in his hand a secret door, and pointing through it, he said—

"Now, sir, pray go on—all of you pray go on, and it's myself that will follow you, sir."

"And where does that lead to?"

"To the garden, sir."

"Very good, then, Dennis; you will go first."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh! but, sir, where would be my manners to go first, sir, I'd like to be after knowing? Oh, no, sir, it's myself that will follow the quality. You have nothing to do, sir, but to go straight on, and you will find, the saints be good to us, it's all right."

Claude whispered to Jack and Dick; and one of them placed himself on one side of Dennis, and the other on the other. Claude Duval himself stepped up to him behind, so that Dennis was environed completely, if we count the open door as one side of the four.

"Now, Dennis," said Claude, "we have that respect for you that we insist upon your going first."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes, you. So you had better go at once without any further bother about it. We will follow you."

"But it's all right, sir."

"We know that, and so we will follow you. Do you think for a moment that we would follow you if it were not all right?"

"But, sir, I—that is—you——"

"Go on, Dennis."

"But, sir—master, I don't want to go first. I'm only a poor sort of fellow, you know, sir; and, bedad! I'd rather not go first. Master, will you speak to the gentlemen, sir, an it please you, sir?"

"No, Dennis; I insist upon your going first."

"Then, sir, I won't! I ain't very well, sir. Let me go, gentlemen. I don't feel very well. I want to go away altogether, sir, if you please. Oh!—oh! murder!"

Claude Duval caught Dennis by the back of the neck as he tried to make a bolt past Jack, and held him firmly.

"You scoundrel!" he said, "you shall go whether you like it or not."

"Murder! murder!"

By one of those efforts of strength which Claude Duval sometimes astonished people with, he fairly, by the aid of both his hands, lifted Dennis off his feet, and flung him with terrible force head-foremost through the open door into the obscurity and complete darkness beyond.

There was one loud scream from Dennis just as Duval threw him, and then, to the surprise of them all, they did not hear him fall; but in about three or four seconds there was a faint cry, as if far away in the very bowels of the earth.

They all looked at each other in amazement.

"What is the meaning of that?" said Dick.

"I can guess," said Jack.

"And so can I," said Claude. "Get one of the candles, Jack."

Jack run to one of the candles that were lighted at one of the little shrines of the chapel, and soon brought it to the spot.

"Don't be rash, Claude," he said.

"No, no; trust me for that. I will be more than careful."

As he spoke, Claude Duval stood upon the very threshold of the little open

door through which he had projected Dennis, and, stretching out his arm with the candle, he looked beyond it.

The mystery was at once explained.

Beyond the door there was no flooring at all, but a deep chasm, down which Dennis had gone, and down which the party now in safety in the chapel would, no doubt, have gone, if they had but allowed Dennis to be the last one of the lot, for, no doubt, if any difficulty had arisen he would have made a rush at them, and, so taking them by surprise, have precipitated Duval, his friends, and his master, down the chasm.

After that, the young girls would have been an easy prey to the abbess and the old nuns, who, no doubt, were waiting with some eagerness the result of the diabolical experiment.

"It's all over with Dennis," said Claude, as he drew back.

"How so?" said Mr. Field.

"Look!"

Claude handed him the light, and as Duval had done, he, too, took a cautious look through the open door, and then he turned away with a shudder.

"It is, indeed, all over with him."

"No man more richly merited the fate he has come to," said Dick.

"And may all such so perish," said Jack. "He was the very worst of traitors, for he betrayed the hand that fed him."

Jack closed the door, and they shrunk from the very vicinity of it. Then Claude Duval said in a clear voice—

"Take good care of these young ladies, and follow me, I will not remain another minute willingly in this most odious place."

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXIX.

### THE DEPARTURE FROM THE CHAPEL, AND THE MYSTERIES OF THE GARDEN.

ALICIA hung upon the arm of Mr. Field, and they followed Claude Duval closely. After them came the three young girls, and Dick and Jack, each with a loaded pistol in his hand, brought up the rear of the little party.

Claude Duval and his friends were quite clearly in that frame of mind that it was not likely they would stop at trifles in effecting their escape from the convent. The atrocious attempts that had been made not only upon their own lives but upon the lives of the innocent and beautiful girls who were with them, had certainly had the effect of enraging Claude and his friends beyond all endurance; and if any of the old nuns or the abbess had come in their way, it is very likely that they would hardly have stopped to consider whether their sex gave them any particular claim to mercy.

There was a look about the face of Duval which let Jack see, for he knew him well, that his patience and temper had been tried to the very utmost by the events that had taken place in the convent.

Proceeding along the aisles of the chapel, Claude reached a kind of transept, at one end of which was an arched door, which had evidently been designed by the architect of the place to be the principal mode of egress and ingress from the chapel.

This door was securely and elaborately bolted, but it did not present any apparent obstacle to getting it open, till all the bolts, and there were five in number, were withdrawn, and then there was evidently some hindrance to its opening which Claude at the instant could not detect.

There was no lock.

"Confound the door," said Claude, "I don't know what is the matter with it. Just come and look to it, Jack. You, I know, comprehend these things."



Jack stepped forward, and by the aid of one of the lights, he carefully examined the door, and then he said—

"I have it, Claude. Don't you see that there is a long iron pin here down the side, which holds it all the way by a kind of lip, that just comes over it?"

"Ah, yes; what are we to do?"

"Hold the light. Dick, have you the crow-bar?"

"It is here."

"That will do."

With the crow-bar, that had already been of such use to them, Jack tapped the long piece of iron, till he found a part of it that returned a much duller sound than the rest.

"This is the spot to try it," he said.

There were few persons who could wrench with a crow-bar with greater skill than Sixteen-string Jack, and now he managed to place it in such a position that the long piece of iron gave a sharp crack and flew aside upon its hinges; for it was hinged all the way like the locking pilastres that are now so fashionable to pedestal chests of drawers.

"That's it," said Jack. "There is a secret spring that held it, and which I we had known the way to act upon it, no doubt would have moved the iron rim at once. I have broken it, though, so our end is answered."

Upon Duval trying the door, now, it opened at once, although rustily, upon its hinges, for it had evidently not been used for a very long time indeed.

"Oh—on," said Duval, as he forced the door open. "I will get through every obstacle to liberty out of this place, the very atmosphere of which, if depressing."

There was quite a gush of cold air upon their faces as they went out of the chapel. Immediately outside the door was a little portico with a dome top, and beyond that they found half a dozen stone steps, that led at once into the garden.

"Bravo!" said Dick, "all's right now."

"I don't know that," said Jack.

"Why, what have we to be afraid of? I think that, honestly speaking, we are a match for the abbess and all the nuns, if they were to have the folly and the temerity to attack us."

"That they will not do, but I am thinking of what the abbess told Claude about there being only one path through the garden, in consequence of the spring-guns and the steel-traps that were in it."

"Oh, I don't believe a word of that."

"I am glad to hear you say so. What do you think of it, Duval? We are talking of the danger of the garden."

"We can't help it," said Claude. "I should say come on, and don't heed the one half, or the whole of the abbess's story about the may-be romance."

They were all very well pleased to hear that Claude Duval, whom they looked upon as rather a high authority, had such an opinion regarding the dangers of the garden, for the novices as well as Alicia had during their residence at the convent been duly informed of those dangers.

There was one particular portion of the convent garden only, the whole of which was, not without reason, supposed to be within the view of some window of the house from which the abbess could look, in which the novices were allowed to walk; but they had been told that if they ventured to go beyond that spot they would encounter such injuries as would be to them a source of pain and suffering while they might exist.

Claude Duval, though, took a very common-sense view of this matter; and, in the first place, he thought that the abbess said too much about the dangers of the garden for them to be real; and, in the second place, he knew how difficult it would be to maintain anything like such machinery for injuring people, as she would fain make others believe was there, in anything like a good state of repair.

Spring-guns require constantly reloading and looking to—spring-traps get

rusty and fall to pieces; so, taking one thing with another, Duval was much inclined to think that the abbess drew rather largely upon her imagination for her facts, or pretended facts, concerning the dangers of the convent garden.

With such impressions, then, he resolved to take the shortest route he could to liberty with those who were entrusted to his care.

"This way," he said. "Keep close to me. Come on—come on. Why, there is daylight enough for us to see well."

"There is, indeed," said Jack.

"Claude—Claude," said Dick, "I don't know if you know it, but the fact is, you are going, to my judgment, directly the contrary way to the lodge entrance at the corner of the lane."

"I know it."

"Then I have no more to say."

"Allow me to explain that, during my researches in the garden, I saw that there was a door in the wall. It was of iron, to my thinking, but it has, no doubt, a lock, and that will be as easily found as the lock of a wooden door. My object is to take you to that door in the wall, and to let Jack try his skill upon it."

"I will," said Jack.

"Of one thing," added Claude, "we may be assured, and that is, that the fastenings of the doors, be they what they may, are on this side; so I cannot for a moment think that they can be any very insurmountable obstacles to our proceeding."

"They cannot, indeed," said Jack; "and it is infinitely better to leave the place by such means than by the ordinary lodge entrance."

While this little discourse was going on Claude had proceeded not very rapidly, but easily and steadily, along the path of the garden which seemed most likely to lead him in the direction he wanted.

The early dawn was just casting its cold, grey light upon the tops of the old trees in the place, and the birds were beginning to awaken from their slumbers.

A rather keen, fresh air was blowing; but that was rather delightful after the vivid recollection they all had of the direful and unwholesome vapours they had had to encounter in the dismal vaults of the convent.

Claude Duval was beginning quite to congratulate himself upon the fact that the abbess had only spoken, as she had done of the dangers of the garden, to frighten him and others, when a circumstance occurred which gave rather a new turn to his thoughts.

As he went on he was rather surprised to see lying in his pathway a quantity of dry twigs, which appeared to be scattered too artfully to be the product of chance.

Duval paused a moment, but only for a moment, and so very brief was the pause that it could hardly be observed by those who followed him. He did not say anything; but, planting one foot firmly on the ground, he advanced the other, when, to his astonishment, the moment he hurled aside one of the pieces of wood, the whole fell with a crash, revealing the fact that there was a pit of about fifteen or twenty feet in depth, which was just the width of the path, and which had been loosely covered over by wood, and the debris of the garden, for the purpose of making it appear to be all level ground.

"Hold!" cried Claude.

"What is amiss?" said Mr. Field.

"Nothing particular."

Mr. Field got to the brink of the pit, and gazed at it with surprise.

"Why, what can this mean?"

"Only a little trap in which to catch any one who might happen to come this way, that is all; but, as we have avoided it, why it don't matter to us now. I am rather surprised that the abbess could think it possible that any one would be taken in by such an obvious arrangement."

"She relied upon night favouring the delusion," said Dick.

"The fall would, no doubt," said Jack, "have inflicted such injury as to make capture certain."

"No doubt of that," said Claude. "It would be difficult to fall into a hole like that and avoid a broken or a sprained limb; so that then her ladyship could come at her leisure and take what sort of vengeance she liked upon the interloper."

"Even so," said Alicia. "I have heard her say that there were deep holes in the grounds that went far down into the very centre of the earth."

Claude laughed at this extensive idea of Alicia's about the pitfall going to the centre of the earth, and he said—

"Without going so far as that; it goes, no doubt, quite far enough for mischief. I think, though, that now we know what are the descriptions of danger in the place, we may very well guard against them."

As he spoke, he tore from a tree close at hand rather a long jagged bough, and determined to use it to test the stability of the ground as he went on.

A very slight deviation from the path enabled them to get past the spot where the pit was; and they went on in safety for some time. The morning light, which each moment increased, was certainly a very great aid to them, so that, after all, as Alicia said—

"Everything is for the best. We were agrieved at the many delays which the destructive spirit of the abbess placed in our way when we were trying to leave the convent, and now we find that the effect of all those delays has been just to give us daylight to find our way in, and that, having such daylight, we have avoided a fall into yonder pit."

"Even so," said Claude. "We never do know in this world, so short-sighted are we, as to what is to come, that which is good for us."

It was at this moment that the report of a gun being discharged came upon their ears, and a shower of leaves from a tree close at hand fell among them.

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXX.

### THE ABBESS IS COMPELLED TO LET HER PREY ESCAPE HER AT LAST.

CLAUDE DUVAL did not allow himself for a moment to be put out of his way by this attack; for that it was an attack there could be no sort of doubt.

Drawing a pistol from his pocket, he just glanced around him, and made up his mind in which direction the shot had come, and then he fired.

The moment that he pulled the trigger of the pistol, he called out—

"Forward—forward! now, quickly, before there is time to fire a second shot at us. Follow me, and depend upon my leading you all right. Ah! there is the gate in the wall. Jack?"

"Yes, Claude?"

"Run on before, and open the gate. We will follow you. Do you see it?"

"I do."

Jack ran on to the wall which had just become visible between two trees, and there, sure enough, was the little low-arched iron door that Duval had spoken of to his friends.

That it was the abbess herself who had fired the gun at the party, but who had been foiled in doing them any harm, owing to the abundant character of the vegetation about that spot, Duval did not doubt. His only hope now was, that she might not know exactly how to load the gun again, or that if she did, she might not have the means at hand to do so.

A glance from Claude to Dick let the latter see that he thought the present danger rather great; and so, indeed, it was, for if the abbess were to make an appearance and fire with shot at the party, the odds were very greatly in favour of her hitting somebody; and it would have been a hard case, indeed, if any of the

young girls had been killed or badly wounded at the moment of escape, after passing through so many of the dangers of the convent.

“Jack,” cried Claude, “how do you get on?”

“It is an old lock.”

“Can you pick it?”

“No, Claude.”

“Then force it, Jack; for, on my honour, I don’t think that there is any time to spare.”

“The deuce there isn’t!” said Jack.

When Claude said such a thing as that Jack felt quite certain that he had good cause for haste; so, taking the crowbar in his hand, Jack plunged the fine flat end of it between the door and the wall, and by a powerful effort of leverage, burst the door open.

“All’s right,” he cried.

“Thank Heaven!” said Claude. “Mr. Field?”

“Yes—yes.”

“Take the ladies out of the garden. Quick—quick!”

“At once—at once!”

“No!” cried a voice. “Too late!”

Claude turned in the direction the voice proceeded from, and just emerging from amid a clump of trees that grew on one side of a narrow gravelled path he saw the abbess, with a short carbine in her hands, which she levelled at the party.

“Stir one step, any of you, and I fire!” she cried.

“Stop!” said Claude.

“Ha! ha! you are in my power!” said the abbess.

Claude gave Dick a look, and then they both placed themselves before the terrified girls, so that if the abbess were to fire, they would intercept the shots; and then Duval said to her with great coolness—

“Madam, I am loth to take the life of a woman; but I swear to you that if you do not depart at once, and cease to annoy us, I will forget that your sex claims my consideration, and kill you as I would a mad dog.”

“Base words!” said the abbess—“base words; but I well know my danger, and I likewise well know my resources.”

“You had better leave us.”

“No! I know that this establishment cannot subsist after what has happened here to-night; and after what you and your myrmidons are cognisant of, I know that you will denounce this house, and that the evil spirit of the English laws, which are not made to favour Catholicism, will be down upon me and mine. I care not to outlive the ruin of this house.”

“Rash woman, you know not what you say.”

“I know well what you say, and my whole and sole object is not to die quite unavenged. In this death-dealing carbine I hold the lives of several of you. I only now gloat over the destruction I can at any moment hurl among you.”

“You are mad.”

“Perhaps I am—perhaps I have always been mad. I know I was mad to trust you, and be fooled by you as I was; but it was passion blinded me. I would have made you rich as any prince; but now that you have deceived me I will kill you.”

“And do yourself no good.”

“I care not.”

“Come, now, I will make conditions with you.”

“I’ll not believe you.”

“Nay, why not?”

“I made a bargain with you, and you deceived me—shall I be twice a fool within twenty-four hours? No. I do not know who or what you are; but I think that you are some bold and skilful spy of the police. But whether you are or not, I am lost and ruined, and I will have revenge!”

"Dick," said Claude, "she will fire."

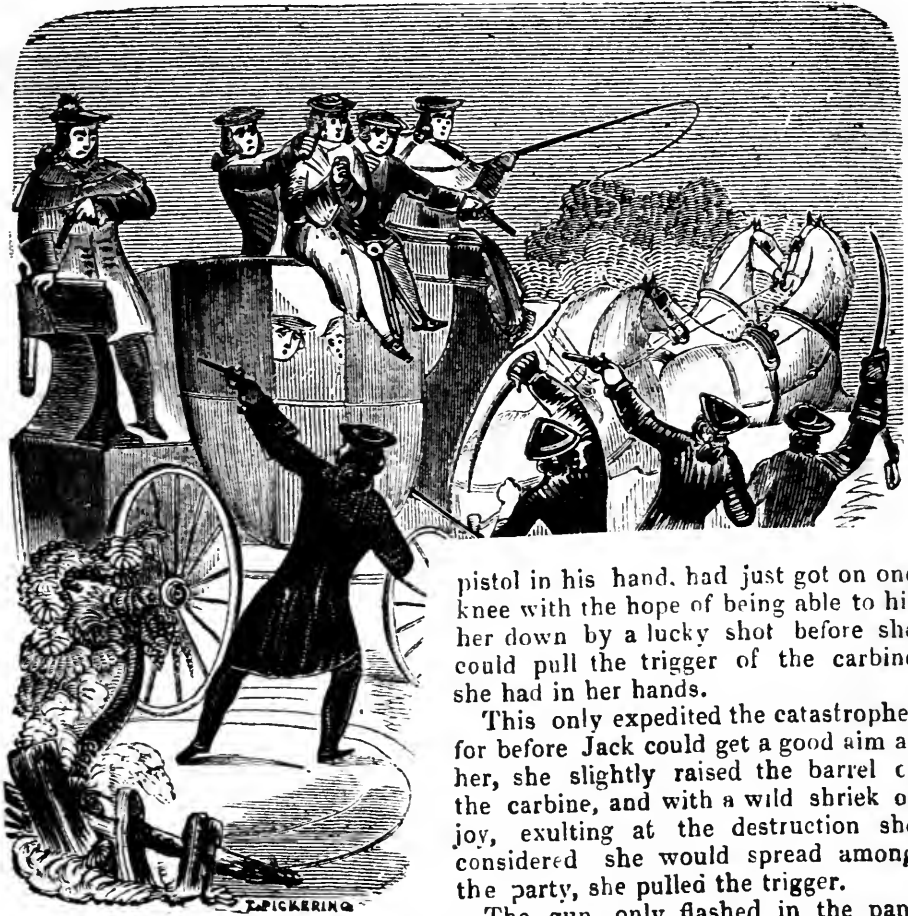
"Of course."

"If anything happens to me, Dick, leave me here."

"If I do, may I be—— Well, no matter."

"Ah!" cried the abdess, "I see you. It will not do. Die, all of you!"

What she had seen was Jack, who, dodging behind Dick and Claude with a



pistol in his hand, had just got on one knee with the hope of being able to hit her down by a lucky shot before she could pull the trigger of the carbine she had in her hands.

This only expedited the catastrophe, for before Jack could get a good aim at her, she slightly raised the barrel of the carbine, and with a wild shriek of joy, exulting at the destruction she considered she would spread among the party, she pulled the trigger.

The gun only flashed in the pan, and Claude Duval and his friends were saved from what might have been a most serious calamity.

Duval drew a long breath, but he did not say a word. Advancing with a pistol in his hand, he kept his eyes fixed upon the face of the abdess.

When she found that the carbine had missed fire, she had uttered such a cry, that any one would have thought she had really been wounded to the death.

Then casting the useless weapon to the ground, she seemed intent upon flying from the spot; but the steady gaze of Claude Duval evidently exercised a strange fascinating power over her, and there she remained staring at him as though she had been turned to stone.

Duval waved his arm when he got within about a dozen paces of her, and cried—

"Away—away, infamous woman! My duty to society, I know, is to secure you, and give you into the hands of the law, which for your numerous offences would most probably put you to death: but I have private obligations which press too much upon me at this time for me to do so. Away and repent, for soon you will have to answer both at an earthly and heavenly tribunal for your black and malignant life."



"Mercy!" she gasped.

"Away—away! Do not let me look upon that most awful sight that man can see—the fears of a wicked woman."

She shuddered, and stepped back pace after pace; but instead of taking the route among the trees as she had come, and as she, no doubt, intended to go, and thought she was going, she took the little path by the side of the thick vegetation.

"Away!" cried Claude, again.

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped the abbess. "Mercy! Oh, God!"

These were the last words she spoke, for, to the horror of Claude Duval, who did not look for such a catastrophe, that path into which she hurried in her absence of mind had in it one of the pitfalls similar to the one he, Duval, had escaped from.

The abbess trod upon the terrible ground, and with a piercing shriek she fell headlong backwards, and disappeared as if the earth of its own accord, or at the bidding of Heaven itself, had opened to receive her.

"She is gone, by Heaven!" said Claude.

The novices filled the air with shrieks of dismay, and it was with some difficulty that Mr. Field got them silent, so full of terror were they at the awful end of the abbess of the convent.

Dick and Jack both ran up to Duval, for they could not believe but what something serious must have happened to him at the moment.

"What is it?" said Dick.

"Yes, Claude," cried Jack, "where is the abbess?"

"Gone."

"Gone has she—but where?"

Claude pointed with his finger downwards, and then he said—

"She has gone into a grave of her own fashioning, Jack. Can you bear to look upon her?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I can. Hark!"

A strange and horrible wailing cry came upon their ears, and then a frightful scream, after which all was still as the grave itself.

"This is horrible," said Dick.

"I cannot bear it," said Jack. "Oh, come away."

"No—no," said Claude Duval, "it looks cowardly to leave even such a woman as the abbess of the convent in the awful position she may be in. We are men, after all, and it is our duty to go to her aid. Come with me, both of you; Mr. Field will look to the ladies for a minute or two. Will you come?"

"Yes," said Dick.

"I will follow you," said Jack.

Upon this Duval, although he absolutely shuddered as he did so, strode forward to the little pathway, about six paces down which the abbess had met with such a fearful catastrophe. Arriving at the edge of the pit he cast a glance down it, and then turning to his two friends, he just said—

"Look."

They did look, and turned away pale and aghast.

The infernal ingenuity of the abbess had placed at the bottom of that pit a terrible machine of iron, with spikes about the length of sword blades sticking up from it, so that whoever might fall into the pit could hardly avoid being pierced through by them. That dreadful fate that she had intended for others she had met herself. She lay at the bottom of the pit quite transfixed by some of the spikes, and fast bleeding to death, although, as Claude looked down, he saw some slight movement of one of her arms as he thought, but he was not quite sure of that.

For a moment or two, neither Claude nor his two friends spoke, and then it was Dick who said—

"On your soul, Claude, tell me. do you think anything can be done for that woman? for, if so, I will scramble down the sides of the pit in some sort of way."

"No," said Claude. "No—and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"It would be a mercy to send a bullet through her brain."

"She is dead," said Jack. "I have taken a second look. Come away, and rest content, Claude, with the fact that she is dead."

"I am glad to think that it is so," said Claude. "One would not have such a woman as that suffer."

"Certainly not."

"Come away—come away," said Dick. "At all events, it is a gracious thought for us that she come by her death by an act every way her own, and with which we had nothing to do."

"You are right there," said Claude Duval. "I would not have had that woman's death upon my conscience for any money."

"Nor I."

"It will be better," said Claude, "to say nothing of the fearful state in which we have seen the abbess to the ladies."

"Certainly not, Claude," said Dick. "Which of us, I wonder, would like to set about describing to them such a scene?"

"Not I," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Claude. "So now come on, and I for one shall breathe a little more freely when I have left this terrible abode. The death of the abbess, I think, almost absolves us, does it not, from the necessity of any further interference with Berrymead Priory or its inhabitants?"

"It does, to my thinking," said Dick, "for some time to come, at the least."

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXXI.

### GENTLEMAN JACK HAS HIS LAST ADVENTURE.

WHILE this little examination into the condition of the abbess of the convent was going on upon the part of Claude and of his two friends, Dick and Jack, Mr. Field had very properly and prudently taken the ladies through the little iron door in the wall into the lane, that ran along by the outside of the wall of the garden.

There they were not only tolerably safe from any further attacks upon the part of the convent authorities, but they were out of hearing of anything that might have a tendency to increase the condition of alarm into which they had been thrown.

Upon Claude and his two friends seeking them, the novices and Alicia looked as though they would have been glad to have received some information regarding what had taken place in the garden that had seemed so alarming, and Claude thought it was better to say something than to leave them entirely to their own conjectures upon the subject.

"Rest contented," he said, "as regards two things—one is, that the lady abbess of the convent will trouble you no more; and the other is, that none of us have her death to answer for, in any shape or way whatever."

These words were sufficient to let the novices know that their great enemy was no more, at the same time that they did not have the effect of inducing any belief that he who had been so true a friend to them had found it necessary or politic to have the death of that abandoned and truly horrible female to answer for.

A feeling of great relief came over all their minds at this assurance, and they were content, or seemed to be content with the amount of information they then possessed, and did not seek for more.

This was so far satisfactory, then, to Claude Duval, that he felt the whole affair, as regarded the convent of Berrymead, had assumed an aspect that would not make it necessary for him, or Dick, or Jack, to interfere further in it.

"Now, Mr. Field," he said, "here we are in the open air, and I think we may take upon ourselves to say, that we have nothing further to do with the building that lies within this gloomy wall."

"I hope not, indeed."

"You," continued Claude, "can make your own arrangements regarding Alicia, and for what my friends and I have been able to do, I have only one favour to ask."

"What is that?"

"It is, that you will charge yourself with the care of these young ladies, and see that they reach their friends in safety."

"Most cheerfully will I do so; and I will promise even more than that, for if it should so happen that the bigotry of any of their friends should be so great that they hesitate to receive them in the manner one may wish, I and Alicia will offer them a home with us, for it will be quite impossible we should ever forget the mutual aid and assistance, and the common dangers we have all passed through together upon this eventful night, that is now with the past."

It was quite impossible that Mr. Field could have said anything else which would have given Claude Duval more satisfaction than this, for it at once relieved him of what, to him, might have been the most awkward part of the whole adventure, namely, the care of the young girls who had been rescued from the convent.

Turning to Dick and Jack, Claude said in an undertone—

"We have but to get our horses now, and to bid adieu to these kind friends, with whom we have been associated in this adventure."

Dick and Jack at once assented to this view of the affair; but it happened that Claude Duval had not spoken in so low a tone but that Mr. Field had heard him, so stepping up to him, he said—

"Duval, can you spare me a few moments of your time?"

"With pleasure: what would you say?"

Mr. Field led him a little in advance of the party, and then with an air and manner of evident emotion, he said to him—

"Do you think, that after all you have done for me and mine, I can possibly think of parting with you thus? Do you think that I have no heart, and that I do not feel deeply to its inmost core what I owe to you?"

"I never thought any such thing," said Duval.

"Then let me tell you that I feel such gratitude towards you, that all I possess is at your behest. I pray you to desert the mode of life you are now engaged in, and induce your two friends to do so likewise. Come, then, with me, and with Alicia, and we will provide a home for you. What I propose is, that we all reside together."

Claude shook his head.

"Nay, do not put a negative upon the matter. Alicia and I quite understand each other regarding it, and have briefly spoken of it together."

Again Duval shook his head doubtfully.

"You have not heard all that I have to say," added Mr. Field. "Will you listen to me with patience?"

"I will."

"Then, Claude Duval, what I propose is just this, that we—that is, Alicia and I—purchase an estate some way in the country, and that we and such of the novices as may want a temporary or a permanent home, reside there with you and your two friends. We shall all be far enough removed from popular observation for you to be safe along with your two associates; and as by the course of time the memory of your deeds will by your non-appearance in public grow faint, so will your sense of security be all the greater; and you will, at

least, feel that there is no danger, even if you were inclined to mingle a little with the great world again."

Claude Duval was silent for a few moments; and it was evident that the proposition so kindly made by Mr. Field had greatly affected him. When he spoke again, it was in a very different tone of voice to any that he had hitherto used.

"Mr. Field," he said, "if, not very long ago, this proposition had been made to me, I should have accepted it."

"But why not now?"

"I will tell you."

"Yes; but I hope to conquer your scruples."

"Listen: there was one whom I loved, but she is now with the dead. From that time my heart has become, as it were, a barren waste; and I can know no peace but in the wild excitements of the life I lead, or in the grave!"

"Do not say so!"

"It is the truth; so urge me no more. I will find you out and see you now and then, when I can do so without the chance of casting a slur upon your fair fame with the world, by letting it seem that you have such an acquaintance as Claude Duval, the highwayman. And now, if you would really be kind to me, you will say no more upon this subject."

After such a speech as that from Claude Duval, of course it was quite out of the question that Mr. Field should further urge his argument; so he merely bowed and said—

"Your wishes shall be laws to me."

"Nay, now," said Duval, as he held out his hand, "do not let us feel any coolness towards each other, or disagreement upon this matter. Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that I still have in you a friend."

"You have—you have, indeed!" said Field, as he wrung the hand of Claude Duval. "You have in me a friend, and you ever will!"

There could be very little doubt but that Alicia and Dick and Jack understood pretty well what was passing between Claude Duval and Mr. Field; but they said not a word when they both slackened their pace and allowed the party to come up with them.

Duval looked tolerably cheerful; and the little party in a short space of time reached the spot where Claude and his friends had left their horses. There was then a strange kind of gloom on the whole of them; and Duval, as he patted the neck of his steed, said with a voice of feeling—

"Ladies, I and my friends will bid you good-day at this point of your plans. Mr. Field will take every possible care of you, I know; and I can only say that it will be your own faults if ever you enter a convent again; and that I wish you all good husbands as soon as possible. Come on, Jack."

Claude sprang upon his horse; and, as his friends were already mounted, they all three were ready for the road.

"Now," said Claude, in a whisper, "let us be off as soon as we can, for the longer we stay here the more painful will be the parting upon both sides."

"Let's cry out good-by, then," said Dick, "and gallop off."

"No—no," said Jack. "Not that—not that. We ought to shake hands with all the novices before we go; so, Dick, don't be over-hasty."

"As you please."

"Jack was always very gallant to the ladies," said Claude with a smile.

This hand-shaking that Jack was so anxious about was gone through very tearfully by the young girls, who considered that they were so much beholden to Claude and his friends that it was impossible to bid them adieu without emotion.

"We shall meet again, surely?" said Frances.

Claude bowed and smiled faintly.

"Ah, you do not mean it, then?"

"Yes, I do. I hope that we shall meet again, and it shall not be my fault if we do not. Farewell."

With these words, Claude gave his horse a slight hint to go on, and as he went off at rather a sharp trot, Dick and Jack had no resource but to go after him. They let him precede them because they wished that he should go just where his fancy might lead him, and they could guess very well that in the state of mind he was in he could not, for some little time, be very much in the cue for conversation upon any subject.

Rather to their surprise, for they thought he would have gone towards London, Claude turned his horse's head countrywise, and fairly rode past Berry-mead Priory again.

They could none of them forbear from regarding those gloomy and suggestive walls with strange feelings as they rode past them, and even Claude Duval slackened his pace and turned his head to take a last look at the ivy-crowned walls within which had taken place such strange events.

This slight relaxation of speed upon the part of Claude, brought both Dick and Jack up to him.

"Shall we ever," said Claude, in much his usual manner, "shall we ever see that place again inside, Dick?"

"I don't want."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"And, indeed, I don't; and yet when we come to reflect that there will be a new abbess, and new nuns, and new novices, we shall not be far wrong in coming to the conclusion that there will be fresh novices treated there of a not very dissimilar kind to those which have recently taken place."

"Then, Claude, if such be the case, we had better denounce the whole affair to the authorities."

"Probably Mr. Field," said Jack, "will feel it to be his duty to do that."

"It is likely."

"Well—well," said Claude, "come on—come on. We will take a canter to the first retired inn we meet with, and then have some breakfast and put up for a little while. I for one feel as if I wanted some rest, and I think that if we can lie by with anything like safety till sunset it will be well."

They all three trotted along the road abreast now, and so passed on through the villages of Ealing and Hanwell, crossing the little River Brent by a rustic bridge that was there at the period of our story.

About a couple of miles further on, situated in the midst of very picturesque and beautiful scenery, they came to an inn called "The Reindeer and Cup," and from the quiet and rusticated character of the place, so far as they could see, Claude thought it would do to stop at.

"What do you think of this house?" he said.

"It is the very thing for us," said Dick, "to all appearances."

"So I think."

"And so do I," said Jack. "We are all agreed."

"Then let us stop here and breakfast, and rest our cattle better than they could where we left them while we were at the convent. We will, if no cross-accident should occur to mar such a design, stay here till sunset, and then, old friends, I should say, let us to the road again!"

Jack and Dick were far from being averse to this proposition of Claude's, and after a glance at each other, Jack said—

"Yes, Claude. Let it be the road again, for I don't think that either you or I or Dick are in just the frame of mind to sit down quietly in any state of life, whatever might be its advantages."

"Certainly not," said Claude.

"I think with you both," said Dick. "Time was when I cherished the dream of one day making sufficient by this mode of life to go from it, and in peace and retirement and serenity pass the remainder of my days; but I have lived long enough to feel how fallacious is any such idea, and so I have completely abandoned it."

"We are all agreed, then," said Claude; "so to the last we shall be, what



we have been so long, knights of the road. Here we are at the inn. It will be just as well that we ascertain what guests are here before we alight and allow ourselves to encounter a disadvantage."

## CHAPTER CCCLXXXII.

THE "GUILDFORD CELERITY" IS OF ASSISTANCE TO CLAUDE DUVAL.

"HOUSE—house!" cried Dick. "House, here! Hilloa!"

At this upon outside the door of the inn, a man ran out in his shirt sleeves, and said in a hurried voice—

"Good Lord, gentlemen, what is the matter? You quite take my breath away."

"Where's the landlord?"

"I am the landlord, if it's all the same to you, gentlemen."

"Then what do you mean by saying that it almost takes your breath away to see three guests at your door?"

"Because, gentlemen, it is so early, that's all; but if you will only please to alight, you will find that there is here good accommodation for man and beast, as the sign says, which is now over the door; and though you might go to a place where you might find a finer looking room than I can show you, and mere filigree nonsense, yet I don't think you could possibly go anywhere where you would find more comfort than there is here, gentlemen."

"What guests have you?"

"Guests, sir? Why, I do think I may take upon myself to say, sir, that we have three."

"Three, have you? Well, who and what are they? for, to tell the truth, we are a little particular where we put up."

"You can't do better, sir, than be particular, so I can set your mind at ease by saying, that the three guests I think I have—"

"You only think?"

"Yes, gentlemen. The three guests I think I have, are your three noble selves, for there is not another soul in the house, except me and my own family."

"This will do," said Dick to Claude.

"Exactly."

"The very thing," said Jack.

"Well, landlord, we will stay some hours with you. Open your stable door, and let us ride our horses into the stable yard. You will be so good as to give them the best breakfast you can, and likewise do the same by us."

"With all the pleasure in life, gentlemen," said the landlord, who was certainly rather an original. "With all the pleasure in life, I may say. A merciful man is merciful to his beast, and I like to hear you say you wish the cattle to have a good breakfast."

"We think as much of our steeds as it is possible to think of such creatures," said Claude.

A very short time sufficed for the horses to be comfortably bestowed, in three stalls, and for their masters to be seated at the breakfast-table of the landlord, which was tolerably well supplied with abundance of good things. The party consisted of the landlord, his wife, and his wife's sister; and Claude Duval, with his friends, were not long in discovering that there was something or another upon the mind of the whole party, against which they were struggling might and main.

That this something was a matter of grief to them, that Claude could guess, by the way in which the females caught their breath, now and then, as if they were repressing the desire to sob, and by the landlord, without any cause in the whole world, pretending now and then to be seized with an immense desire to sneeze

This pretended sneezing, Claude was sufficiently sharp-witted to see, arose from a desire to hide tears, that would at times force themselves into his eyes.

Claude looked at Dick, who gave him a short nod in return, as much as to say, "I understand you, and see with you that there is something or another sorely amiss in the family."

Jack, too, by the observant way in which he looked at the landlord's wife, was evidently alive to the fact of the mystery that was pending.

After a time, it was obvious that the uneasiness of the whole party was very much upon the increase, indeed, and that, as they looked at a clock that was in the room, their pent-up feelings amounted to quite an agony.

At length the clock struck eight.

At that moment, the landlady could control her feelings upon some subject or another no longer, and she burst into an agony of weeping, crying out as she did so—

"He is lost! Oh, he is lost! My son—my son! he is lost!"

"Hush! Oh, hush!" said the landlord.

The landlord might as well said "Hush!" to some torrent, for the landlady's grief having once got the upper-hand of her, it could not possibly be restrained, and in a moment or two the sister joined in the sobbing, and Claude Duval and his friends looked upon the scene with the greatest possible surprise.

This surprise, upon the part of Duval and his friends, though, was very much heightened, and the mysterious conduct of the landlord and his family reached its climax, when he suddenly plumped down upon his knees before Claude, and holding up his hands, said, while the tears streamed down his face—

"Oh, sir, I don't know if you have any children of your own, or if you are likely to have any, but you may, you know; and so I conjure you to have some mercy upon my poor, unhappy boy."

"Yes—yes," cried the landlady, "have mercy upon him."

"Oh, do—do!" cried the sister.

"Good God!" said Claude, "what on earth is the meaning of all this? I don't understand a word that you are talking about. Pray, good folks, are you all a little mad or not?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"Then explain yourselves."

"Oh, sir, we know you."

"Do you, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, too well—too well."

"And, pray, who am I? If you know me, perhaps you can name me, although if you do I cannot for the life of me see what that has to do with him whom you call your unhappy son."

"But, sir—good sir, you are——"

"What, pray?"

"An officer—a Bow-street officer."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir, and those are your two comrades. Is it not too true?"

"My good friend, I don't know for the life of me what cause you have to fear or to expect Bow-street or any other officers here in this house; but as far as we are concerned you may banish your fears, for we are not at all in that line, I assure you."

"You are not?"

"Most certainly not."

"Oh, what a relief—oh, what a relief this is, to be sure! Don't say another word about it, I beg of you, gentlemen—oh, don't. It's nothing at all—it's nothing, wife, is it?"

"Yes, husband, it is much."

"No—no—no."

"But I say it is, and I have a strong opinion upon the subject. I think that,

after the mistake we have made, and after the way that these gentlemen have been treated by us, that we ought to explain all about it to them."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Don't say, 'Oh, dear!' you might say that if our Charles were guilty; but as he is not, it is quite another affair; so don't, I beg of you."

"Well, then, I won't; and if the gentlemen will be so good as to attend to what we have to say it may lighten our griefs a little to tell it. Oh, where is my poor boy—where is he—oh, where is he?"

"Don't make that noise," said Claude. "Tell me, some one or other of you, as quietly as you can, what is amiss; but, first of all, why did the striking of eight of the clock have such an effect upon you?"



"Because," said the mother, "we expected Charles to arrive here by then, and he told me if he did not get home at that hour he would surely be in the hands of the police."

"But what has he done to make him obnoxious to the attentions of the police?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing."

"Well, that is strange. Pray tell me, then, what he has to fear?"

"My poor boy, Charles, sir," said the mother, "is, or I should say was, in the employment of a great merchant in the City, who is very rich; and as my boy is very good-looking, though I say it, who, perhaps, should not, the merchant's daughter, Miss Annie Hargrave, fell in love with him."

"No—no, wife," said the landlord.

"Yes, you know she did."

"Well, but you should say that our Charles fell in love with Miss Annie. That is the proper way to put it. Young ladies, you know, ought not to be supposed capable of falling in love with young gentlemen."

"Well, but, John, I think they are. I suppose I know more about young ladies than you do—what they are likely to do, and what not?—and I can tell you that they are continually falling in love, only that they do not say anything about it."

"Pray go on," said Claude.

"I will, sir. Then I may say, that my son and Miss Hargrave mutually fell in love with each other."

The landlord nodded.

"But, sir, when Mr. Hargrave found it out, which he did by a little accident that occurred to make him suspicious."

"Yes," said the landlord, "it was but a trifle. One day he went into the drawing-room, and instead of my son being at his desk in the counting-house below, he was kneeling at Miss Annie's feet, and she was a-kissing of him, and he was a-kissing of her, that was all."

"Yes, nothing else in the world," said the landlady, "and that made him suspect that they had made acquaintance with each other."

"I should rather think it would," said Claude.

"Do you, sir?"

"Certainly I do, madam. But go on. This Mr. Hargrave must have been a tolerably suspicious sort of man."

"Yes, and, as you hear, about nothing almost. Well, sir, what must he do but put himself into a violent rage, and turn our boy Charles out of the house: but not content with that, he came down here the next day before we knew anything about the matter, and said to us—'Where is the thousand pound note that your son has robbed me of?'"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. Well, when we heard that, we naturally screamed together, and then he said in quite a blustering way—'I shall have your son apprehended, unless you send him out of the country pretty quickly; he has stolen a thousand pound note of mine, and it is not likely I am going to put up with such a loss.' Well, sir, when he had said that, and frightened us all out of our wits, he went, leaving us in a pretty situation."

"When was that?" said Claude.

"Only yesterday morning, sir; but before we could think of what to do, there came a letter from Charles, explaining all about it, and saying that he was in hopes of getting an interview with Miss Annie, and persuading her to run off with him; he said, if we had anything to write to him, to send it under cover to a shop in Oxford Street; so we let him know what had happened here, and in answer he sent a few lines to say that if he were not with us by eight o'clock this morning, to conclude that old Mr. Hargrave had done his worst, for that he, Charles, was desperate, and if Annie would not be his, he did not care one straw what became of him."

"And that is all?" said Claude.

"It is, sir; so we thought you were an officer, we did indeed; and expecting our son every moment, you may easily guess what a state of mind we were in when we saw you."

"It is natural that you should be rather frightened, I admit," said Claude; "and I am very happy to inform you that I am not only no officer, but that I think your son is falsely accused by Mr. Hargrave, and that, much as he has the villany actually to concoct such a terrible plot against him, such a charge, under the circumstances, will never be able to be maintained against the young man."

"Oh, sir, do you, indeed and in truth, think so?"

"Upon my honour I do."

"What a relief that is," said the landlord: "I will run and get some of the old Madeira out of the corner of the cellar, and we will have a glass of it together, for who knows, after all—ha—ha!—but that our son, Charles, may persuade the sweet young lady to run away with him, and so be married to her—eh, wife?"

"Ah, who knows, indeed," said the wife, with a toss of her head. "I'm sure there's lots of lords and dukes that is no more to be compared in looks and manners to my Charles, though I say it, who ought not perhaps, than chalk is to cheese."

"To be sure," said the sister, "he is a genteel youth."

"Hush!" said Claude, starting up.

"Oh, sir, what is it?"

"The sound of wheels."

"Wheels? Oh, there's wheels within wheels in this world," said the wife.

The sound of horses' feet, now, as well as wheels, came plainly upon their ears; and before they could get to the door it was quite clear that some carriage had stopped at it.

## CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

### MISS HARGRAVE IS PROTECTED BY CLAUDE AND HIS GALLANT FRIENDS.

THE state of terror in which the landlord and his family evidently were now had about it something truly ludicrous. The landlord, himself, showed a strong desire to hide himself under the table. The wife went into hysterics, and the sister looked as though she fancied the chimney would not be a bad place to get into.

"Silence, all of you," said Duval. "Everything is to be lost by fear, and nothing is ever to be gained by it."

"Yes—yes," gasped the landlord. "I—oh, dear!"

"Stay where you are all of you; I will go to the door and see who is there."

"Oh—oh!"

"Silence, I say—silence!"

The peremptory way in which Claude Duval spoke had the effect even of causing the landlady to smother her hysterics, and the landlord himself sat looking intently at Claude as if he had only just then seen him for the first time.

"I will go to the door," said Duval to Jack and Dick; "you stay here; I will call to you if I want you."

"All's right," said Jack.

"Take care of yourself," said Dick.

"I will, you may depend."

Claude Duval was at the door of the little inn very quickly, and then he saw a chaise with the horse all in a foam in it, and a young man just alighting from it. In the chaise, too, there was a figure muffled up in several shawls and a cloak, and Claude Duval formed his own conclusions regarding that figure.

Stepping up to the side of the chaise, Duval said to the young man—

"Premising before I ask you any questions that I am a friend, let me request of you to know if your name is Charles?"

"It is. Stand off, sir."

"And you are the son of the landlord here?"

"I am. What of that?"

"Nothing particular, except that your friends here will be glad to see you. This, I suppose, is the fair and accomplished Miss Hargrave?"

When Claude Duval uttered these words, the figure that was enveloped in the shawls and the cloak uttered a scream, and turning to Claude, he saw the face of the loveliest young girl that he thought he had ever seen in all his life. She was very young evidently, but there was such a sweetness of expression, and



such a purity of look and general appearance about her, that it was quite a charming thing to have the opportunity of gazing upon such a face.

"Spare him!" cried the young lady. "Oh, spare him! He is indeed innocent, and the time will come when my cruel father will repent of the false charge he has made against my Charles."

"Oh, my Annie," said Charles, "it cuts me to the heart to hear you plead for me. Sir, I know not who or what you are, but I defy you."

The idea of such a mere stripling as Charles defying a man like Claude Duval, whom few strong, stout men could very well defy, was rather absurd, and Claude said with a smile—

"My good sir, you and I, together with a couple of friends I have in the inn, may, I hope, defy your foes; but I am afraid that if we defy each other we shall do no good at all. Come in at once, and be assured that I am your friend."

Charles looked a little doubtful; young as he was, he had seen more of the world than Annie Hargrave, and he had found out how

"A man may smile—and smile, and be a villain."

But Annie called to him tenderly, saying—

"Oh, Charles, this is a friend to us, indeed. If he be not, there is no faith in outward virtue, for never, surely, could hypocrisy look and speak as he does."

Claude turned to the young girl, as he said—

"From my heart, Miss Hargrave, I thank you for that kind opinion. He shall not be betrayed by me, you may depend upon it. And now, Mr. Charles, will you trust me?"

"I will, sir. But how came you to know who I am, and who the young lady passes my comprehension most completely?"

"I have heard your whole story from your mother."

"Ah, then I am satisfied. Come now, my darling Annie; let me help you to alight from this vehicle, which has served us so well, and my father will look after the horse, which has done its duty so gallantly."

"Oh, Charles, are we not pursued?"

"We were so, dear one, but we have evidently baffled pursuit, or they would be closer to us than they seem to be."

Charles helped the young lady from the chaise to the ground, and as he did so, Claude, who was rather a close observer, saw that they both took advantage of the occasion to give each other a very tender and loving embrace, which seemed so to intoxicate the young clerk with joy, that his eyes sparkled again with the delight of his heart.

From what he now saw of both of them, Duval was more than ever inclined to befriend them to the best of his ability, and he called out to the landlord in a loud voice to come out.

In another moment the landlord embraced his son, and then he began to make a number of bows to Miss Hargrave, but she stepped up to him, saying in her sweet voice—

"You are my dear Charles's father, so I will show to you the duty and the love of a daughter."

With these words, she placed her arms upon his neck, and the landlord looked as though he were ready to sink through the ground.

"Oh, lor!" he cried. "She is an angel—quite an angel! Oh, Charles, how did you get such a sweet, dear, delightful—Oh, what is that?—Horses' feet!"

"Hold!" said Claude, as he put himself into an attitude of listening.

They were all for a few moments like statues, so still were they; and then Claude said—

"Mr. Charles, have you any reason to anticipate peril?"

"I have."

"Do you think your enemies know the route you took?"

"I am afraid they suspect it."

"Then they are coming."

"Oh, my poor boy!" cried the landlord—"oh, my Charles, what on earth will become of him? He is lost!"

"Silence," said Claude. "I think, Master Charles, you were imprudent to come here. You would naturally be sought at this place."

"Yes, sir, it may be so, but my tenderness for the fair fame of Annie is such that I could not feel happy to place her in any other hands than in those of my mother, and that is why I came here at once; but I have yet hope that the persons who are approaching may be merely casual travellers on the road."

"Oh, no—no," said the landlord.

Miss Hargrave clung to Charles in quite an agony of terror, and Claude, then, after a moment's thought, said—

"Come in—doors, all of you. Stop! you, Mr. Landlord, put up the horse and the chaise at once in the stable. Surely, there are some places in this old house in which the lovers can hide?"

"Oh, no—no!" cried Annie, "that will look like guilt. My Charles must not hide from any man, not even from my father."

There was something so noble about the young girl's air and manner as she said these words, that Claude Duval admired her more than ever, but again he urged them to come into the house while the landlord put aside the chaise and the horse, and they accompanied him into the room where the mother and sister, and Claude's two friends were.

The meeting between the mother and her son was deeply affecting; but Claude Duval felt all the emergency of the situation of the young couple, and he said—

"Now hide yourselves, both of you, for however it may look like guilt, and be an action of guilt to do so, yet innocence itself is compelled at times in this world to hide its head."

"Mother," said Charles, "to you, and to you, aunt, I commit the care of this dear girl. Let it be sufficient for you to know that I love her better than I do my life; and rather than that a hair of this dear head should be injured, I would lay down that life with pleasure. Take care of her, for if anything should happen to her, I cannot live in this world."

"Charles—Charles!" cried the girl.

"Dear Annie, go and let me remain here to meet every questioning. I am innocent of all but loving you too well."

"They will kill you, Charles!"

"No," said Claude Duval, "you may trust me and my friends here with his safety. I think that, feeling his own innocence as he does, it is as well that Charles should face his enemies. If they have any authority at all, it is over him, and not over you, Miss Hargrave; and if they find him here, they have no right to enter a single room of this house in the name of the law; and if they attempt to do it in the name of violence and force in search of you, we will resist them; so Charles is doing the best thing he can to save you."

"Yes, at the sacrifice of himself."

"No—no! It may not be so."

"Charles?"

"Yes, dear Annie?"

"Do you command me to go?"

"No—no! So harsh a word as command to you can never pass these lips; but I ask you to go, dear one."

"Oh, Charles, that is, indeed, a command. Farewell! Oh, sir,"—turning to Claude—"you will protect him?"

"With my life."

The look of gratitude that the young girl gave to Duval went to his very heart; and if before, which, in truth, he was not, he had been ever so lukewarm in the cause of Charles, he would from that moment have felt that it was a sacred duty with him to do all that was possible in conformity with his promise to that young and beautiful creature.

The lovers took a kind farewell of each other; and just as a party of horse-

men of some six or ten in number dashed up to the door of the inn, Charles's mother and aunt conducted Annie Hargrave to the upper part of the house.

Charles looked a little pale, and the father, who had come in from attending to the horse and chaise, was in a terrible state of agitation. Placing his hands upon the shoulder of his son, he said, in a voice that was choked by sobs—

“My boy—my Charles! On, tell me—tell me, are you in truth innocent?”

“I am, father.”

“Entire'y so, and not by any—any——”

“Any what, father?”

“Any odd way of putting it, you know, so as to say that it was no real crime, or anything of that sort?”

“Father, I am innocent in every possible meaning of the word. I am falsely accused of stealing a thousand pound note. I know nothing on oath about it, sir, beyond taking it from a banker's and placing it in Mr. Hargrave's own hand.”

“Then you had it once in your possession?” said Claude.

“I had, sir.”

“I see, then, how the charge is made. He denies having received it from you?”

“He does, I suppose.”

Claude felt very uneasy now for Charles, for he saw how easily, if Mr. Hargrave chose to destroy the note, he could fix the charge upon him by taking oath that he had never received it of him, while the banker could prove that he paid it to him, Charles, upon his, Mr. Hargrave's, account.

All these considerations did not at the moment present themselves to the young man; for, to tell the truth, his mind was so full of his dear Annie, that he thought but little of the peril in which he himself stood at that moment.

“Hilloa!” cried a horse voice from the door of the inn. “Hilloa! Is nobody at home here? Hoi! House here!”

“They come,” said the landlord.

“Don't be alarmed,” said Claude. “Let me speak and act in the matter. There is yet a chance.”

As he spoke, Claude looked at Dick and Jack in such a manner, that they quite concluded he did not intend to let young Charles be taken, and they gave him a nod each in reply, to intimate that they were quite ready to act with him in the matter.

Before anything else could be said in the matter, the sound of footsteps in the passage came upon the ears of all in the room, and the door being violently opened, the party of mounted men who had stopped at the inn, and who had left one only of their number outside to take care of the horses, marched in.

“Stop, if you please!” said Claude Duval, advancing two steps in front of his friends. “Pray what do you want?”

This calm and cool address had the effect of stopping the sudden entrance of the officers, and the chief of them said in a civil enough tone of voice—

“I don't know what right you have to ask, but as I am always ready to answer a civil question to a gentleman, as you seem to be, I may say that I am an officer of the police, and that I have a warrant for the apprehension of Charles Brownlow, on a charge of felony against his master, Mr. Hargrave; and having reason to suppose he is here, I come here to seek him.”

“He is here! He must be here!” said a voice in angry tones, and a man, with a countenance distorted by passion, pushed forward through the group of officers. “I will have the villain's life, for he has robbed me of my money and of my daughter, too! I say, I will see him hanged for it! I told him I would and I will!”

## CHAPTER CCCLXXXIV.

## MR. HARGRAVE FINDS THAT HIS VILLANY IS FULLY DISCOVERED.

AFTER this speech from the violent man, there could be no doubt of his identity as Mr. Hargrave; so Claude Duval addressed him, saying—

"Sir, you shall have justice."

"Justice!" he cried. "I will have justice without your interference, sir. I don't care a straw who you are, sir. I will hang him if it costs me ten thousand pounds to do so; and if once I get hold of that undutiful child of mine, I will make her bitterly repent of her bad conduct, that I will. The hussy—the little wretch! Oh, I will make her smart for this morning's work, I will, indeed, and I will hang Charles Brownlow!"

The officer who had the command of the party shook his head, as he said—

"Sir, you will permit me to say, that it is very imprudent, indeed, of you to go on in this way."

"And why so, sir?"

"Because it looks as if revenge, and not justice, were your aim; and when the young man is put upon his trial, and I report your words that you would spend ten thousand pounds to get him hanged, it will go a long way towards getting him acquitted."

The demoniac look that came over the face of Mr. Hargrave as the officer said this, was truly dreadful to see.

"Ha—ha!" he cried; "it don't matter. The case is so strong against him, so clear, and so simple in its strength, that if the whole world were to say all sorts of things, it could not have the effect of contradicting the testimony against him."

"I admit it is a strong case, sir."

"Yes, you do well to admit it, for, in good truth, it is a strong case. Ha! ha! It is a case which will be his death—his death!"

The chief officer made no reply to these words; but turning about, he said—

"Is the master of the house here?"

"Yes," stammered the landlord. "I am that unhappy individual."

"Then, here is our warrant to search these premises, or any other that we may have reasonable suspicions of, for Charles Brownlow, accused of felony. You will be very ill-advised, indeed, Mr. Brownlow, if you place any obstruction in our way."

"I will not."

The landlord spoke very faintly, and was forced to drop into a chair, where he sat, looking so ill, that the officers really pitied him as the father of the youth whose fate, in their minds, was sealed.

It was then, at the moment that Mr. Hargrave was rubbing his hands together, and glaring about him like a fiend, and that the officers were preparing to search the house, that, from behind Jack and Dick, young Charles Brownlow stepped forward, saying as he did so—

"There need be no further trouble, gentlemen—I am here!"

"Ah!" cried Mr. Hargrave, "seize him! Bind him! Put fetters on him! This is the villain—this is the villain!"

"There is no occasion, sir," said the chief officer, "for either violence or torture. Are you Charles Brownlow, late a clerk in the service of Mr. Hargrave?"

"I am."

"Then, you are my prisoner."

Charles bowed.

"Upon what charge," said Claude Duval, "is this young man taken?"

"For stealing a thousand pound note."

"I deny it," said Charles. "I call upon you all to witness that I deny the

charge in toto. I did receive a thousand pound note from the Bank of England on account for Mr. Hargrave, in whose employment I was, and I gave it into his own hands in his own private counting-house within ten minutes after so receiving it."

"False—false as hell!" cried Mr. Hargrave, stamping fiercely upon the floor of the room.

"My good sir," said the officer, "there is no occasion for all this violence; we are not trying the case here, I assure you."

"But it is false!"

"It is true," said Charles.

"Well—well, you have both had your say," said the officer, "and there is an end of that. You will come to town with us, Charles Brownlow; our duty is quite plain and easy. It is, to lodge you in jail; and whether you be innocent or guilty is a matter with which, you see, we have nothing to do."

"Certainly," said Charles, "and I thank you for the kind way in which you are disposed to do your duty. I am really."

"Stop!" said Claude—"stop a minute. The charge is quite absurd, for Mr. Hargrave, if he were put upon his oath, don't know the number of the note, and Mr. Charles Brownlow does."

"Not know it?" cried Mr. Hargrave—"not know it? I do know it. I—I ought to know it. It is——"

"Well, sir?"

"It is 9—9—no, not 9—yes, it is 90. Stop a bit, I will soon confound you all, for I made a memorandum of the number of the note in my pocket-book this very morning."

"From the note itself?" said Claude.

"No, sir, not from the note itself, for I never saw it. I am not to be so very easily trapped, sir, as all that comes to. No, sir, the memorandum I made was from the information the bank clerk gave me, sir, if you please. Ha—ha!"

Mr. Hargrave nodded and smiled in the most vicious manner in the world, as if he had attained some great triumph over Claude Duval; and then going to the window of the room he looked in his pocket-book, and called out—

"The number of the note is 9023."

"Very good," said Claude. "Write that down, Mr. Officer, if you please."

The officer smiled as he said—

"I shall remember it; but really, Mr. Hargrave, you are acting very foolishly in this matter."

"Never mind—never mind. I stick to it. And now, if you please, we will search for the other delinquent."

"The other what, sir?"

"The other delinquent."

"And who may he be, sir?"

"My runaway daughter—the companion of the flight of this young vagabond. My daughter, whom he has seduced."

"Sir," said Charles, "that is false; and but for the halo that surrounds even you of respect, as being the father of Annie, I would knock you down for those words."

"Knock me down?"

"Yes, sir, for a foul calumniator of female innocence."

"Wretch! I say again you have seduced her!"

"Stop—stop!" cried the officer "It is a very odd thing to hear a father accusing his child and somebody else defending her. But that is no business of mine. Come along, Charles Brownlow, to town at once."

"Yes, I am ready," said Charles.

"And so am I," said Mr. Hargrave, "as soon as you have searched this house from top to bottom for my lost daughter. I will have every hole and cranny of it looked into. Oh, I will make her remember this day's work!"

"Well, sir," said the officer, "search away."





"But you and your men will search?"

"Oh, no."

"No? Did you say no?"

"Yes, sir, we did. We have no warrant to search the house but for Charles Brownlow, and he is here."

"Yes," said Claude; "and the landlord of this house forbids any man at his peril to attempt to enter a room in it without his permission."

"Death and fury!" cried Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes, sir," said the officer, "death and fury are very hard words; but we are not going to have an action against us for trespass because you say death and fury."

"I will search the house myself, then," said Mr. Hargrave. "I and Mr. Jacob Bell. Jacob Bell—Jacob Bell! where are you? Never mind the horses, let them go to the d—l. Come here, Jacob Bell."

A man with a cringing gait entered the room, and bowing very low before Mr Hargrave, he said—

"Honoured sir, what is your noble pleasure?"

"Jacob Bell, you will help me to search this house for my lost daughter. Charles Brownlow is arrested, as you see."

"Oh, the villain!"

"Yes, Jacob, he is a villain."

"Oh, the wretch, to rob such a master—such a good master, too! Oh, Charles—Charles, how could you be so wicked? You will be hanged now, you unhappy young man, and I shall be compelled to give my testimony, humble as it is, against you."

"Against me! What do you mean?"

"Tell him," said Mr. Hargrave—"tell him."

"Why, Charles, I am sorry to say I saw you put the note into your own pocket, and I heard you say, 'Old Hargrave shall never see this note again. I will keep it as an instalment of his daughter's fortune.'"

"You vile fabricator!" said Charles, springing forward and catching Jacob Bell by the throat, "such words never passed my lips, or ever occurred to me. How dare you look me in the face, with such a hideous lie in your mouth?"

"Murder! murder!"

The officers rescued Jacob Bell from Charles, and Mr. Hargrave cried out—"There, you see, you would not handcuff him, and that is the consequence of it. You see he assaults the witness, you see—you see."

"Oh yes, sir, we see."

"He! he!" said Jacob Bell, as he righted his cravat, "I fully expected to suffer; but as it is in the cause of my much honoured and beloved master I don't care. Oh dear, no—I don't care. He will make it up to me."

"I will, Jacob, you may depend."

"Oh, sir—oh—oh!"

Jacob bowed almost to the floor, and then Mr. Hargrave cried out—

"You and I, Jacob will search this house for my daughter. I am not afraid of your actions of trespass. Ha! ha! Out of the way, man!"

"No, thank you, sir," said the landlord.

Claude Duval had whispered in the landlord's ear what he ought to do; and seeing that the officers would not support Mr. Hargrave, and that Claude and his friends would support him, he gathered courage to act.

"Out of the way, fellow!"

"No, this is my house, Mr. Hargrave, and if you don't like it you may leave it; and if you are disorderly I will turn you out. As to searching my house, it is a thing I can't permit, and I won't either."

"Force your way, Jacob Bell."

"Try it," said the landlord.

"Yes, sir," said Jacob. "I—that is—oh, dear me, what a ruffian he looks, sir! If you were to go first, I don't think he would dare to hit such a great gentleman as you are, sir. Tell him you are worth two thousand pounds a year, sir, and if he hinders you after that, he must be mad."

"If he had twenty millions," said the landlord, "I'd knock him down."

The officers looked on rather amused at this scene, and Mr. Hargrave turning to them, said savagely—

"Of course, you will interfere if there is a breach of the peace?"

"Yes, if called upon by the master of the house."

"The master of the house?"

"Certainly. You are the interloper here, you know, sir. If you go outside into the street, there can't be any breach of peace, unless the landlord comes after you, and then he will be in the wrong; but you can't expect us to help you when you come into a man's house and assault him."

"I don't care—I don't care. I can see that there is a staircase in that corner yonder, and it may lead me to where I shall find my most undutiful child. Come on, Jacob Bell, I command you! Clear that man out of the way, or I will discharge you from my service."

Jacob Bell, under the dread of the threat, stepped forward, but Claude put out his foot, and Jacob trod upon it.

"What!" said Claude, "are my toes to be trodden upon in this desperate way by a ruffian! Villain! you seek my life, and in self-defence—mind you all, gentlemen, only in self-defence—I am compelled to put Jacob Bell gently outside the house."

As he spoke, Claude pounced upon poor Jacob Bell, and catching him by the back of the neck with the left hand, and the lower part of his apparel with the right, he sent him like a bomb-shell, head-foremost, right through the window into the yard, where he alighted amid a whole litter of pigs, who were busily amusing themselves on a dung-heap.

When Mr. Hargrave saw in what a violent and ready way his man-of-all-work, Jacob Bell, was disposed of by one of the friends of the Brownlow family, he staggered back aghast, and did not stop till he reached the door, crying out as he did so—

"Help—help! Murder—murder!"

It so happened that these cries had some effect; although it was rather an absurd thing to hear them coming from the person who was quite untouched, while he who was in some degree of peril—that is to say, Jacob Bell—after uttering one great howl, said not a word.

The voice of Mr. Hargrave calling for help, and uttering that one fearful word "Murder," came upon the ears of his daughter, Annie, as she sat trembling in the bed-chamber of the landlady; and her kind and gentle feelings towards her father, notwithstanding he had ever treated her with a kind of harshness that might well have dissipated any tenderness she might naturally have for him, induced her to fly to his aid.

Rising from the old-fashioned arm-chair upon which she sat, she cried out—

"That is my father's voice. They are killing him!"

"Oh, no," said the landlady, "don't you think that, my dear. Nothing is more unlikely than such a thing. Don't you take that into your head."

"Yes—yes, he called murder, and it is my duty to go to him. He may forget the duty of a father, but I cannot take such an example even from him, and forget the duty of a child."

With this, despite an attempt the landlady made to stop her, Annie ran down stairs.

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXXV,

### THE ARRIVAL OF SIR JOHN HARE, AND THE DISCOMFITURE OF MR. HARGRAVE AND JACOB.

It did not occur to Mr. Hargrave that he could possibly have such a hold upon the heart and the affections of the fair young girl, whose beauty he had only looked upon with an idea that it might, by wedding her to some man of rank, favour his own ambition, as to induce her when he cried for aid to forget every other consideration, and fly to his side.

When, therefore, from the staircase that Jacob Bell had made such an abortive effort to get up there came the vision of such loveliness, and with her long fair hair hanging in disorder, and alarm upon her sweet face, Annie appeared, Mr. Hargrave was scarcely less surprised than any one else in the apartment.

"Father—father!" she cried, "where are you?"

"My daughter!" said Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes, father, you called for aid—I am here."

"Good. Ha—ha!"

Annie looked about her in surprise, and Claude Duval stepped between her and her father, saying—

"Miss Hargrave, I am sorry to say that you have let your feelings get the better of your prudence in this matter. Mr. Hargrave is in no danger."

"But I heard a cry."

"True, you did."

"Of murder!"

"Yes; but it was fear, not danger, that provoked it."

"I don't care what provoked it," cried Mr. Hargrave, "so long as it has had the effect of producing this disobedient girl, whom I shall take with me to London, and I dare any one to interfere between me and her."

"I interfere!" said Claude Duval.

"And who the devil are you, after all? You seem to be very busy here, and you take upon yourself much—too much. You appear to have a liking to interfere in my affairs, sir."

"I have. You are right there, sir."

"Stand aside, villain!"

"Say that again, Mr. Hargrave, and you will find yourself with your friend Jacob Bell."

"Jacob Bell?" said Annie. "Is he here?"

"He is, to the confusion of you and your lover," said the father. "Upon the evidence of that very excellent man, Jacob Bell, I shall be able to commit Charles Brownlow of robbery; and in these glorious days, with such a king upon the throne as George the Third, who wishes every child in his dominions to read the bible, there is no escape for any one convicted of even a robbery; so hanged he will be."

"No—no!"

"Ah! we shall see—we shall see."

"Charles—my Charles, where are you?"

"Here, Annie," said Charles Brownlow, in a voice of affection.

"Oh, Charles, do not be cast down. Heaven will save you."

"Oh, Annie, it is not upon my account that I am cast down; but why did you leave the place of safety you were in? Here you would have had a safe asylum for a little time until my father and mother could have conveyed you somewhere else; but now, alas! you have appeared, and it will go hard with you to resist your father."

"You are a capital lawyer, sir," said Mr. Hargrave, rubbing his hands together; "my daughter is under age; therefore, I have absolute control over her. Ha! ha! Good gracious! what is that?"

Poor Jacob Bell had been all that time struggling and kicking to get out from the entanglements of the dung-heap, and now with a loud groan, and the most deplorable look in the world, he projected his head through one of the broken panes of the window through which he had been flung, and glared at the party present.

When Mr. Hargrave shouted and uttered an exclamation, all eyes followed him, and then they saw the miserable object that Jacob Bell looked.

"Oh—oh—oh!" said Jacob. "The Lord have mercy upon us all, miserable sinners! where am I now? and what is going to happen next?"

"It is Jacob," said Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes, sir, the ghost of your Jacob."

"Come in, idiot!"

"I'm coming, sir, if you please."

"Stop!" cried Claude.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir. Anything that you wish, I'm sure, I am delighted to attend to."

"I think, Jacob, you are safer where you are."

"If you think so, sir, I'm quite convinced that I am, and no sort of mistake. Oh, dear! oh, dear! was it a bomb-shell?"

"A what?"

"A bomb-shell."

"What do you mean, you fool?" cried Mr. Hargrave. "Are you mad?"

"Well, it's enough to make a fellow a little queer in his upper story; but it seems to me that nothing short of a bomb-shell could have sent a Christian right through a window in the sort of way that I went; and the pigs, sir, that were outside all fell upon me, and have torn my clothes dreadfully, sir. Oh, what am I to do?"

"What you please," said Claude.

"No more of this," said Mr. Hargrave. "Officers, do your duty. I no longer want your aid to secure my daughter—that I will do myself. All you have to do is to take your prisoner, Charles Brownlow, to London."

"We are ready."

"And as for you, Annie, I will settle matters with you when we get to London; so come at once without any further parley about it."

"Oh, save me!" said Annie.

"That is enough," said Claude Duval; "do you wish to go with your father or not?"

"I do not. I fear him."

"Yes," said the father, "and you shall have good reason to fear me before I have done with you, ungrateful girl that you are. Come with me at once, I command you to follow me."

"That is quite sufficient, sir," said Claude Duval. "If Miss Hargrave chooses to follow you of her own accord, and without any fear, she, of course, might go; but you shall not take her from here except with her own consent."

"I claim her as a right. She is under age."

"Assert your right then."

"I do so."

"Enforce it, then."

"Villain! the law will aid me."

"Go to law, then. Until you do so, and get such aid as the law will give you, this young lady will not be given up, and perhaps not then."

Mr. Hargrave had seen enough to know that he was baffled; and Charles Brownlow, as he seized Claude Duval by the hand, and shook it heartily, cried out—

"Oh, sir, you have raised me from despair again; and you, Annie, be but firm, and you are yet free from the tyranny of a home which is undeserving of so much excellence and beauty. Now, Mr. Hargrave, I am ready to go to London, and to meet the charge that you have to make against me."

"Stop," said Claude Duval, "I have sent one of my friends on a little message, and I advise you all not to go till he returns."

The officers shook their heads, and the chief said—

"We cannot wait. Come along, Mr. Brownlow."

"Nay," said Claude Duval, who about ten minutes before had whispered something in the ear of Jack, which had induced him abruptly to leave the room—"nay, let me beg of you to give five minutes more to this affair."

"We cannot."

"We will not," said Mr. Hargrave.

Charles looked from one to the other in surprise as to what could be the cause of the delay that his friend Duval wished for, but at that moment Jack entered the room rather in haste, and said—

"He is coming."

"He?" cried Mr. Hargrave. "And who may he be?"

"Sir John Hare, baronet, and a justice of peace for the county, and special magistrate for this district of the suburbs of London."

"Sir John Hare?"

"Yes—you have heard of him?"

"Pho! I don't care for Sir John Hare. Officers, come along at once. Remember, I will give you a guinea each upon your lodging your prisoner in Newgate."



"But," said the chief officer, "did you say that Sir John Hare was coming?"

"He is," said Jack.

"Well, then, Mr. Hargrave, if that be the case, it would look like disrespect to such a gentleman not to wait for him. It can't make very much difference, you know, for here is the warrant for the apprehension of Charles Brownlow; so you know, sir, we are sure to take him; but as Sir John is a magistrate, why we ought to let him know, if he wishes, what is going on."

"Curse Sir John, and you too."

The officer smiled.

"I think," said Duval, "you are quite right, officer. It is but a little compliment you owe to such a gentleman as Sir John, when he comes in your way."

"But you sent for him?" said Mr. Hargrave, passionately.

"That, sir," said Duval, "is my business."

Mr. Hargrave was upon the point of making some very passionate reply, when the door of the room opened, and a couple of gentlemen appeared upon the threshold.

"Here is Sir John," said the officers, who knew the magistrate in a minute, and touched their hats respectfully to him.

"What is all this about?" said Sir John Hare, as he entered the room. The gentleman who was with him slightly bowed to the company.

"Oh, I will tell you, sir," said Mr. Hargrave.

"Well, sir?"

"I came to identify a thief, sir. This young man here robbed me of a thousand pound note; and as I gave information to Sir Richard Strong at Bow Street, he granted a warrant, and these officers came here to execute it; and I am with them to point out the culprit, as well as to get my daughter home, with whom he had eloped."

"Officer?"

"Yes, Sir John?"

"Is this so?"

"Yes, sir, it is so. Here is the prisoner, and there is the gentleman's daughter."

"You have nothing to do with the young lady?"

"No, Sir John."

"She is not included in the charge, I hope?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Very well. I don't see what I have to do, except to back the warrant as I am here. Give me pen and ink, and I will put my name to it."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Hargrave.

"Stop a moment, sir," said Claude Duval, advancing to the magistrate. "Sir John Hare, all England has heard of you as one who is more in love with justice than with law."

"Sir, I am much obliged to you for the compliment."

"This young man, Charles Brownlow, was clerk to this Mr. Hargrave, who charges him with receiving upon his account a note for one thousand pounds from the Bank of England, and never paying over to him the same."

"Yes," said Mr. Hargrave; "and which Jacob Bell has already sworn he saw him in possession of, and heard him say he would keep it."

"Just so. Officer, did you make a memorandum of the number of the note?"

"I did, sir."

"What was it?"

"It was 9023. Mr. Hargrave himself gave that as the number; but, of course, that can easily be ascertained at the Bank of England."

"Yes," said Sir John Hare. "But you will really do me a favour if you will tell me what I have to do with all this? I am not trying the case."

"No, Sir John; but I will show you what you have to do with it. You have written your name on the warrant."

"I have."

"Then you have jurisdiction, if you like; for your name being last on the warrant takes the case into your hands, if you like to deal with it. You can, by law, either send the prisoner to London before a London magistrate, or you can examine him yourself."

"That is quite true; but I shall merely let the officers take him to London."

"I don't think you will, sir. Now, Mr. Hargrave, if you please?"

With two steps across the room, Claude Duval was by the side of Mr. Hargrave; and before he could get out of the way, or make the least resistance, he caught both his arms by the wrists and held them up above his head, saying, as he did so—

"Now, Sir John Hare, this man who charges another with stealing a thousand pound note, No. 9023, has it in his pocket."

These words were uttered by Claude Duval with a shout, that made them ring through the house again, and every one present was amazingly startled at the statement. Jacob Bell at once dropped from the window on to the dung-heap again, for he saw that the game was up with his master.

As for Mr. Hargrave himself, he gasped again with terror, and in the singular attitude that Claude Duval made him assume, with his white face, and his staring eyes, and his mouth wide open, he looked like one transformed by a judgment of Heaven.

"What can you mean, sir, by this extraordinary conduct?" said Sir John Hare. "You surely cannot substantiate what you say?"

"I can, sir."

"Then I—I—blush for human nature."

"Do not do that, Sir John; for the honour of human nature, let you and I, and all of us, believe that there are few men like Mr. Hargrave. Officers, search this man, and if you do not find it as I state, you may take me to Newgate along with my friend Charles Brownlow."

The officers looked at Sir John Hare for a moment, and he gave a slight nod, as much as to say, "Do it." Then they, with the practical celerity they had in such matters, soon found a pocket-book in one of Mr. Hargrave's pockets. The pocket-book was handed to Sir John Hare, who said—

"Mr. Hargrave, if you are innocent of the really fearful charge which is brought against you, you will not shrink from my looking into this pocket-book. If you are guilty, it is my duty to look, for there cannot be a more sacred exercise of the privileges of those who have to administer the law than that which enables them to clear the innocent from an unjust accusation."

Mr. Hargrave tried to speak, but he could only utter a strange guttural sound, and as Claude Duval released him, he sunk into a chair quite prostrated.

## CHAPTER CCCLXXXVI.

### CLAUDE DUVAL'S LAST APPEARANCE UPON THE ROAD.

THE state of affairs in the house was now so far interesting, that Claude Duval, as he glanced round him, thought he had never seen such a curious picture. There were the young lovers, locked hand-in-hand together, and evidently feeling that to each other they were all the world. There was the father and the mother of the young Charles, and his aunt, all so deeply interested in what was going on, that expression upon their countenances was particularly painful.

Then there was the magistrate, whose mind one might easily see by the look of his eye was quite made up regarding the guilt of Mr. Hargrave; and, lastly, there was the guilty old man himself, who, to be revenged upon his young clerk for daring to love his daughter, had brought such disgrace upon his own head.

Claude Duval and his friends and the officers, together with the old merchant,

might be considered as the accessories of the scene, but that Claude himself was in the foreground a very prominent figure upon the occasion.

The magistrate yet seemed reluctant to open the pocket-book, and he again addressed Mr. Hargrave, saying—

“I presume then, sir, by your silence, you have no objection to my opening the pocket-book, now?”

Again the guilty man tried to speak, but again the words died away in the labouring throat, that could not shape them into anything articulate.

“I take consent, then,” said Sir John; “and thus in presence of you all, I put to the test the fearful accusation that has been made against the man.”

As he spoke he opened the pocket-book; and almost the first object that met his eyes within it was the very one thousand pound note in question.

“It is here!” said the magistrate. “It is here, to the confusion of the guilty, and to the delight and joy of all who love innocence and justice!”

“No! no!” yelled Mr. Hargrave. “Death and confusion! it is all a trick!”

“Beware!” said the magistrate—“beware what you say! I do not say that it is possible, in a criminal sense, to make your case worse than what it is; but you may yet aggravate the feelings of your fellow-men against you by the manner in which you comport yourself.”

“Comport myself? I tell you all that it is false! I came to make a charge. I will have him hung yet!”

“On the contrary,” said Sir John, “I feel it to be my duty to arrest you and your rascally accomplice on a charge of conspiracy against the life and liberty of this young man, whom you would have sent to death, knowing that he was innocent of the crime you charged him with.”

“Arrest me?”

“Yes, Mr. Hargrave; and I imagine that you have fallen into the hands of a magistrate who will do his duty. Officers, seize that man!”

“Now, sir,” said one of the officers, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of Mr. Hargrave—“now, sir, if you please.”

For a minute or two Mr. Hargrave seemed stunned, and so did his daughter; but then she cried out in frantic tones—

“Oh, no—no! He is yet my father! Save him! save him!”

“Impossible,” said the magistrate.

The sound of his daughter’s voice appeared to have the effect of rousing Mr. Hargrave to a sense of his position; and with a yell that sounded more like what might be uttered by some wild animal disappointed of its prey, when he imagined it to be all but in his grasp, he shook himself from the officers, and rushed out of the inn into the open air.

So very sudden and unexpected was this escape upon the part of Mr. Hargrave, that it took the officers completely by surprise for a few seconds; and then, when they did recover sufficiently to pursue him, they jostled each other at the door of the room in their eagerness so to do.

“After him!” said the magistrate—“after him, officers! It will be a disgrace to you all if he escape!”

The officers made a rush into the passage of the inn; and there they met the ostler, who cried out—

“That’s the way he went!—that’s the way!”

“Which way?”

“Round the corner, and into the kitchen-garden. Come on—come on!”

“Lead us the quickest way.”

“Won’t I, that’s all. We will soon have him, I take it.”

The officers followed the ostler into the kitchen garden of the inn, where he had accidentally seen Mr. Hargrave run, and as he had been listening in the passage, and had heard all that had taken place in the room, he was well aware of the terrible guilt of the man whom he pursued, and was quite willing to aid the officers in every possible way to capture him.

Upon reaching the garden the officers looked about them in surprise, for it



was not very large, and it was surrounded by a good brick wall on two sides and by a high paling with nails at the top of it on the third, while the fourth made up the back of the house, and yet no Mr. Hargrave was to be seen.

"By Jove," said one of them, "we are done."

"No—no, he's here," said the ostler; "I tell you. I saw him go. He's hiding among some of the bushes, or in the summer-house, or up a tree."

"Then, hang him, let us ferret him out."

With all the tact that their profession gave them in such matters, the officers searched the garden, but not the remotest trace of Mr. Hargrave could be found within it.

By this time, Claude Duval and his friends, too, had come out into the garden, fully expecting to see Mr. Hargrave a prisoner, and it was well that they did so come out, for the officers were just beginning to accuse the ostler of misleading them, when Dick Turpin said—

"You may depend the ostler is right; for there is a possibility from the window of the room in which we all were of seeing into the garden through a hedge that skirts the little farm yonder; and through that hedge I distinctly saw the figure of Mr. Hargrave, as he ran along the other side of it."

This put the question quite at rest as to whether he had gone that way or not, and a further search of the garden took place, but without effect, so that the officers were compelled to come back to the magistrate, and to inform him of the mysterious escape of the prisoner.

Jack, as he with Claude and Dick followed the officers, just touched each of them upon the arm, and said, in a whisper—

"Stop a bit."

"What is it, Jack?"

"Ah, you have found Hargrave," said Dick.

"Well, I may say I have."

"Call back the officers, then, and give the old rascal into custody."

"No—no, It is better not. The shock will be too great for the fair young creature, the daughter. He is dead."

"Dead, do you say? How do you know that?"

"There is a well in the garden."

"Ah, indeed, and so there is. He is down there, is he, Jack?"

"Yes; most probably by accident he has fallen into it, and there he lies."

"You saw him?"

"I did. By getting in one direction there is light enough down the well just to enable you to see the water, and there is something dark floating in it, which must be Mr. Hargrave."

"Or the bucket?" said Dick.

Claude smiled.

"Come," he said, "we may as well make sure of it."

Upon this they left the officers to go into the house, and proceeded to the well, which was in rather a secluded part of the garden, and there, sure enough, they all saw what looked like the body of a man in the water. The bucket was down, and the cord was at its utmost length; so Claude took hold of the windlass, and wound it up some distance, when the bucket, lodging underneath the dead body of the wretched Mr. Hargrave, brought it sufficiently up for them all three to identify it.

"'Tis he!" said Dick.

"I told you so," said Jack.

"It is, indeed," said Claude, as he let go the rope, and down the body went with a splash again to the bottom of the well.

They all three now looked at each other rather in doubt as to what they ought to do; but Claude Duval at length said—

"I tell you what I think the best plan, and that is, to leave the body where it is, and quietly tell the magistrate of it, and then get the daughter and her young lover to go to London and get married as soon as possible, for the probability is, that she is the heiress of all her father's wealth."

"Good," said Dick. "Let us try and manage it so."

With this impression and resolution, they came into the house again, and Claude Duval, stepping up to the young girl, said:—

"My dear, it is quite clear that your father has escaped."

"Oh, sir, are you sure?"

"Quite sure; and now, if you feel that I have done sufficient for you, and your lover to render my advice at all valuable or acceptable, I will give it to you."

"Yes, sir, we will follow your advice as if it were a command."

"It is, then, that you both go to London as quickly as possible and get married, and so put it out of the power of malignant fate to separate you."

The young lady was silent; but her lover cried out:—



"I never heard such wise and excellent advice in all my life! If you only consent, dear one——"

"Oh, I cannot refuse you now. It would be absurd coquetry upon my part to do so. Take my hand, as you have already taken my heart."

"Never was consent so gracefully given," said Claude Duval. "I daresay the landlord here will go with you and see to every necessary arrangement."

"Oh, dear me, yes," he cried, "and so shall my wife, and her sister can mind the inn while we are gone; and as we have no custom, it is not at all likely that she will have a great deal of trouble. But I insist upon everybody having a drop of something before we go."

The officers did not seem to think that that proposition was by any manner of means a bad one; but the magistrate shook his head, and said—

"I will take a glass of water, if you please, in the which I can just as well drink to the health and happiness of the young couple as in any stronger liquid."

"Well, sir, if you won't have anything but water, I can promise you as fine a glass of that as the whole country can produce. I will go to the well in the kitchen garden myself and get you some."

"Thank you."

"No—no—no!" cried Claude Duval; "stop!"

"Eh? Did you say stop?"

"Yes, I—that is—Did you say the well in the kitchen garden?"

"To be sure I did."

"Well, then, I was going to say that I and my friends, in trying to get up a drop of water, broke the windlass."

"Oh, well, if that is the case, I can get some from a stone filter in the bar, if that will do."

"Quite as well," said the magistrate.

The water from the stone filter was got, and the health and happiness of the young couple was duly drunk; and then in the course of a quarter of an hour they and the landlord and his wife started for London.

The moment they were gone, Claude Duval took the magistrate aside.

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXXVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS SET UP IN A NEW LINE OF BUSINESS COMPLETELY.

THE expression of Claude Duval's face as he took the magistrate aside was quite sufficient to convince him that he had something of importance to communicate to him, and he listened with attention as Claude said—

"Sir, I prevented you from getting a draught of water from the well."

"You did; and that you had some motive in so doing, beyond what you state, I could very well guess."

"I had, sir. Mr. Hargrave is there."

"In the well?"

"Just so, sir; and, therefore, I thought that you would prefer a glass of water from any other place just now than that."

"God bless me, yes. But how came you not to mention it before?"

"I feared the effect which such a communication might have upon the sensitive feelings of his daughter; the tidings had better come to her more quietly than they could possibly have reached her here in the midst of all the excitements of the strange scenes that have been enacted in this place."

"You are right, sir. You are considerate as well as right."

"Now, however," added Duval, "I tell you, sir, because it is my duty to do

so, you holding the official position that you do, and perhaps, after all, it is the best end that such a man could have possibly come to, considering all things."

"It is, indeed. Think you it was suicide?"

"Certainly not: it was a mere accident, no doubt. He was flying from the officers, and, probably, attending more to them as they came in pursuit of him than to where he was going, and so fell into the well; and as he would go head-foremost, probably death would be all but instantaneous."

"It will be my duty," said the magistrate, "then, to inform the coroner for the county of the affair; and then, gentlemen, I shall request the attendance of all three of you at the inquest that will take place."

Claude was silent for a moment or two, for the idea of troubling himself by attending an inquest on the body of old Hargrave was one that he could not entertain for a moment; and yet it was a difficult thing to say no.

"I beg," added the magistrate, "that you will not hesitate about the performance of such a public duty?"

The tone of voice in which this was said convinced Claude that Sir John was likely to have rather a bad opinion of him and his friends if they did not accede to the request; so he said with an air of frankness—

"Well, sir, be it so: we will attend. I presume it will be to-morrow morning, at the earliest, before it takes place?"

"Oh, yes; but if you will do me the favour to breakfast with me in the morning I shall be able to let you know precisely. You, perhaps, know my house. It is not very off—Fairlawn Lodge."

"Thank you, sir; we will do ourselves the honour. And now, as we have really rather an important engagement, we will take our leave of you and the inn for a short time; but as we return here to dinner, if anything should arise for which we may be required, we shall be most happy to attend you."

To all this, sounding so fair and straitforward as it did, the magistrate could make no possible objection; so Claude and his friends went to the inn-yard, and Claude called for the ostler.

"Coming, sir—coming."

"You will saddle our horses, and bring them out as quietly as you can."

"Yes, sir—directly, sir."

"Jack, and you, Dick?" said Claude.

"Yes, Duval? Anything amiss?"

"No, I hope not. But one of the officers has been staring at me for the last quarter of an hour in a way that I don't very well like."

"Indeed?" said Jack.

"Who is he?"

"One there with the red nose. Don't you see him?"

"Yes. Confound him!"

"So say I. But he has put me in the humour of getting away from here just as quick as I can."

"Look! look!" said Jack; "he is going to speak to Sir John."

"Is he?"

"Yes—yes! There, he is making his way up to him."

"I will stop that," said Claude.

If the horses had only been out and ready there is very little doubt but that Claude Duval would have disregarded any communication that the officer might have made to Sir John; but as they were not he felt that the only plan was to gain time, so he strode up to the magistrate at the very moment that the officer did, and just as the latter opened his mouth to speak, Claude said abruptly—

"Sir John, a word with you."

"Certainly, sir."

"I, too, Sir John," said the officer, "wish to say a word."

"Upon my reputation," said Claude, "this is not very respectful conduct. I was speaking to Sir John, and you, fellow, come and interfere."

"Yes, but——"

"Begone, sir," cried Sir John. "How dare you behave in this rude way to a gentleman? Begone, sir!"

"But, Sir John——"

"I will not hear you."

"Oh, sir, I assure you, that——"

"Will you be off, sir? If you say another word I will have your constable's warrant taken from you. Be off, sir."

The officer gave his hat a dab upon the top of it, and strode off in high dudgeon and indignation that he could not be heard.

"Now, sir, if you please," said the magistrate, "I have to apologise to you most sincerely for that fellow's impertinence."

"Don't mention it, Sir John, I beg," said Claude. "I was only going to say that as I may see the secretary of state this evening, would you think that there was any impropriety in my mentioning to him the occurrence that has taken place in this house to-day?"

"None in the least."

"Then I shall probably do so, for it is a peculiarity of mine when I see a gentleman act in so noble and excellent a manner as you have done to-day, that I cannot, without great violence to my feelings, keep it to myself."

"Sir, you are too good."

"Oh, no—no, not at all."

While Claude and the magistrate were thus complimenting each other, Jack and Dick, who felt that there was no time to lose, urged the ostler to be quick with the horses, and themselves lent a helping hand in getting them ready, so that Claude, who every now and then stole a glance in that direction, saw them both mount, and that Jack held his horse by the bridle all ready equipped for the road.

"Now, Sir John," said Claude, "I leave you with very—very many thanks, sir, for the kindness and civility which we have all received at your hands,"

"Sir, the kindness has all been on your side."

Another moment and Claude was in the saddle. The magistrate patted his horse upon the neck, as he said—

"Upon my word, gentlemen, you are all three well mounted."

"Pretty well," said Claude.

"I don't think that there are three other such horses in the whole country. Why that black mare that you ride, sir,"—speaking to Dick—"is a magnificent creature."

"She is," said Dick. "My Bonny Bess."

"What, sir, do you call her?"

"Elizabeth, sir, that's all."

"Oh, I thought you said Bess—I—God bless me, what is this?"

The officer was tugging at the coat skirts of the magistrate, and then he called out, in a voice partly of rage and partly of fear—

"Sir John, I can't hold my tongue! Sir John, I can't hold my tongue if you kill me for speaking! I tell you, sir, that if that tall one on the bay horse is not Claude Duval, the highwayman, that they call Gentleman Jack, and if this one on the black mare is not Dick Turpin, I'll be hanged."

A flush of colour spread itself all over the face of the magistrate, for if this should be correct information, he saw how terribly he must have been taken in, and what a story it would be to tell against him.

"It's true, Sir John, upon my life it's true."

"No—no. It—cannot—be—To horse! to horse, officers! Hilloa—your pistols."

"Hold, Sir John," said Claude. "Accept our thanks, and if you wish to say anything more to us, you will be able to do it when you catch us at breakfast to-morrow. I have the honour to be Claude Duval."

"And I Dick Turpin," said Dick.

"And I the devil," said Jack. "Whoop, hilloa!"

With a bound they reached the road. For a moment they leant forward in their saddles, and then, as the officers hurriedly dragged what horses they could find from the stables, off went Claude and his friends like the wind.

A straggling volley of pistol bullets came after them, without doing the least damage, and in ten minutes they were two miles from the little inn, where they had certainly done much more good than harm, and for which they ought not to have been hunted in such a way.

"Halt!" said Claude.

They all drew up.

"Where are we, Jack?"

"Not very far from Guildford, Claude; but it will be better to get out of the high-road, won't it?"

"Yes. Come on—here's a lane."

A very beautiful lane, down one side of which there flowed a pretty streamlet, lay to the left, as they looked westward, and they at once turned their horses' heads down it, and pursued it about half a mile. Then again Claude Duval called a halt, and said to his friends—

"What is to be in our line of business now? I do think that we have seldom, if ever, found ourselves so free from any engagements of any sort as we are now."

"That is true," said Dick Turpin; "but I suppose it is a state of things that is, after all, not likely to last very long."

"Certainly not," said Jack; "but I advise Claude, now that he really does feel himself to be in such a position, to think seriously."

"Of what, Jack?"

"Why, of adopting some means of acquiring money enough to retire from so very perilous a mode of life as this."

Claude shook his head, and then he said, in a voice of emotion—

"Jack, when you utter such a remark as that, you put me in mind of one who is dead and gone long ago, now as it seems to me. When she was alive—I need not more particularly allude to her, for well you know who it is that I mean—when she was alive I ever at her suggestion entertained the hope that the day might come when we might retire to some tranquil spot far away from the turmoils of the great world, and there find the repose that it is in vain to seek within its whirling vortex; but when she left me I had no such hopes, and I only look forward to some sudden death, which will only have one pang, after which I may again look into her eyes."

As he said this, Claude Duval glanced upward, and was silent for a moment or two. Then a remarkable change came over his face, and he cried out—

"Oh, God! 'tis she—'tis she! On the very edge of that silvery cloud I see her now—I see her now!"

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXXVIII.

### THE GUILDFORD COACH COMES TO LONDON IN STRANGE HANDS.

BOTH Dick and Jack were rather alarmed, as well, indeed, they might be, at this strange conduct upon the part of Claude Duval, for it was the first slight intimation of the fact, or the seeming fact, that the adventurous life he had led had affected his intellect a little.

They looked at one another inquiringly, and then Jack, edging his horse close to Claude, laid his hand upon his arm, saying—

"Claude, you are not well?"

"Yes—yes, Jack, I am quite well."

"No, you ain't," said Dick. "There has been too much excitement at work

in your brain, Claude. Come, now, I have certain advice to offer to you, which I hope you will take, for I feel confident it will do you good."

"But I saw her," said Caude. "I tell you I saw her."

"Imagination has played you a trick, Claude."

"No—no! I saw her upon the edge of the cloud, and for a moment—only for a moment, for ere you could say 'Beloved!' 'twas gone. She regarded me with a sweet smile, and beckoned to me."

"Do not, I implore you," said Jack, "give way to such fancies. Believe me, Claude, that if you do, they will take such a hold of you that they will quite unman you, and you will find yourself unfit for any exertion when you are called upon for it."

"No—no, not that, Jack. I am all right as far as that goes, but I am warned, I tell you both."

"Warned of what?" said Dick.

"Of the fact that we shall soon part. And yet I will not willingly, and of my own accord, part with either of you on this side of the grave."

It was impossible that Dick or Jack could pretend to misunderstand that this was a foreboding of death on the part of Claude Duval; and after a brief pause Dick said to him in a serious tone of voice—

"Claude, let me warn you of one thing, and that is, that imagination and fear often fulfil their own prophecies."

"I know it, Dick, but it will not be so in this case; believe me, I will fight to the last; but yet I have a belief that I am near to the end of my career."

"I will hear no more of this," said Jack. "These gloomy fancies will upset us all. I don't wish to hear more about such matters. My own nerves are none of the strongest, as you both well know, and the best thing we can do is to talk of something pleasant, and contrive to live just as long as we possibly can without any forebodings upon the subject."

"I will say no more," said Claude.

"That is right," said Dick; "and now let us trot on again for a little space."

They did trot on, but neither Jack nor Dick could be off from noticing that Claude frequently cast his eyes up to the fleeting clouds that were careering over the sky, evidently having in his mind a hope that he should see again the vision that his heated fancy had once produced.

They neither of them thought it prudent, though, to nurse such thoughts by any further remarks concerning them, so they tried to say things to Claude that would seem to be the furthest possible from any such suggestion, and they had the satisfaction in a little time of finding that to all outward appearance he was much as usual.

The lane that they were in was about a mile and a half in extent, and seemed to lead right away towards the upper part of the Hammersmith Road; but after going about a mile down it they found that the hedge upon one side of it skirted a farm-yard, and from the number of handsome-looking hay-ricks about, they came to the conclusion that they were close to some homestead of importance as regarded size.

"Suppose we stop here," said Dick.

"What, in this lane?" said Claude.

"No; but just take a look over the hedge, Claude, and say what you think of this place. It appears to me that if we must stop somewhere it is better that it should be where we are less likely to meet with unwelcome intruders. One thing is quite clear that we cannot very well keep our horses on their feet now till the evening, if we expect them to be in an efficient condition when that time comes.

"That is true."

"Well, then, let us ask the hospitality of the people of this farm for some few hours, and that will sufficiently swallow up the time, so that we shall be able to take to the road again tolerably fresh."

"Yes," said Jack; "that is better than risking the stopping at any inn."



"Be it so," said Claude Duval.

Having thus obtained Claude's consent to a halt, they rode on till they came to a gate, which led into rather a pretty-looking paddock, at the farther end of which there was another gate, evidently close to the house itself; but, as yet, they could not see any one.

They opened the gate, and rode into the paddock; and then rather a bluff-looking countryman met them, and looked inquiringly at them, upon which Claude said to him—

"My friend, can you allow our horses a rest for an hour or so in the home-stead, while we indulge ourselves with a glass of your old ale?"

"Well, I'm danged," said the man, "if you ain't as good as a witch."

"How do you mean?"

"We have got some old ale."

"Oh, yes, I know that quite well," added Claude, who had no very flattering idea of the intellect of the countryman, from his wondering at such an evident guess as that there was some old ale to be had at an English farmhouse.

The terms upon which Claude and his friends could stay at the place as long as they liked were easily settled; and, in wandering about a delicious garden that was attached to the place, they almost forgot that there was such things as prisons and officers in the world.

The shades of evening, however, at last began to fall across the landscape; and the distant trees and hedges and fields began to be mingled together in a mass of confusion.

"It is time to go," said Duval.

"Yes," said Dick. "But stop, now, just for a few moments. I told you while we were in the lane that I had a proposition to make to you; and, as I did not then mention it, I will now."

"Excuse us, Dick, for our non-attention."

"Don't mention that. But listen to me: I should like a change."

"A change, Dick."

"Yes, I want a month's peace and quietness; so I propose that we try this night what we can do on the Guildford road, as regards putting us in funds; and then, if we are fortunate enough to get a good purse full enough for the purpose, I would wish that we should go to some quiet sea-side place for a time, and forget that we are highwaymen, and in peace and security recover the tenour of our minds a little."

Claude looked at Dick for a moment in silence, and then he said—

"This is proposed for my interest, Dick."

"Yes, partly, and partly for my own, and partly for Jack's. I know that we all need such a change. Come, now, Claude, don't object to it."

"I won't. Be it as you propose, if agreeable to Jack. What do you say to it, my old friend?"

"I am perfectly willing," said Jack. "Be it as you both agree; and, in fact, what is now proposed is particularly agreeable to me, and it would be still more so if it could be accomplished at once without the proceeding of to-night's work upon the road."

"Well, let me see," said Dick. "What money have you, Jack?"

"None."

"Then that is soon settled. What have you, Claude?"

"Something under ten pounds."

Dick executed a long whistle, and then he said—

"I have about twenty pounds, but that will not be enough to do for us all three, and take care of the cattle, too, for that time, so there is an end of it. To the road we must go, and good luck go with us."

"Amen!" said Jack.

Claude nodded his head, and then he said—

"Now, Dick, you shall be general-in-chief to-night. If you think that the



THE FRIENDS WAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE GUILDFORD COACH.

Guildford road is the best one we will take to it at once ; so come on, I know the way."

This, then, was formally agreed upon between them all, that as soon as they had in any way made up the sum of one hundred pounds they would cease their depredations, and start across the country to some of the little villages upon the Kentish coast, and there take up their abode for a month.

Man proposes and fate disposes, though, and it will be seen whether Claude or his friends were ever destined to carry out such an idea as that which they now entertained.

The night, as it happened, was a very dark one, indeed very much darker than was at all to be expected, considering the age of the moon, but the fact was that a sudden shift of wind about sunset brought from the south-west a great mass of clouds, which effectually obscured all traces of moonlight; and, although they did not at once bring rain, it was pretty evident that they were sufficiently charged with aqueous particles to do so at any small amount of provocation.

This state of things was in many respects more favourable for the designs of Claude Duval and his associates than as if the night had been fine, although in one respect a rather threatening night was bad for them, inasmuch as it kept at home persons who otherwise might have ventured out into the roads, and so become the prey of the highwaymen.

Nevertheless, the three friends took their route by the nearest way they could find to the Guildford road, which was then a much more popular one as regarded coaches, both public and private, than it is now.

By going some distance over a field or two, where they found a bridle path, they at length emerged in a part of the road that was at the foot of a hill, and which was exceedingly favourable for their purpose, inasmuch as if they got just a little way on the ascent, as the hill went Londonwise, they would be able to stop any vehicle or horse with ease.

"Here, then, as I am commander-in-chief," said Dick, "I should say, we pause."

"So be it," said Claude.

"But," added Dick, "as I am not at all above taking advice, I would beg to say—Is not this a good place for our purpose?"

"It is, Dick. I don't think, viewing the general description of the ground, we could have a better. All we want now is the enemy."

"And that wish is soon supplied," said Jack, "for, lo! I hear the sound of a horse's feet."

As Dick and Duval had been talking while Jack had been listening, he had caught the sound of advancing feet first; but the moment they turned their attention to the subject they too heard it.

"One horse," said Claude, "and so, we may conclude, one horseman. Who will stop him? It don't want three to one man."

"I will," said Dick.

"Very well; we will take it by turns as long as single passengers only appear. I will sally out to the next one, and you to the third, Jack."

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## CHAPTER CCCLXXXIX.

### THE OFFICERS OF JUSTICE ARE UPON THE TRACK OF THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THERE was not much time for consideration now, for the approaching horseman came on at rather a sharp trot. Upon getting to the commencement of the ascent of the hill, though, he altered the pace of his steed to a walk, and then Dick Turpin went out quite gently into the road and intercepted him.

"Good evening, sir," said Dick.

The horseman paused on the moment, and said in a mild voice—

"Goon evening, sir; but I don't know you."

"You will remember me, though," said Dick. "I don't want to detain you longer than necessary, but you will oblige me with your purse, sir."

"A highwayman!"

"Call me what you will, but be quick."

"Alas, sir, I certainly have a small sum of money about me, but it is the sole hope of one who is in great distress for the want of it. I implore you not to take it from me."

"Stuff," said Dick. "Come, sir, give it up."

"But let me tell you that I am poor. I am a clergyman—a curate merely; my own income is not fifty pounds a year. The little sum of money that I have with me is for the relief of the orphan and the widow. Oh, young man, if you have a heart at all you will let me pass in peace; but if you have not, there is the money, and may God forgive you as I do."

"Pass on," said Dick. "I cannot say whether you are deceiving me and

only playing a part or not, but the doubt is sufficient, so pass on. I will not take your money."

Upon this, the clergyman rode close up to Dick, and said—

"It is dark, but yet I would fain see your face, that I may know you again if ever it should be in my power to do you a kindness."

"No—no. It is as well not."

"Oh, yes—yes. Honour me so far, my friend, I beg of you. There, now, a cloud has partially swept from over the face of the moon, and if you turn this way I shall see you."

"Look at me, then," said Dick Turpin, as he took off his hat, and the curate did take a good look at him by the dim night light,

"Shall you know me again?" said Dick.

"I shall."

"Then good-night, sir, and good speed to you."

"Farewell!"

The curate set spurs to his horse, and rode off.

"Am I done," said Dick to himself, "or not? Well, at any rate, if I am taken in, the fellow deserved to get off for his cleverness in playing the part that he did, for in good truth it was admirably done, and, after all, I rather incline to the opinion that it was all true."

When Dick got back to his friends he told them exactly what had taken place, and Claude said at once—

"You did quite right, Dick. The gold that would be necessary for the wants of the widow and the orphan would do us no good."

"Not a whit," said Jack. "It would bring a curse with it."

"So I thought," said Dick, "but it is your turn next, Claude, and here comes the chance. Another horseman, by Jove! The road is well frequented to-night."

From the same direction, that is to say, from countrywise, that the curate had come, they now heard a horse approaching at a rapid canter, and Claude Duval, finding that there was no time to lose, sprang out into the road, and called out—

"Stop, on your life!"

There was a scream, then, evidently in a female voice, and the horse was pulled up so quickly that it reared right on to its haunches, and then commenced plunging in evident fright.

Claude could just see that it was a female figure that was upon the horse, and seizing the opportunity to do so effectually, he dashed forward and caught the refractory horse by the bridle, and brought it to a state of quietness in a few minutes.

"Oh, sir," said the voice of evidently quite a young girl, "was it you who called out to me to stop, or have you saved me from that danger as well as from the more real one of a fall from my horse?"

Claude hesitated a moment, and then he said—

"I did call out to you to stop, but it was a mistake."

"A mistake, sir?"

"Yes, I took you for some one else, that is all. You are free to pursue your journey, if you please. Your steed is quiet now."

"Thank you, sir; but—but—you are not really a—a——"

"A gentleman, I hope," said Claude, as he slightly raised his hat, "having in all respects behaved as one to you. It is better not to inquire further."

"Sir, I thank you. Good night."

"Good night."

The young lady cantered on, and Claude went back to his friends and laughed, as he said to them—

"Another failure. It was a girl merely; so, of course, I let her go on without ever inquiring if she had any money with her. It really don't seem as if we were destined to do much good upon this road to-night, for there seems to arise some good reason for letting every one pass whom we may happen to stop upon the highway."

"Well," said Jack, "it is my turn next, however, and perhaps I shall have better luck than either of you."

"Hush!" said Dick. "Jack, you won't go single-handed upon the next adventure. Don't you hear?"

"Yes, the sound of wheels. It is a stage coach."

"Are you sure of that? Listen again. Perhaps, after all, it may be some private vehicle."

They all three now listened attentively, and they distinctly heard the tramp of four horses, and the heavy, grinding sound of the wheels of a vehicle of considerable weight upon the road; but if there had been any doubt at all upon the character of the vehicle that was approaching it would have been completely set at rest by the braying sound of a horn, that was evidently blown by the guard of the coach.

That it was a public vehicle that was now rapidly approaching was evident, and Jack at once said—

"Now you know it is a stage coach."

"We do," said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude, "there cannot be any mistake about it now."

"What is to be done?" said Dick.

Jack was rather thoughtful, and evidently waited to hear what Claude would say upon the subject; and after the pause of a moment or two, he spoke—

"Here are three of us," he said, "and there is a stage coach coming along upon the road. It is evidently bound for London, and is likely enough to have in and about it passengers sufficient to make up the money that we want. If we can get that money by such a *coup* as stopping the coach at once, I think it is better than waiting here for perhaps half the night, and only falling in with such chances as have already come across us."

"That is true," said Dick.

"Why, yes," said Jack, "I cannot deny it."

"Then," added Claude, "what do you both say? Shall we attack the coach, or leave it alone?"

"Attack it," said Dick.

"Then," said Jack, "as I should be in a minority if I were to say no to the proposition, I won't; and, therefore, you may consider that I agree."

"On, then," said Dick, "for there is no time to lose. What is to be the order of the attack, Claude?"

"Anyhow you please, as far as I am concerned."

"Then, Jack, you stop the leading horses. I will keep the coachman and guard quiet, and you, Claude, see to the passengers. Will that do?"

"Perfectly well."

"Come on, then, for there are the lights of the coach already flashing on the herbage of the hedgerows."

To stop a stage coach with four good horses in it, going at its usual pace upon a country road, would, under ordinary circumstances, have been rather a difficult as well as a hazardous exploit; but when such a feat was done by any of the knights of the road they took good care to place themselves under such peculiar conditions that the thing was not near so troublesome to do as it might have been.

One of the most essential of these conditions was to be upon the acivity of a hill, so that the horses were, at any rate, reduced to a walk nearly, and the difficulty of stopping them was very materially reduced.

This was precisely the position occupied by Claude and his two friends upon the occasion of stopping the Guildford coach.

The guard of the coach blew his horn again, doubtless for the purpose of warning any vehicle that might be coming down the hill of the close proximity of the coach, and then the horses were brought to a walk, and the broad glare of the lamps fell slowly and oddly enough upon the hedges and the trees on each side of the road.



"Are you ready?" said Dick Turpin.

"Quite," said Jack.

"Yes," said Claude, "I am quite ready."

"On, then, at once, and don't give them time to think about it."

Dick did not pause another moment, but giving his horse an impulse forward, he rode out into the middle of the road, and presented a pistol at the coachman, crying out in a firm, clear voice, as he did so—

"Pull up, or you are a dead man!"

Upon the impulse of the moment the coachman pulled up, and then Jack was at the heads of the leaders in another moment, and without alarming them at all took gently hold of one of them by the bridle, so that they understood they were to stand still.

"Oh, Lord!" said the coachman. "Here's no end of highwaymen stopped the coach, as I'm a sinner!"

"Guard!" said Turpin, "guard!"

"What now?" said the guard.

"You are very likely armed," said Dick, "and I only speak to warn you that we are in sufficient force to make resistance perfectly useless; so if you attempt to make any it can only have to you the effect of getting your brains blown out."

"Yes," said Claude, as he rode up to the side of the coach, "that is about it; and now that you understand your situation, your best plan will be to be quiet."

"Blaze away at 'em, Bill," said the coachman, "You have got a blunderbuss.

"Yes," said Bill, "but don't you hear, they are going to blow my brains out if I do? and as they are the only brains I have got, I don't seem to like it."

"You are a sensible man," said Dick.

"Thank you, sir."

"You are a coward, Bill," said the coachman.

"I know it," said Bill, "that's why I was made guard of a coach, you see, Joe, 'cos it wasn't supposed I would bring you and the passengers into any danger by useless resistance."

The coachman shook his head despairingly, and Claude Dural at once let down the window on the off side of the coach, and looking into the vehicle, he said—

"If there be any ladies here, they need not be at all alarmed, as no violence is intended."

"Violence, sir!" cried a voice. "What the devil is the meaning of all this? Coachman!—I say, coachman! go on, or I shall bring an action against your proprietors for delaying me on my journey."

"The coachman dare not go on, sir," said Claude, "and it is quite useless for you to put yourself in a passion. You will be so good as to deliver up your money, watches, and jewellery, if you please, and be quick about it."

"Murder!" cried a lady's voice.

"No, madam," said Claude, "there is no murder in the case."

"Why, good gracious, man! you don't want to rob us?"

"I do, madam."

"Why, it's a highwayman!" cried the man's voice. "Upon my life this is a pretty state of things. Here we are stopped by a highwayman. Sir Peter Brown!—Sir Peter Brown, I say! are you going to stand this?"

"Oh, yes," said a weak voice—"oh, yes, and a great deal more, if necessary. I cannot allow my serenity to be disturbed by my ideas of resistance; so, my good fellow, here is my purse. There are about forty pounds in it, to which, I'm sure, you are quite welcome, if you will be very quiet and polite in what you have to do."

"Thank you, sir," said Claude. "Now you, sir, if you please."

"But, bless me!" cried the other man, "I—I——"

"Confound you, sir!" said Claude, as he put the lock of one of his pistols in trim for firing. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to force me to fire into the coach, for somebody else may get hurt. Lean forward, sir, that I may get a good aim at you alone."

"Oh, no! The Lord have mercy upon me! Good sir, oh, don't—don't! There is my purse, and my watch. Oh, do go away at once, for I don't feel very well."

## CHAPTER CCCXC.

### THE GUILDFORD COACH PASSES COMPLETELY INTO NEW HANDS.

By the feel of the purse that was handed to him, Claude Duval had every reason to believe that it was tolerably well filled, so he was pretty well satisfied with the result of the attack upon the coach. The lady, who was the only other passenger in the vehicle, gave such evident symptoms of being in hysterics, that Claude Duval said to her—

"Madam, if you wish to get rid of me you can do so at once, by handing me your purse. Come, be quick, now."

"Oh, give it to him," said the passenger who had been first inclined to bully Claude—"give it to him, and let him go."

"Yes," said the other, who was named Sir Peter Brown, as he calmly took a pinch of snuff—"yes, I think that will be the plan, madam."

"Take it—oh, take it. There it is, and my rings, too—my brooch—oh, my bracelets—oh—oh!"

"I don't want your jewellery," said Claude. "Good-night, madam; and I trust, gentlemen, you are much more frightened than hurt."

"Claude—Claude!" cried Dick.

"Yes, Dick?"

"Look down the road there! What is that?"

Claude did look down the road; and what he saw for a few moments had the effect of rather confusing him, for he could not make out what it was.

"What is it, Dick?" he said. "Is it a bonfire moving along, or what?"

"No, Claude, it is a strong party of mounted men, preceded by two bearing flambeaux. Don't you see them now?"

"Ah, yes, I do."

"We must be off. The only three outside passengers that there were to the coach slid down, and ran off. I let them go, as is my custom, pretending not to see them; but now they will give the alarm to those people who are advancing without a doubt, and we shall be taken if we don't mind."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the coachman. "Now, my fine fellows, I rather think you are in for it, for I can see, if you can't, that it is a strong party of mounted police that is coming up the road. It is to be hoped you have made your wills all of you."

"Be quiet," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, I'll be quiet. Ha! ha!"

"Dick, we may yet baffle them."

"How? By flight?"

"Yes, partly, and partly by *finesse*. Will you see to my horse?"

"Certainly I will."

Claude dismounted rapidly, and then, rather to the surprise of Dick, he mounted on to the coach box, and snatching the reins from the hands of the coachman, he said—

"Get down, or you are a dead man!"

The coachman, seeing a pistol in the right hand of Claude, rolled off the box into the road in a moment, calling out as he did so—

“Bill—Bill, why don't you shoot him?”

“I'd rather not,” said Bill. “Two can play at that game, you know, Joe. Is there anything I can do, sir”—addressing Claude Duval—“to give you any satisfaction?”

“Yes. Be off with you after the coachman.”

“With all the pleasure in life, sir.”

With amazing celerity the guard dropped from the roof of the coach on to the road; but he took his blunderbuss with him.

“Now, Dick,” cried Claude, “you and Jack ride on in front of the leaders, and I will drive the coach. Off we go, and all's right.”

“Good,” said Dick. “I see now. It is the best plan in the world.”

Claude touched the horses with the whip, and off they went; but at that moment the guard did a very desperate thing, for kneeling down in the middle of the road, he fired his blunderbuss after the coach, and half a dozen slugs with which it was loaded went, slanting upwards fortunately, right through the back panel.

The effect of this discharge was to frighten the old lady in the inside of the coach into a state of hysterics, and to blow off the hat and wig of Sir Peter Brown, while one of the slugs hit the irascible gentleman on the side of the nose, and reduced that prominent member of his face from an aquiline, of which he used to be very proud, to a snub.

“Confound the fellow!” said Claude, when he heard the discharge of the blunderbuss. “If I had not four horses to manage, I would let him know that such tricks were not to be played with impunity.”

It was a good thing now for the safety of the coach and the inside passengers, and himself, too, that Claude Duval was a good whip, for the horses had become very much alarmed at the sudden discharge of the blunderbuss, and after kicking a little had fairly broke into a gallop.

Any effort to pull the cattle in for a mile or so would most likely have ended in the upset of the whole concern; so Claude acted upon the prudent plan of rather encouraging them in a gallop than otherwise, so that they soon got tired of it, and comfortably subsided into a good round trot of about nine miles an hour.

During the time that the horses had made such speed, Dick and Jack had got out of the way, and only kept up with the coach, one on each side of it; but now they resumed their position in the front, which would hide them from any one who might be coming after the vehicle.

Gradually, then, Claude pulled up, and said to Dick—

“Look down the road, and see if you can see anything of the rascals we expected after us, Dick.”

“No. But there is a turn in the road.”

“Turn? There is, and rather a sharp one too. I thought that we should have been upset at it.”

Now, the passengers in the inside of the coach had been so confused altogether at the attack, that they were utterly unaware of the change of the driver that the coach had, and hearing some talking now, and feeling that after the mad way in which the coach had been going on that it had come to a stand still, the irascible gentleman whose nose had suffered pulled down the glass, and popped his head out at the window.

“Hilloa! hilloa!”

“What's the matter?” said Claude.

“Coachman! coachman!”

Claude guessed the mistake at once, and imitating the voice of the coachman as well as he could from hearing it only once or twice, he said—

“Here you are, sir. Hope all's right, sir?”

“No, you rascal, all's wrong.”

"Sorry to hear it, sir."

"You sorry to hear it, you vagabond? How dared you submit to those rascally highwaymen in the way you did?"

"Couldn't help it, sir."

"You couldn't help it, you wretch? You know well that you could help it, and your duty was to help it; but I'll bring an action, sir, against your proprietors, sir, I will, sir, you vagabond; and I don't feel quite sure but what you are in the plot yourself, confound you!"

"Oh, dear, no, sir."

"But I say, oh, yes, sir! and I only wish I had hold of the rascals, now I have got my pistols out of my travelling valise—where, somehow or another, they always are when I want them most—I would let them see that an Englishman's coach as well as his house were his castle."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir, indeed! Curse you, sir!—that's what I say."

The irascible gentleman drew up the window with such violence, that it was a wonder he did not smash it at once.

"On again, Claude," said Dick, "they come—look!"

Claude gave one glance behind the coach, and then he saw the party with their flambaux advancing at a trot.

"No," he said. "It is better to brave it out, now. You both of you get into the shadow of the trees, and leave all to me."

"We will aid you," said Dick, "if there be any occasion."

"Yes," said Jack. "Trust us for that."

"I do."

Both Jack and Dick, now, got out of sight almost among the large overhanging branches of a chestnut tree, that grew by the road-side, and Claude put on the coachman's extra great-coat, that fortunately for him was upon the box. In the pocket of the coat, too, was a large red worsted comforter; and when Claude got that round his neck and the coat on, he was as thoroughly disguised as any one need wish to be.

He had just completed these little arrangements, when a party of twenty-five well armed and well mounted men arrived at the coach.

A man with a pistol in his hand, and who was evidently the leader of the mounted force, rode up to the side of the coach, and cried out to Claude—

"Hilloa! Mr. Coachman, have you been stopped on the road?"

"Oh, lor, yes, sir."

"Oh, you have?"

"Haven't I, sir, and my guard killed, and my passengers robbed!"

"Oh, indeed. I thought as much."

"My 'osses, too, sir, took fright, and off they set, and if I hadn't been as good a whip as there is a goin', though I says it myself as perhaps oughtn't, there would have been a regular upset, and no mistake."

"No doubt of it, the rascals. Did you know them?"

"Me, sir? Oh, lor, no!"

"Well, then, I can tell you that in all likelihood it was Claude Duval, and a couple of fellows who are with him, one of whom is the famous, Dick Turpin, on that four-footed devil, his black mare."

"Oh, sir, you don't say so?"

"It is so, in sober truth."

"Then we are all dead, sir!"

"Oh, no, you are not. I and my men will hunt Claude Duval till we find him; but we are off the scent just now. Do you know which way he went?"

"Yes, to be sure I do."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes, sir. You saw a lane just before you got to the turn in the road, by the old finger-post?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, sir, he went down there along with some other fellows, and thankful enough was I when he did, for then I thought that we might be rid of 'em for to-night, at all events. I only wish, sir, you may catch him. I declare I'm all of a shake, but I don't think any of us are killed, sir, except my poor guard."

"We'll have the rascals—we'll have them. Thank you for your information, coachman, and you will hear of it again if we catch them."



"No doubt of that, sir."

"This way—this way," cried the chief officer, as he turned his horse's head in the contrary direction again. "This way, my men. Good-night, coachman."

"Good-night, sir."

Another moment, and the twenty-five officers were all on the gallop away from Claude Duval and his friends, as quickly as they could possibly go.



"Bravo!" cried Turpin, clapping his hands as though he were applauding at a theatre. "Bravo! bravo!"

"So say I," said Jack.

"Well, it is not bad," said Claude; "and now I have no sort of objection to bidding good-by to the Guildford coach. Where's my horse?"

"Here you are, all right, Claude."

"Thank you. But the best plan will be to release the horses from the coach, and let them trot quietly to town by themselves, otherwise the passengers may get upset, after all, and it will do us no good to expose them to any such dangers."

"None in the least," said Jack. "I'll manage it."

With his experience and tact with regard to horses, Jack in a very few minutes released all the four horses from the coach, and then away they trotted to town, not at all displeased not to have dragging behind them the vehicle, that was thus left alone in its glory in the road.

Claude Duval then mounted again, and going up to the coach door, he let down the blind, and said in quite an easy tone of manner as he looked in at the astonished passengers—

"There was a gentleman here who said he had got his pistols ready for me if I came again; and as I am here, perhaps he will explain what he meant by that remark about me."

"Oh, lord, no!" cried the irascible gentleman. "This is the devil himself!"

"If you are the same highwayman who before favoured me with your company," said Sir Peter Brown, "I beg to state that I have not had time to go home and get any more money."

Claude laughed and drew up the window again; and then turning to Jack and Dick, he said—

"Come, I rather think that we may now conclude this adventure to be settled to the satisfaction of all three of us; and the sooner we go from the coach the better."

"So say I," replied Dick.

"And I," said Jack.

"Come on, then. Where is my horse, Jack?"

"Here, Claude, and all right."

Another moment and Claude Duval was mounted again, and with his two friends on the road, ready and fearless for whatever might occur. They paused for a few moments, and the silence that was between them seemed as though it had something ominous about it. It was Dick Turpin who broke the silence.

"Claude," he said, "which way do you go now? Have you enough, do you think, to make it worth our while to try to carry out the little plan we thought of awhile ago?"

"Ay," said Jack, "that is it."

"I will soon see," said Claude, as he let the bridle of his horse go on to the creature's neck—"I will soon see about that. Perhaps you could let me have a match alight for a moment; for I think that there are notes in one of the purses."

"To be sure," said Jack.

"No!" cried Dick—"no, don't be quite so hasty. I hear nothing, but Bess does. Only notice her."

Turpin's steed was pawing the ground in rather a suspicious manner, and the creature's ears were projected forward so as to catch the slightest sound.

## CHAPTER CCCXCI.

## CLAUDE DUVAL FULFILLS THE PROPHETIC FEELING OF HIS SOUL.

"WHAT does Bess mean?" said Claude Duval to Dick, after the pause of a few moments, during which they heard no alarm.

"She means that there is danger. You hold her for a moment, Jack, while I place my ear close to the ground and listen."

"I will, Dick."

Turpin dismounted and flung himself flat on the ground, placing his ear close to it, and after about half a minute's intent listening he rose, and springing into the saddle, he said—

"Claude, my boy, they are trying to steal a march upon us."

"How do you mean?"

"I am quite confident that a number of horses are coming along the road so carefully and slowly that they may be within a few hundred yards of us before we should under ordinary circumstances hear any sound of their approaching feet."

"Ah, say you so?"

"It is so. I cannot help thinking that they must have adopted some mode of more effectually deadening the sound of the creatures' hoofs upon the road."

"That may be done," said Jack.

"As how, Jack?" said Claude. "I don't see how on the spur of the moment such a feat could be accomplished."

"Oh, yes; I once tied a silk handkerchief over one of the feet of my horse, many times doubled, and it was surprising how it stilled the sound. But I have an opinion with regard to these advancing officers, which I think, if we do ever know the rights of the matter, is very likely to turn out the correct one."

"What is it, Jack?"

"Simply, that before they all got very far from here they met the guard and the coachman, who have given the information, not strictly in accordance with what they got from us"

"It must be so."

"Nothing more likely," said Dick. "This will be our way, I take it. And now I seriously incline to get over the first practicable hedge we happen to come to and make our way into the open fields. So long as we continue upon roads, whether they be highways or byeways, we run the risk of encountering the officers."

"Be it so," said Claude.

They now, at rather a swift canter, for they thought that was the pace that would make the least noise on the road, which happened to be pretty hard just about that spot, went on townwards, until Dick Turpin, who was a little in advance, came to a portion of the hedge by the wayside which was of so straggling and imperfect a nature that there could be no sort of difficulty in crossing with the horses.

"This will do," he said.

"We follow you, Dick," said Claude, "for, if you recollect, you accepted the appointment of commander-in-chief, and I am still willing to concede it to you."

"And I," said Jack.

"No—no, that's all nonsense. You are our chief, Duval, and to you we both look. But that don't much matter; Bess I know can do this feat of leaping from the road into the fields, for she is well used to it, and, perhaps, after seeing her do it, your horses will follow."

As he spoke, Turpin just patted the neck of the beautiful creature he rode, and in another minute she had made a dash at the little embankment by the side of the road, and clearing the slight obstruction of a straggling alder branch or two, she was in the meadow beyond in safety with Dick Turpin.

"Bravo!" said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack, "it was beautifully done."

"Come on—come on. I don't know how it is so," said Dick, rather hurriedly, "but now that I am here upon the green sward I seem to hear the sound of horses' feet in this direction easier than I did even upon the road."

Thus urged, both Claude and Jack spurred their horses up the embankment, and they both got into the meadow rather gallantly.

"Well done," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, "as regards the scramble it is; but let us now listen for the sounds you heard, Dick."

Claude said nothing, but he bent his head down about on a level with the saddle, and with his hand at his left ear he listened intently.

A strange clanking sound came upon the night air. They all heard that.

"What is it?" said Jack.

"What is what?" said Claude, for he wanted to hear from Jack if he, too, heard the clanking sound.

"Why I don't know how to describe it, but if I didn't think it was not at all likely, I should say that there was a sound not unlike that which would be produced by military accoutrements."

"Yes, that's it."

"What's it, Claude?"

"We are pursued still by the officers, who, no doubt, have fallen in with the coachman and the guard or one of them, and by some means or another, too, they have got the aid of some military."

"Think you so, indeed?" said Dick.

"I do."

"Then there is no time to lose, and let who will be in command among us I say but one word, and that is, on—on!"

Dick did not stop to argue the matter, but off he set, and was quickly followed by Claude Duval and Jack. The meadow in which they were was certainly of considerable extent; but going at the rate they did they very soon cleared it, and then they came to a very low and easily scaled hedge which they got through in a moment, but to their mortification they found the field upon the other side was a ploughed one, and at every step the horses sunk above their fetlocks in the soil.

The labour of getting along this field at any speed was truly terrific; and after trying a canter, and a gallop, and then a trot, they were compelled to let the horses walk it, for fear of straining them, so that when they should get upon beaten ground they would be found lame after such an exertion.

Fortunately this ploughed land was not of very great extent, and when they emerged from it, they came upon a portion of grass that covered a long avenue, bordered by chestnut trees on each side.

The avenue really looked so artificial, that Claude Duval and his friends could scarcely bring themselves to think that it was other than a work of art.

The morning light was just beginning to show itself in the eastern sky now, and as a long pencil of grayish, strange colour shot up from the horizon, Dick waved his hand, saying—

"To cover! To cover! They come! On—on! Follow me!"

Without asking Dick for the special cause of this sudden alarm, or staying to look for it themselves, both Jack and Claude followed him closely up the avenue, and then they came to a row of iron hurdles, beyond which they could just see, looming larger in the morning light, several huge haystacks.

That they had come upon a farmyard, instead of keeping to the open fields, was now a fact too evident to dispute. But Dick did not hesitate a moment. Springing from his horse, he laid violent hands upon several of the hurdles, and succeeded in displacing them, and then he cried out in a sharp, quick, but yet suppressed voice, to his friends—

"Come on—come on! Concealment is our only chance."

While Dick Turpin had been displacing the iron hurdles, both Claude and Jack had had time to take a look along the seemingly artificial avenue down which they had come, and then they no longer doubted the wisdom of the hurried proceedings of their friend Turpin.

It so happened that rather a heavy gleam of light fell from the eastern sky round a little clump of trees at the commencement of the avenue, just after leaving the ploughed field, and that streak of light fell right upon the arms and accoutrements of about half a dozen lancers, whose gay equipage and martial appearance was certainly rather out of place in that seemingly peaceful region, in which the birds were just awakening to welcome the rising sun.

We may as well now state at once to the reader the cause of this sudden and truly alarming accession of strength to the attacking party.

The fact was, that the officers, with the exception of one, were all totally deceived by the assumption of the character of coachman of the Guildford Celerity by Claude Duval. That one officer, however, happened to know the coachman well, and he thought that there was a slight difference of tone that was rather odd.

It said a great deal, though, for the accuracy of Claude's sudden assumption of the coachman's character, that this man could only suspect that there was something rather odd in his friend's voice, without being able to pronounce positively upon the fact that it was not him.

After the party had ridden off, and taken the route that Claude had sent them upon, and which would have separated them from the coach further and further, this one suspicious officer communicated to the commander of the party his suspicions that they were being deceived in some way.

This brought the party to a halt.

After some parley, then, it was agreed to send six of the force still onwards by that route, while the remainder should go back and seek to overtake the coach again, and thoroughly satisfy themselves with regard to the identity of the coachman; and it was in the attempt to carry out this portion of their plan that, after reaching the road again, they heard a faint voice crying out—

“Hilloa! hilloa!”

Upon coming to a halt, and answering the cry, it was repeated, and then they followed the sound, till they came to the guard of the Guildford Celerity, who was lying in a ditch by the road-side, with his discharged blunderbuss still in his grasp.

A good shaking and some eager questions put to him by the officers, at once let him see that he was among friends; and then out came the whole affair, to the intense mortification of the officers.

Before they left the guard, for leave him they were compelled to do, since they had no spare horse for him, the six men they had sent down the turning came back into the road again, accompanied by a sergeant's party of Lancers, who were *en route* for the head-quarters of their regiment.

From this party they learnt that it was quite impossible three mounted men could have come by the route supposed, without passing them, and they repeated that they had met no one whatever for five miles or more.

Of course, putting all this together, the magistrate who was with the officers came to the tolerably sensible conclusion that he had been completely taken in by Claude and his friends. The only thought was how to repair the serious error into which they had fallen.

The magistrate, in the first instance, easily, by stating who and what he was, induced the sergeant in command of the five Lancers to lend him what aid he could in the matter, and the more especially as it did not now seem likely to take him out of his route.

Thus was it that the military force was once again enlisted in the service of the civil authorities against Claude Duval and his two companions and friends.

What will be the result of this combination, we shall quickly see.

It was arranged that the party should be divided in this manner.

The Lancers were to take to the fields, along with the six men who had met them in the cross-road, and to ascertain as they went along if any trace of the highwaymen was to be found, while the magistrate with the remainder of the party kept on the high-road, with the hope of driving the thieves off into the meadows.

All this had been executed with such speed as was possible, and carried out, and the consequence was, that Claude and his friends found themselves, as the reader is aware, with the Lancers and the six officers in the rear, the farm-yard and its dependencies in the front, and the road, no doubt, well taken care of by the magistrate and the strong force still under his orders.

We now return to Claude and his friends.

Their position, to them, did not seem quite so desperate as it really was, for they did not up to that point know of the division of the force that had been sent against them; and it was to their minds just possible that the people attached to the farm might befriend them in some degree, so that it was rather with hopefulness than otherwise that they paused amid the haystacks, and waited for the coming assault.

By dint of some exertion, they replaced the iron hurdles that had been cast down by Dick, for, at least, they would be some sort of protection against their pursuers; and it would not be a very easy thing to take them down, when exposed to the fire of the pistols of the highwaymen, as either the Lancers or the officers would be if they should make the attempt.

While all this was going on, the worst possible thing that could take place for Claude and his friends did occur, namely, the rapid approach of the morning, which happened to be a really fine and clear one. To them the light seemed each moment to be spreading itself over the sky, with a speed that was quite unusual with it.

"We shall be in broad daylight in another hour," said Jack.

"No," said Dick—"no. Don't say that."

"But look at it."

"Yes. But I think I have more experience in country matters than even you have, Jack, although you ought to know a good deal about it, too. Don't you see the mist in yonder valley thickening each moment? Look at it. It is only half-way up the trees."

"Ah, yes!"

"Well, then, my opinion is that in the course of the next quarter of an hour we shall have a white fog about us; and, if so, it will, I think and hope, be all to our advantage."

"It will," said Claude.

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick; "and as for these soldiers, I don't feel quite sure that they know we are on their route at all. But I see now how it was that we heard the seemingly muffled sound of horses' feet while we were in the road; for what we listened to was the tread of the cattle on the grass in the meadows."

By the actions of the Lancers and the officers of police who were with them, the supposition of Dick Turpin that he and his two friends were not known to be so close at hand, seemed to be pretty well verified.

They came on till they were within a couple of hundred yards of the farm-yard; and then Claude distinctly heard the order to halt.

In the clear, fresh morning air, then—although it was pretty evident that the white mist covering it had not yet come—the voices of the sergeant of the Lancers and the principal of the officers came clearly upon the ears of Claude and his party.

What they heard induced them to think that everything might be gained by keeping quiet; so they descended and led their horses round the haystacks, and, pulling out a few handfuls for them, they left the creatures to amuse themselves; while they themselves peered round the corners of the stacks, and alternately watched their foes, and listened to what they said.



## CHAPTER CCCXCII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE A SERIOUS BATTLE IN THE FARM.

It would seem that the sergeant of the Lancers, although he had not liked to refuse his aid to the magistrate who had requested it—and, indeed, he did not feel very clear but that the magistrate had the power to demand his co-operation—did not seem to be very much pleased with the duty he was upon.

Claude and his friends could hear him, in rather a burlesque sort of way, speaking to the officers.

"Well, Mr. Officers of Police," said the sergeant, "I don't see that we are doing any good now. Here we are close to a farm-yard. What are you disposed to be at, now?"

"Confound the fellows!"

"Ah, well, so say I. But it is of no use our staying here and swearing, you know. Show me what I can do, and I will try and do it. But it seems to me that we are on the wrong track."

"It does look like it."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"I suppose we must take to the road again, and see his worship, and ask him what he would have done."

"Well, come on, then. I don't think you will catch these fellows you are after this bout, at all events."

"I never did think we should, sergeant."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, dear, no. You don't know that Claude Duval—if, indeed, it be he, and not the devil himself. He is as cunning and as brave as half a dozen people put together."

"Well, I only wish he would come into our regiment. They say we shall be off to the continent to fight the rascally French soon; and he is just the sort of fellow I should like to ride next to, if all is true that is reported of him, and I suppose a good lot of it is."

"I think it, too."

"Well, then, it's understood that we are to make our way into the road again, is it?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Now Claude Duval and his friends began to congratulate themselves that all was well, and that in another five minutes the Lancers and the officers would be past the spot, and so they would, but for one of those little *malapropos* accidents upon which the lives and fortunes of men seem at times to turn.

Just as the sergeant was giving the orders to his men to clear the way through the hedge to the road there arrived in the farm-yard a great thick-headed-looking man in a smock-frock, rubbing his great sleepy eyes as though he had just roused himself for the day, as, indeed, he had, for his duty was to feed a considerable number of pigs that were close at hand.

"Oh, lor! oh, lor!" he said, "what a thing it is to have to get up of a morning. I don't so much mind it after one is up, but it is a horrid thing to have to get up when you are sleepy. How I should like to stay in bed for a week and have a lump of fat bacon brought me now and then, and a jug of master's old ale!"

The yokel had just got so far in his soliloquising, when his eyes fell upon three horses quietly at work upon a haystack, and pulling out portions of it with the greatest perseverance.

"Hilloa!" he cried in a voice that rang through the place again. "Hilloa! master! Oh, won't I have you all in the parish pound, and no sort of mistake! Master! Oh, I say, can't you leave off? Master—master! here's some cattle got at the hay. Hilloa! master—master!"

"Villain!" cried Claude Duval, as he sprang at the fellow and held him by the throat with a grasp of iron. "Another word, and you are a dead man."

Alas! it was too late. The fellow had said words enough not only to reach the homestead, but the officers and the Lancers, too. From the house there was at first no notice taken of the cries of the swineherd, but the officers pricked up their ears; and although they could not tell exactly what was amiss, the mere fact that there was something was quite sufficient to induce them to inquire into it.

"Sergeant, did you hear that?" said the chief officer.

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I think it's worth looking to."

"So do I, if you want to catch your men."

"Then you think that—that——"

The sergeant nodded only.

"That will do," said the officer. "Come on. Forward, all of you. Something strikes me we shall have them, after all."

Just as the Lancers and the officers came up to the iron hurdles at a trot, the farmer, who had been aroused by the cries of his swineherd, reached the other side of the farm-yard.

"What's all this about?" he said.

"Peace!" said Dick Turpin. "You and all your family had better consult their own safety by keeping within doors. There is likely enough to be some rough work here."

"Rough work?"

"Yes; be warned in time."

"Well, but, as this is my farm-yard, and as these are my stacks, I rather think I have a right to be here."

"Shoot him," said Jack.

"Well, it will save trouble, to be sure," said Dick, as he presented a pistol at the farmer.

Neither Dick nor Jack had the least intention of shooting the man; but the effect upon him was complete, for with a yell of fear he turned and ran back to his house again as hard as he could.

"Now," said Claude, as he let go the swineherd, "you follow your master, and keep out of harm's way. You have done quite mischief enough for one day; but I don't want to take your worthless life."

Quite delighted at his escape from what he had only a few moments before looked upon as certain death, the swineherd galloped off after the farmer; so that the place was clear of them, although the much greater danger remained, in fact, as the Lancers and the officers were rapidly approaching.

"Dick," said Claude, "what is to be done?"

"I'll be hanged if I know,"

"Can we not escape?" said Jack, as he placed his foot in the stirrup of his horse.

"I don't see the way."

"Nor I," said Dick. "Here we are, and we must fight it out. We are to some extent strengthened here by the stacks and the iron hurdles; but I don't see any way out of here but across the yard, and into the house, and then we should just have to hold a kind of siege, which would be fatal in the end."

"It will be fatal," said Claude, "to one in any way."

Jack and Dick looked at each other significantly; and then Dick sprang to his horse with a feeling of desperation, as he said—

"A fight here between three men and the force opposed to us would be madness. I say, let us try and get away to the left here into the road through every obstacle. It appears to me that there is merely a kitchen garden to get through and a paling to cross, and there we shall be. Come on, Claude. Mount and follow me!"



"As you please," said Claude, as he sprang upon his horse.

Jack did the same, and they made a dash past the haystacks to a little deserted piece of ground; but the getting there had two effects, which at once disclosed the operations of the party.

From that direction they ran into the road, and there, not very far off, was the magistrate and his party returning, and evidently looking for the glitter of the arms of the military, as they could be seen through the trees.

The second effect that that movement had was to mark them to the Lancers and to the officers, who with one voice called out—

"There they are—there they are!"

"Lost now, I think!" said Jack.

"Back to the stacks," said Dick. "While there is life there is hope."

They ran back in a moment to their old position, and then again they dismounted, just as the Lancers came up at a trot to the iron hurdles, closely followed by the officers.

"Dick and Jack," said Claude, rapidly, "let me give myself up."

"Give yourself up?"

"Yes, upon condition that you two go free."

"Never!"

"Never!"

These two answers came sharply from the lips of both Jack and Dick; but Claude Duval looked at them both, and spoke in a tone of melancholy seriousness, saying—

"I know that you do not like the idea of such a thing, but let me beg of you to entertain it. I may have many chances of escape afterwards, but now only look at our situation."

"Say no more," said Dick, "I won't listen."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"We live or die together."

Claude bowed his head in silence, and a sort of shudder came over his frame, after which he looked up coolly and calmly, and with an expression of great beauty beaming upon his face, as he said—

"Be it so. We will fight to the last; and if they gain a victory over us they shall not say it was a bloodless or an easy one."

Dick and Jack could not but look at Claude Duval as he spoke, and they thought they had, in all their long acquaintance with him, never seen so strange an expression upon his face as it then wore.

That time, however, so rife with danger as it was, was not one in which there could be any meditations upon Claude's looks, for they heard the sergeant of the Lancers suddenly cry out—

"Halt!"

Then, to the surprise of his two friends, Claude Duval walked leisurely forward for a few paces beyond the haystacks, and facing his foes, he said—

"Well, what is it?"

"That's our man," cried the officers with one breath. "That's Claude Duval. Seize him—seize him! That's the rascal!"

The Lancers looked at each other and then at their officer doubtfully, and then the sergeant glanced at the police, saying—

"Well, if that's your man, take him."

"Claude Duval," said the chief officer, "I summon you to surrender in the name of the king. I have a warrant against you, and if I had not, it is quite lawful to apprehend you, and you must see that resistance is quite out of the question. I warn you."

"Rather," said Duval, "let me warn you."

"Of what?"

"Of the certain fate that will be yours if you don't be off at once."

"Oh, stuff! That won't do at all. Now, my brave fellows, go in and win. Take him alive if you can, but if you can't, just give him a poke with one of the lances, and that will answer the purpose very well."

"You had better surrender," said the sergeant to Claude.

"No."

"Well, I can't help it."

"Shoot him!" cried the chief officer, for he felt that if an affray really took place the likelihood that he would come out of it in a whole skin was not very great; therefore, he would have been glad if Claude Duval were to be shot at once.

"No," said the sergeant, "none of that. Go and take your man, and if there is any risk we will aid you; but it is quite absurd of all of us to go in upon one man."

"There are three of them," said the officer. "The other two are close at hand."

"You don't know that," said Claude.

"Where are they, then?"

"Look for them in the fog."

The object that Claude had in view in engaging his foes in talk was to let the white mist, which was coming rapidly from the valley, reach the spot, and even as he spoke it came in dense wavy clouds, enveloping horse and man in its fleecy embrace.

The moment Claude saw that such was the case, he stepped back, saying as he did so in a loud, clear voice—

"Come on now, at your peril. The first man who lays a hand upon the iron hurdle, will be a corpse ere he can take it off again."

"Take that, then, and be hanged to you," said the chief officer, as he drew one of the holster-pistols, and fired it at Claude.

Duval's hat was blown off his head by the shot; but before he could think of returning it, there was the sharp crack of a bullet from Jack's pistol, and the chief officer, with a cry, fell from his saddle, and his horse galloped down the avenue half mad with fright.

The officers huddled together, and cried out to the soldiers to take Duval and his friends, for the fall of their chief had given them a sort of panic. The sergeant of the Lancers, however, took things quite easy.

"Dismount!" he said to his men.

In another moment every saddle was empty.

"Protect the horses," he then added. "This affair must be done on foot."

The soldiers thrust their lances into the turf, and fastened the horses to them, and then stood in rank, waiting for further orders.

"Take them alive, if you can, my men," said the sergeant; "but cut down all who resist. Draw sabres! Forward! March!"

The situation of Claude and his friends was now in truth one of the most critical that could well be imagined. They had no wish to take the lives of the soldiers; but after the orders they had heard given, it was but a course of self-defence to do all the harm they could.

### CHAPTER CCCXCIII.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY COMES TO THE AID OF DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS.

WITH the air of men who feel that they had rather a disagreeable duty to do, but which at all hazards must be done, the Lancers marched towards the iron hurdles. It was then that Duval cried out in a loud voice—

"Halt, if you value your lives!"

"Give them a volley from your pistols," said the sergeant.

Five pistol-shots whistled past the heads of Claude and his friends.

"Load!" said the sergeant.

"Fire!" cried Claude.

At the moment he and his two friends returned the fire, and two of the soldiers fell by the iron hurdles.

"Forward!" shouted the sergeant, and he sprang over the hurdle close to him. Claude bounded forward, and seized him by the arm and throat, and tossed him back again as though he had been a truss of straw.

The police officers at this moment poured in a volley of pistol-shots against Claude and his friends; but the salute was returned, for Dick had knocked down one of them with a hedge stake he had found, and Jack had wounded another. There was but one who was unhurt, and he prudently retreated clear of the hurdles, finding himself in such an emergency as he was.



The fog and the smoke from the firing mingling together, prevented the officers on horseback from seeing how the soldiers were getting on; and they kept cheering to them to encourage them.

Then it was that Dick, seeing that if the fight continued they must certainly be worsted, laid hold of Claude by the arm, saying—

“Follow me—follow me! Come, Jack—come. I think there is a chance yet.”

Claude made no answer, but followed him hurriedly through the farm-yard, and so did Jack. They came to an ivy-covered porch of the house, and there they found that the fog was not so bad; and Dick was in the act of trying to force the door open, when a little girl, of about twelve years of age, came up to them, crying, and saying—

“Oh, is it you they came to kill?”

“Yes.”

“Then come this way, and they shall not.—Come, come, before grandfather sees you. They shall not kill you! Oh, do come!”

In wonder they followed the child across the yard to the right; and she opened a little gate, and led them into a flower-garden, and so on to a corner of the house where there was an open door.

“This way!—oh, this way!” she said. “I saw all from the window of my little room, and they tried to kill you, I know. They killed my poor brother, did the bad soldiers, and they shall not kill you! He was a soldier: but he wanted to come home and love us all again and be happy: but they would not let him, and so they shot him. Do you want to go home and be happy?”

“Yes,” said Dick.

“And they won’t let you?”

“Just so.”

“Then I will save you! I am but a child, I know; but I can do more, and just because I am a child, than any one else can do now for you.”

“That is true,” said Dick.

“Hark!” said Jack—“hark!”

“Forward!” cried a voice—“forward! This way! They cannot have escaped us altogether.”

There was then a rush of many feet; and then the little girl took Dick by the arm and led him through the open door and up a little flight of steps to the upper floor of the house. There was a long and dreary-looking passage upon that floor, from which opened various rooms; and into one of them the little girl went, followed by the three stalwart men, whom she said she would save.

This was something like the fable of the lion and the mouse, in which the latter, with all its weakness, aids the former, with all its strength, to elude its foes.

“Come in,” said the child: “this is my chamber. They let me have this room to myself entirely, and I alone keep it neat and clean. There is my little bed—there is my little work-table that my aunt gave me; and, you see, I have some books and some flowers. Now, do you think if you hide in this room and I sit reading here so calm and still, like a little nun, that anybody will think you are here?”

“Certainly not,” said Dick.

“We are saved!” said Jack. “Don’t you think so, Claude?”

Even as Jack put this question to Claude Duval, that personage tottered, and would have fallen but that a little couch that was in the room fortunately was close to him; and he sank upon it with a deep groan.

“Good God,” said Jack, “what is this? Light—light! Draw the blind, and let us have some light.”

Dick Turpin, when he heard Jack speak in this way, did not speak a word, but in two steps he crossed the little room, and reached the window. A green blind was across it, which enveloped everything in the apartment with a mysterious kind of halo. With one movement of his hand, Dick Turpin removed this

obstacle to the early daylight, and then it streamed into the room, and upon the face of Claude Duval.

One look at that pale face, upon which death had set its seal, was enough for both Jack and Dick.

Poor Claude sat upon the little couch, with his right hand upon his breast, and every vestige of colour had fled from his face. His very lips were of an ashy paleness.

The little girl was much alarmed, and stood trembling by the window, gazing at that awful face.

"Claude—Claude!" said Jack, "what is this? Oh, speak to me, I implore you. What is the meaning of it?"

Dick Turpin said not a word.

Then it was that, with an evident effort, Claude Duval smiled in a strange fashion, and holding out his other hand to Jack, he said—

"Jack, old friend, it is nearly over now."

"Oh, God, no!"

"Hush! Jack, hush! They have done for me at last, old friend, Do not think much of this little accident. It was sure to come to this some day. Dick, are you there?"

"Yes, Claude," said Dick, as he snatched up his hat, which he had laid upon the little table. "Yes, I—"

"Stop. Where would you go? Oh, don't leave me now, either of you."

"You are wounded," said Dick, "and I would get surgical aid for you."

"No—no; oh! do not."

"But it may save your life."

Dick moved towards the door; but Claude clenched his left hand, and in a firmer voice he said—

"Dick, if ever you had the slightest feeling of affection for me, you will stay now with me, and not go upon the fruitless errand you speak of. I know that no human aid can avail me now; my minutes are numbered. But do not let them take me in life, if you can help it."

Jack had staggered back to a chair, and with both his hands clasped over his face, he rocked to and fro in quite an agony of grief.

There was a something about the tone in which Duval spoke that brought even firmer conviction to the mind of Turpin that what he said regarding the utter uselessness of surgical aid was but too true, so Dick laid aside his hat again, and slowly walked up to Claude. Looking him earnestly in the face, he said to him—

"Duval, old friend, tell me—is it a bullet?"

"Yes, Dick."

"And where?"

"So near to my heart that it is quite near enough, Dick, to end my career. It's all over! Hark! what is that?"

The sound of voices in the house came upon their ears; and a look of deep distress came over the countenance of poor Claude.

"Oh! my friends," he said, "for you both there is hope! I was selfish when I asked you to stay with me. Flight may yet save you. Go—go, and leave me! I can but die once!"

"Never!" said Dick, as he drew a pistol from his pocket and stood by the side of Claude's chair with a determined aspect. "I, too, can but die once, and I am willing to do so in your company, Claude; and woe be to the man who first tries to lay a finger upon you!"

Poor Jack still rocked to and fro in helpless grief.

The sound of voices came nearer and nearer still to the corridor.

Then it was that the little girl stepped to the door, and opening it quickly passed out of the room. Dick looked a little anxiously after her, for he was afraid that the courage of the child had deserted her, and that she would go and throw herself upon the protection of her friends, and disclose who were in the

room she called her own. But such was not the case : in a few moments the girl returned.

"They are searching the house," she said.

"Then all is lost!" said Dick.

"My good friend," said Claude, and he spoke still fainter now than he had done before, "it is a chance for you, and for you, dear Jack. This window is not far from the ground."

"No, no," said Jack; "I will not leave you!"

"Nor I!" said Dick, firmly. "Jack?"

"Yes, Dick?"

"Your pistols! We will all die together, if it must be so. Your arms, Jack! Don't submit easily. The most timid animal in all the world, if hunted to the covert, will turn upon its foes. Be a man, Jack!"

"I will—I will!"

Jack sprang to his feet, with his hair dishevelled, and looking scarcely less pale than poor Claude. With cautious eagerness he took a pair of pistols from his pocket, and pointed them both towards the door of the room; and then, in a strange, cracked voice, he said—

"Let them come!—let them come! Let the bloodhounds come for their prey! Ah, they will find me ready for them! Life for life! They shall rue the day they struck down the noblest heart that ever beat in human bosom! War to the death! Let them come!—I am prepared! and, oh! that I could single out the hand that did the deed!"

"No—no!" gasped Claude, "not this—not this. I did not mean this."

"Cease to talk," said Dick. "I see that it only exhausts you the more, Claude. I will not yet abandon hope of your recovery."

Claude shook his head.

"This way, then, if you will go into every room," cried a voice in the corridor; "but I tell you they couldn't come into the house without some of the family being aware of it."

"Don't be too sure of that," said another voice, in rough and surly accents.

"A pretty piece of business this has been, to be sure. No less than three of my men killed by it."

"Well, but highwaymen must be caught," said another.

"Oh, confound your highwaymen! I only wish they had been down your throat before I and my men came across you."

This conversation was between the sergeant of the Lancers and the chief officer, and it was the former who had made the remark about the impossibility of Claude and his companions getting into the house without having been seen by some of the family.

"They come," said Claude. "God! they come, and I so helpless."

"Not helpless," said Dick, "while Jack and I live. Be firm, Jack."

"I will—I will,"

## CHAPTER CCCXCIV.

### THE LITTLE GIRL PROVES HERSELF TO BE A TRUE HEROINE.

It takes us longer to tell of these stirring and startling events than it took for them to be enacted; but that is a necessary condition of nature.

When the sound of voices in the corridor struck upon the ears of the young girl who had already done what seemed to be all that it was in her power to do for Claude Duval and his friends, a flush of excitement came across her cheeks, and glancing round the room, she clasped her hands together in seeming despair.

Then, with a bright flush of hope upon her face, she sprang to the side

of the couch upon which Claude lay, and said in a low tone so that it might not be heard without—

“There is still something to be done.”

Claude shook his head.

“Oh, yes—yes, but there is.”

“Yes,” said Claude, “one thing only. Take a dying man’s blessing. If it does you no good, my dear child, it will do you no harm.”

The girl looked at Claude for a moment, and the tears swam in her eyes as she did so; but the voices came again upon the silence of the house, and the necessity for immediate action came strongly to her mind.

With a celerity, and a power of action that was little to be expected from her age and sex, she took from where it rested, partly against the wall and partly around the head of her little bed, a tall covered screen, gaily papered with flowers, and placed it round the front portion of the couch, which it completely hid.

“There,” she said. “Behind that you will all be safe.”

“Alas, my dear,” said Dick, “do you, indeed, think that so frail a screen as that, will protect us from those who seek our lives?”

“I do.”

“She is right,” said Claude, faintly—“she is right. The darkness, too, is grateful to us. Come—oh, come. It is a chance.”

The girl looked eagerly from one to the other of them, and then in the corridor the tramp of the heavy footsteps of the officers, and of the sergeant of the Lancers and his own men, who were in fit state to come with him, came nearer and nearer still.

There was evidently no time to be lost, if they would attempt even to take advantage of the chance of concealment afforded to them.

“It may do,” said Dick. “Come, Jack.”

“To the last—to the last!” said Jack, in a tone of abstraction. “Let them come, I will fight them to the last.”

“Jack, you know not what you say,” said Dick, taking him by the arm. “Come this way, there’s a good fellow.”

“No—no! I have to defend Claude, and this is my place. Over my corpse alone shall they reach him.”

“But you mistake. You will be the destruction of him.”

“Let them come!—Oh, let them come!”

“Claude, call to him,” said Dick, “if you possibly can. Your voice only will have any effect upon him.”

“Jack—Jack,” said Claude. “I want you, old friend.”

“Yes—yes. I am here—I am here!”

Jack stepped behind the screen, and Dick followed him.

“Hold my hand in yours, Jack,” said Claude, “and don’t leave me: Help me to lie down very quietly—quietly. Oh, God!—Ah, yes—more quietly still. God bless you both.”

They gradually let Claude sink down upon the couch, and Jack held the hand in his that was disengaged, for the other was still pressed upon his heart.

Behind the screen, now, there was a gloom almost approaching to darkness, so that it was only in a dim sort of fashion, that Dick and Jack could see each other. But they felt how critical was their position, for in the course of a few moments there came a tap at the door of the room.

Preceding that tap at her room door, the little girl had sat down by her work-box, and opening it, had taken out some unfinished sewing, and, although her little hands shook again, she did her best to seem to be quietly at work.

The tap came to the door again, and then she, with as firm a voice as she could possibly command, called out—

“Yes—who is there?”

“Lucy! Lucy!” said a voice. “Are you up?”

“Yes, grandfather, I am up.”

"Open the door then, child."

"Come in, grandfather. The door is not fast. Come in. I'm only doing a little work."

The girl's voice shook and quivered as she spoke, notwithstanding all her efforts to appear calm, and then, fearful that the expression of her face would betray her, she darted from her seat, and succeeded in drawing the little green curtain right across the window again before the door was opened.

This was a bold manoeuvre of the girl's, for it placed the room in such a state of semi-darkness, that those who came from a strange light could not possibly have the chance of noticing that she was very pale, and that tears were in her eyes, and that her very lips quivered with emotion.

The door opened, and the farmer made his appearance.

"Oh, yes, you are up and dressed, Lucy," he said. "All's right. Don't you be at all alarmed, my dear, but there are some gentlemen looking for some thieves, and they don't seem to be satisfied till they have looked into every room in the old house."

"Thieves, grandfather?"

"Yes, my dear. Did you not hear a disturbance?"

"Oh, yes, but I didn't know what it was all about."

"To be sure not. How should you? Well, gentlemen, here is my little grandchild's bed-room. I suppose you don't exactly expect to find Claude Duval and his friends hid in her work-box, do you?"

The chief officer and the sergeant of the Lancers just appeared on the threshold of the room and glanced in. Lucy rose from her seat, and faced them with more boldness than one would have thought her capable of.

"Oh, grandfather," she said, "why do you bring these men here? This is my own little room, as you always told me."

"My dear, I can't help it. They will soon go."

"Oh, yes," said the officer. "You sleep here, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, well, there's no use wasting time bothering here. Come on, sergeant. Sorry to have troubled you, my little dear, but we couldn't help it. Come on. This is only waste of time."

"So I should think," said the farmer, as he closed the door of the room again, leaving Lucy with the three highwaymen.

The girl burst into tears, then, when the door was shut, and was about to say something, but it was as well she did not, for it was opened again in a moment by her grandfather, who popping his head in, said—

"You can come down when you like, Lucy. We shall have breakfast soon, my dear; but don't you be frightened."

"No—no, I am not."

"That's right. But how dark the room is."

"I prefer it, grandfather."

"Oh, very well—very well. Now don't you be alarmed, for the people who are in the house will go soon."

"Yes, grandfather."

The door was again closed, and again Lucy felt that there was another reprieve for those whom she had chosen to throw the shield of her protecting innocence over.

While these extremely peculiar movements were proceeding, Dick Turpin had stood close to the couch on which lay Claude. A pistol was in each of his hands, and if the screen had been attempted to be moved aside there is very little doubt but that both the chief officer of the civil power and the sergeant of the Lancers would have met their death; so that, after all, the little girl was as much entitled to their gratitude, if they had but known their danger, as she was to that of Claude Duval and his two friends.

But soon the retreating footsteps of the searching party were lost as they descended the stairs to the lower part of the house, for Lucy's room had been



the last they had searched in the corridor, and the little creature felt that to a great extent the danger was now over, and that she might speak freely.

"They are gone—they are gone!" she said.

"Yes," said Dick, "and so far all is well. We owe to you our lives, and I don't know what to say to you to express what I feel upon the occasion."



"Nor I," said Jack. "How dark the room is."

"Yes, it is, Jack."

"It is the window blind," said Lucy. "I will soon remove it again. There, you can see better now."

"Move the screen, Dick," said Jack.

"Stop," said Dick. "Has your room-door a fastening, Lucy?"

"Yes—oh, yes. I will lock it."

The girl went to the door, and just as Dick heard the sharp click of the lock

he doubled up the screen that was before the couch upon which Claude Duval lay.

"Now, Claude," he said, "let us hope that you are better. The danger is past, and who knows but, after all, we may only have to recount this along with others of our peculiar adventures?"

"Do you hear, Claude?" said Jack.

Dick suddenly knelt down by the side of the couch and looked in Duval's face. Then a strong emotion shook him, and clasping his hands, he said—

"No, Jack. He does not hear. He will never hear again! He is dead!"

"Oh, God, [no—no! Not Claude—not my friend—my only friend, oh no! Dick—Dick, don't say it. Light—more light!"]

Jack dashed the screen cautiously aside, and then he lifted up the head of Claude. One glance into the calm, cold, passionless face was enough. Serene in death lay Claude Duval. A slight—a very slight smile seemed to curl the upper lip, and that was all. It was quite evident that that daring and adventurous spirit had fled without a pang.

Jack dropped to the floor as if he had been shot, and did not move for many minutes.

Dick Turpin, although much cut up by the death of Claude Duval, yet had about him more presence of mind upon this occasion than poor Jack had, and he removed from the breast of the corpse the right hand which even in death there continued.

The moment that hand was out of the way, Dick saw that poor Duval had received a bullet as nearly as possible over the region of the heart, and the only wonder was that he had lived so long as that he had had the indomitable firmness to prevent any great sign of the agony he must have suffered to escape him.

A very small portion of blood had oozed from the wound and saturated his clothes just around the spot, and his hand was soaked in blood; but there was nothing else to show the violent death to which he had come at last.

"It is all over," said Dick. "Farewell, poor Claude!"

Dick took his own hat, and tied it gently over the face of the corpse, for he saw Lucy close to the window looking much alarmed, and he was afraid that the look of the dead face would alarm her still more.

"My dear young friend," he said to her, "you have no cause for fear. We who live will not leave you, and he who is no more cannot, if he would; and were he still in life he would risk it for you twenty times. We owe you much—oh, so much! and now I know not how to ask you to do still more for us."

"I will—I will," said Lucy, sobbing. "What is it?"

"I don't know whether you can do it or not, but do you think that there is any chance of us being able to stay here in peace till night?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Well, I hardly thought it possible."

"It is not possible," said Lucy. "My grandmother will be here twenty times in the course of the day. Oh, no, no! I would if I could; but what can I do?"

"Nothing—nothing! Jack—Jack, I say—be a man!"

Jack slowly rose, and shudderingly looked at the couch.

"Rouse yourself!" said Dick. "It is true that our old friend is gone: but he is at peace! Think of that, Jack. There will be no more rewards for him, dead or alive. Cupidity, with cruelty and malice in its train, will never again start to hunt him to the death. He has now no fears of chains or cells, nor of the gallows-tree. The vulgar multitude, who would have made high holiday at his execution, will have no chance to do so now. He is dead; and he has died, I am sure, a much less painful death than many thousands who would execrate his name. He has gone to his God, Jack, where he will be judged more from what he thought and what he meant than from what he seemed to do, and where the good deeds of his life are written by recording angels; while the tears of gratitude of the

widow and the orphan, whom he has oft cherished and aided, will blot out even the memory of his crimes!"

Jack looked at Dick while he spoke; and, as he did so, a change came over his face—a change from all the agony of deep grief to serenity of soul. He took Dick's hand in his, and shook it.

"Thank you, Dick," he said—"thank your brave heart! Thank you! I did not think of all that. You knew Claude better than I thought you did. I thank you from my soul, Dick, for those kind words; and they are so true, too. I am much better—oh, so much better, now!"

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## CHAPTER CCCXCV.

### THE FUNERAL OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

Poor little Lucy listened to what Jack and Dick was saying with the most intense interest; and then she plucked Dick by the sleeve, saying—

"Sir?—sir?"

"Yes, my dear? What would you say?"

"You do not know my grandfather. He is at times rather a stern man, they say, and he has not a good temper; but he has a good heart, for all that, and he will not be unkind to you."

"Think you so?"

"I know it. Now, if you will let me go to him and tell him all that has happened—how you sought shelter here—how your poor friend is dead, and how much you both loved him, and how cruel it would be to bring death and danger to you both, do you think that there is anybody in the world who could be so unkind as to say nay to you?"

"She speaks truth, Dick," said Jack. "We must throw ourselves upon the kindness and the consideration of this family."

"Be it so," said Dick. "But stop a moment, Lucy—stop a moment: you shall not go empty-handed. Here is gold. Nay, do not turn aside and refuse it, but give it to your grandfather or your grandmother, whichever you think will like to have it the best; and tell them that we consider it only a poor payment for the shelter we ask till night for the corpse of one whom we love well, and whom we would not desert even in death."

"Yes—yes," said the little girl, "they will be kind, but I cannot take the money."

"It is not for you," said Dick. "Believe me, Lucy, I have seen enough of you to feel that you would not take money for doing a kind action."

The eyes of the child filled with tears.

"But," added Dick, "it is possible that the world may have altered the feelings of your friends in that particular, even if they were once like yours; so take the money, and if it has no other effect it will have that of convincing your relations that we have no evil intentions towards them, and that by affording us the shelter we ask they run no risk of our leaving our dead friend a burthen to them."

"Yes, yes—take it," said Jack.

Thus urged, the little girl took the money, and with a countenance full of sympathetic feeling she glided from the room upon her mission of gentleness to the farmer and his wife.

The officers and the Lancers had left the house after, as they all thought, as efficient a search of it as it was at all possible to make, and not a little amazed were they at the seemingly mysterious disappearance of the three highwaymen.

"Dick," said Jack, as he pointed to the corpse of Claude, "did you—did you, Dick—"

"What, Jack?"

"Did you close poor Claude's eyes?"

"No—no. I thought of that, but could not."

"I am glad you did not, Dick."

"Are you glad, Jack? Oh, yes, I understand you. It is a last sad office that you would wish to do for one whom you knew so well in life as Claude."

"It is, Dick."

"Then, Jack, I honour the feeling, and am glad that I did not interfere with what I feel is your prerogative, my good friend."

Jack stepped up to the couch, and with a gentle and reverent hand he removed the hat that covered the face of the corpse.

There was nothing in the smallest possible degree repulsive in the look of Claude Duval. You might, had you seen him lying upon that couch so very calm and still, have really thought him sleeping. To be sure there was something of a strange colour about the face, and Jack thought that that colour was deepening upon it even as he looked at it.

Gently and sorrowfully Jack closed the eyes of the corpse and placed a half crown piece upon each one. The coins upon the eyes of the dead man gave the face a strange look, but Jack did not heed that. His heart was full of the reminiscences of the past as he looked in the face of his old friend and companion.

"There is one," he said, "who has gone to the grave before you, Claude, to whom, had she lived to see it, this would indeed have been a dreary day. You and I and all of us mourned for her when she went to death; but, after all, it was a happy thing that she took the dark and dreary path before you did, Claude, for had she lived, I would not have looked into her face this day for the wealth of worlds."

"You are right, Jack," said Duval.

"Yes, it is so—I know it is so," said Jack.

Poor Jack then lifted the coverlet from the bed, and laid it gently over the still form that lay upon the couch.

The coverlet slowly sunk to the shape of the body, and was awfully suggestive of what was beneath it. With a shudder Dick turned to the window, and in silence looked into the garden beyond it. Then there came upon the morning air the lowing of cattle, and the cackle of the feathered inhabitants of the farm-yard, as they aroused themselves for the new day. The mist that had swept up from the valley was gradually dispersing before a bright beam of sunshine that had broken through the mazes of a darkening cloud.

"Morning," said Jack, as he stood by the side of Dick. "It is the blessed and beautiful morning; but all is night to him who there sleeps the long sleep that knows no waking."

"Don't say that, Jack. Perhaps, even while we look upon that still form, the brighter and nobler essence of its nature has awakened in a region where there is no night."

"I should like to think that, Dick."

"And don't you?"

"I don't know exactly. Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't."

"Well, Jack, that is a subject upon which we will talk at another time. Do you hear the sound of footsteps in the corridor?"

Jack started.

"I do—I do. They come as foes or friends—it don't really much matter which to me now. I never in all my life felt so very indifferent to my life."

Dick stepped between Jack and the door, and his hand was plunged into the breast of his apparel. Most probably it grasped a weapon of defence, for it was impossible he could tell in what kind of spirit the people of the farm were coming to that apartment.

The voice of the little girl now came upon their ears, and what she said rather tended to increase the doubt regarding the intentions of the farmer than otherwise.

"No—no, grandfather," they heard her say, "you must not. It is so very wrong. I said you would not—I said I knew you would not, and, indeed, you must not."

"Pho—pho, child," said the farmer, "you don't know what you are talking about. Hold your tongue, do now."

"Yes," said rather a shrill, peevish voice. "Children can't be supposed to know, so don't be so vain and silly, Lucy, as to try to set up your little judgment against ours. A pretty thing, indeed, that would be!"

The door of the room was now opened, and the farmer and his wife appeared upon the threshold of it. Dick advanced two steps, and in a tone of clear and firm decision, he spoke.

"Hark you, sir," he said, "I don't know your name, or I would address you by it; but I do hope that for your own credit in particular, and the credit of human nature in general, you will listen to the voice of feeling and of humanity, and ratify the promise which this child has made to us in the purity and in the innocence of her young heart."

"Oh, sir—oh, gentlemen," said the farmer, as he made a low bow, "don't mention it, I beg of you."

"It's not the smallest trouble," said the woman executing a curtsy, "I assure you, gentlemen."

"Not the least," chimed in the farmer. "I'm quite sure, anything that I can do, or my missus—"

"Yes, me or my good man," added the wife, "we will do with all the pleasure in life."

"That we will," said the farmer.

Dick and Jack were quite amazed at this rather extraordinary, and overdrawn politeness on the part of the farmer and his wife; but Lucy soon furnished a key to it, for, with tears in her eyes, she said—

"They took the money—they took all the gold; but I cannot, and will not think that they mean to keep it."

"Silence, child," said the grandmother. "Dear me, how children's tongues do run on to be sure, don't they, sir?"

"Hush! will you?" said the farmer. Upon my word, Lucy, I don't know what has come over you to-day."

"But the money, the—the—"

"Say no more about it," said Dick Turpin. "I am very glad if the few guineas I sent are of any service."

"Service!" said the farmer. "Oh, my dear sir, you can't think how bad the times are for farmers. They always are, I rather think, for you see, sir, when we have bad crops, we can't, of course, sell so much as we would wish; and when we have good crops, the difficulty of keeping up the prices is quite terrible; so what with one thing and another, sir, the agriculturist almost always has something to grumble about; and as for the guineas being of service, I beg to assure you, sir, that they are of the greatest possible service."

"Yes," said the wife; "and if you think our services worth a few more of them, I'm quite sure it isn't for humble folks like us to say no to your generosity."

"Grandfather," cried the little girl, "do not—oh, do not act in this way. You will surely be sorry when you come to think of it in the time to come. Don't you know, that what is asked of you is nothing that is worth money—nothing that ought to be sold like your corn and your turnips, grandfather? It is kindness and good feeling, not goods. You cannot, and ought not to take the money."

"Oh, you aggravating child!" said the grandmother, "is this the return you make for all our kindness to you?"

"Let me," said Dick, "put an end to this discourse, by at once declaring, that I and my friend here would much rather you kept the money than not. We



are quite satisfied with the arrangement, and will double the sum we have already given you if you will keep faith with us, and aid us in what we wish."

"Oh, yes—yes," cried the farmer.

"Double it?" said the wife; "why, then, we've nearly forty guineas, as I'm a sinner!"

"Quite forty," said the farmer.

"Then we will promise," said Dick, "to make it forty more."

## CHAPTER CCCXCVI.

### NIGHT AT THE FARM HOUSE—THE OLD CLOAK.

HOWEVER poor Lucy might be shocked at the mercenary conduct of her grandfather and grandmother, Dick Turpin and Jack were better pleased that it should be so than otherwise, unless, indeed, the feeling of sympathy, which might possibly have dictated a kind course of conduct towards them, had been very complete and perfect indeed.

Such not being the case, however, they felt that the next best thing was to feel sure of the farmer and his wife through their avarice, and therefore was it, that from the moment Dick saw how greedily they appropriated the money he had already sent, and hinted at how very agreeable it would be to get still more, he was quite satisfied that he and Jack not only saw no possible risk in the house than they could screen them from, but that everything would be done that they might wish as regarded the disposal of the mortal remains of Claude Duval.

"You will be content," said Dick, "with that sum?"

"Oh, yes, quite—quite," said the farmer.

"Yes, my good gentlemen," said the wife. "We are much obliged."

"Oh," said Lucy, "I don't like this."

"Lucy," said Dick, "you ought to like it, when I tell you that it suits us well."

"But it is not right."

"Yes, yes, it is quite right enough, so don't cry."

"Cry indeed," said her grandmother. "I only wonder what she has got to cry at. But children, of course, sir, don't know the world as you and I do."

"Indeed, they do not."

"Ah, dear me," said the farmer, advancing towards the couch, upon which lay the corpse of Claude Duval, "and so it has come to this, has it? and here lies the body of your poor friend, gentlemen. Well, it really is too bad to hunt human beings as if they were nothing in the world but foxes come to steal your poultry. I always set my face against such things, that I do, and I hope I always shall."

"And what can we do, gentlemen, to accommodate you?" said the wife.

"Dick," said Jack, "we will stay here in this room."

"Yes, Jack."

"You tell them, then."

"Listen to me," said Dick. "We wish, when night shall come again, and that it may come soon we earnestly desire, to take our dead friend further into some shady spot, and inter him beneath some tree, so that we may know the spot, and that while we do so, we may please ourselves with the idea that he will mingle with the earth undisturbed by any one."

"Yes," said Jack.

"If, therefore, you will take care that no one comes to this room to interrupt us during the day we will remain here, and at night we will relieve you of all further trouble by taking away this sad sight."

"And a—a—then—a—"

"Then what?"

"The other forty guineas?" said the farmer.

"Them you shall have when we leave the house, without fail."

"Then, gentlemen, I am quite satisfied. You shall have every attention during the day, and whatever you like to order, I'm sure. My wife will cook you anything you like, and I daresay Lucy will wait upon you with cheerfulness."

"Oh, yes," said Lucy.

"Be it so," said Dick; "all we shall want will be a loaf of your country bread, and some water. We are in no mood for eating; but yet we feel the necessity of preserving our strength for what we have to do."

"Yes," said Jack, "that is it."

The farmer and his wife, with a profusion of bows, professed now the most unbounded sympathy with what had occurred, and they heaped such loads of abuse upon the officers and the military who had aided them, that it was quite terrible to hear them do so; and, if possible, Jack and Dick were more disgusted at all this mock show of commiseration than they were at the downright selfishness and mercenary grumbling feeling that had before characterised them, and which was still in the ascendant, their fine talking being only another manifestation of it.

With some difficulty they got them to go away, and leave them alone in the room with the dead.

It was in truth a long and weary day that which Dick and Jack passed together in that chamber. They had some discourse together about the past several times; but none at all of the future. That was a subject they seemed to avoid by mutual consent until poor Claude should be under ground.

The long-expected night, though, came at last, and then upon one of the visits that Lucy paid to the chamber, Dick said to her—

"Lucy, did you hear or see anything of our horses?"

"Oh, yes; they are feeding by the haystacks, and they are all three now in the stable; but—but——"

"But what, my dear?"

Lucy was silent.

"Nay, now, this is unkind of you," said Dick. "I feel quite sure that you have a something to tell us, and why do you not do so?"

"Yes, I have a something."

"But you do not like to say it?"

"In truth I do not, and yet I feel that I ought. I heard my grandfather say to my grandmother something about the horses."

"Come, now, what was it?"

"He said—'They don't know, I daresay, what has become of their horses, so we will not say anything about them either, for they are worth a good hundred pounds each, and to sell them will be the making of us.'"

"That's rather too bad, don't you think so?"

"It is—it is, indeed."

"Well, don't you mind it. Our horses we will and must have, but there is no occasion to make any disturbance about them just yet. However, upon one of the horses there was rather a large cloak rolled up, and strapped to the back of the saddle. That cloak we want."

As he spoke, Dick gave a glance to the couch, and Lucy comprehended at once what the cloak was wanted for. It was to wrap the dead in.

"You shall have it," she said; "but there is something I want you to do."

"What is it?"

"I want you to trust Harry Brown."

"Harry Brown?—Who is he?"

"He is a boy on the farm here, but he is a good boy, and you may trust him, and if you do trust him he will be a great help to you. If you will let me tell him all that has happened, and then let him come to you, you may depend upon him quite as much as you can upon me."

"Do so, then," said Dick. "I shall be glad to see him."

Little Lucy's face quite brightened up at the permission to tell all to Harry Brown, who we may suppose from that was a very great favourite of hers, and she left the room in a moment, as though she dreaded that Dick or Jack might retract the permission they had given her.

"What noise is that without?" said Jack, suddenly.

Dick stepped to the window.

"It is rain," he said.

"Ah, rain, is it? Oh, yes, and I hear the rustling of the wind past the window, and the dashing to and fro of the tree-tops. It is a gusty and a stormy night, Dick."

"It is, indeed."

"Well, Dick, you have heard the old rhyme, I suppose?"

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,  
And happy is the corpse that the rain rains on."

"Yes," said Dick; "I have heard of it, Jack; and if the rain pleases you, I shall be glad of it."

"Thank you, Dick; but believe me, I am not quite so superstitious, after all, as you and as poor Claude used to think me."

"No, Jack, I never thought you so."

"Did you not? Well, it is kind of you to say so. Dick, we—we will bury him as deep as we can."

"Yes, Jack."

There came a slight tap at the door now, and upon permission being given, it was opened, and Lucy said—

"Here is Harry Brown."

A very handsome country lad stood upon the threshold of the room.

"Come in," said Dick.

"Yes, sir, I am here," said the lad, "and Lucy has told me all."

"And are you willing to befriend us?"

"Oh, yes, quite so."

"Very well; then, do you know where to lay you hand upon our horses?"

"I do, indeed."

"That is well, Harry Brown."

"Yes, sir, and Lucy said you wanted the great-cloak that was strapped to one of the saddles, so here it is."

"Many thanks both to you and to Lucy for your kindness, I did want it. Here, Jack, here is the cloak. It has covered our old friend many a time from wind and from weather, and it will make as good a shroud for him as he or we could wish."

"It will," said Jack.

"Now, Harry Brown," said Dick, "I will just tell you what sort of help we want from you. At the hour of twelve we mean to carry out our dead friend to the long avenue of trees close to the farm-yard, and there bury him, so we shall want you to get us a couple of spades and a pick-axe, you see, and a lantern, and when the funeral, if we may call it such, is over we want you to bring us the horses to the spot where we dig the grave. Do you understand?"

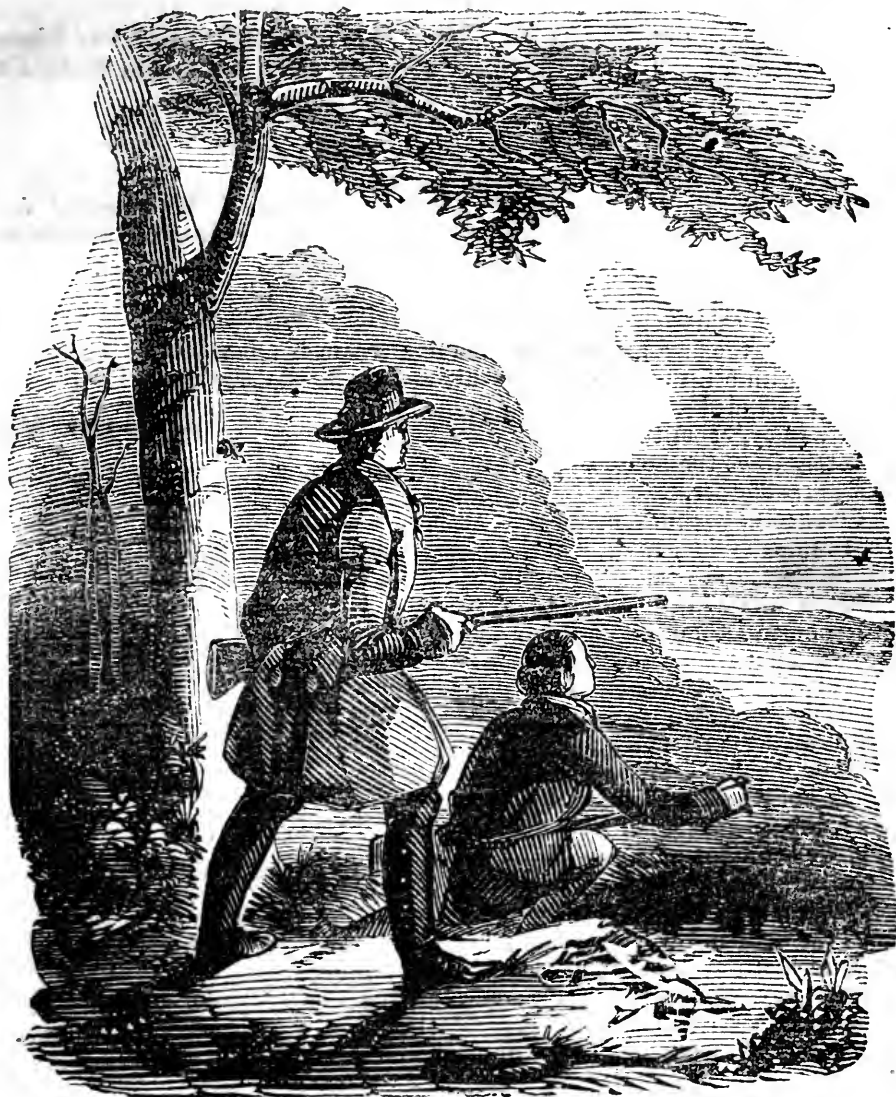
"Oh, yes, it shall be all done so."

"We thank you from our hearts, Harry Brown; and remember that we trust you with our lives, for if you chose to betray us we should soon, perhaps, be even as our poor friend is who lies so cold and still yonder."

"He will not," said Lucy.

"Indeed I will not," said Harry Brown, "and if you have the least thought that I would do such a thing I am very sorry that you trusted me at all."

"We have no such thought," said Jack. "Do not suppose that we have any such thought. Lucy answered for you, and that is quite enough for us."



This assurance satisfied Harry Brown, and with Lucy he left the two friends alone in the darkness of the chamber with the dead.

Waiting thus, some hours crept slowly on, until a distant church clock, in a pause of the storm of hail and rain that now and then dashed past the window of the room, struck the hour of twelve.

"It is time," said Dick.

Jack started from his knees by the side of the corpse;

#### CHAPTER CCCXC VII.

THE BURIAL OF CLAUDE DUVAL, AND THE PRESET TO HARRY BROWN.

THE evening, which had set in with such strong demonstrations of bad, had by no means played the part of a false profit with regard to what the night was going to be.

Such a stormy night for the season of the year could hardly have been looked for. The rain, at times, came down in perfect torrents. The wind rushed sweeping by the homestead and wood, and yelled among the trees as if it were a living thing.

There was a secret pleasure in the mind of Jack to find the elements of nature in so disordered a mood upon that night, for they seemed more to harmonise with his desolate feelings than as if all had been calm and serene.

"Dick," he said, "can you see?"

"No, but I expect Harry Brown here with a lantern soon."

The sound of footsteps in the corridor came upon their ears, and there was a flash of light, and the farmer himself appeared at the door of the room.

"Oh, gentlemen," he said, "I have heard that Lucy has told my boy Harry to help you; I assure you he is a good lad."

"So we think," said Dick, "and we will accept his aid."

"I am here," said Harry.

As he spoke, the boy advanced with a lantern in his hand, and close to him came Lucy with a little red cloak on her and the hood drawn over her head as though she intended going with them to the interment of poor Claude.

"Why, Lucy," said the farmer, "what is the meaning of this, child? You won't surely leave the house to-night?"

"Yes, grandfather."

Dick looked at her for a moment in silence; and then he said—

"The rain is falling, Lucy, and the wind is boisterous. Do not come."

"Oh, let me!" she said. "You know I knew him while he was alive, and one of his best smiles and kind looks was for me. He shook hands with me before he died; and so I think him a friend, and seem as if I ought to follow him to the grave. It is not the rain or the wind that will stop me in such a duty."

"Let her come," said Jack, in a voice of deep emotion. "If the spirit of poor Claude could look down upon us—as who amongst us will say it cannot?—it will be well pleased to see such a mourner by his grave. So I say, let her come."

"Be it so," said Dick.

"Well, but," said the farmer, "I really ——"

"Nay, my friend, let her have her way," added Dick. "I request it of you."

"Oh, well, in that case ——"

"That will do. Now, Jack, help me. Harry, the light."

Harry Brown stepped with them up to the couch. Over and over again they wrapped the body in the large cloak; and then Dick took off his cravat, and tied it round, so that the cloak could not come off easily. The farmer hurried about the corridor in evidently rather a scared condition; for he was goggling his eyes fearfully, and shaking in every limb.

"Now, Jack," said Dick, "we will carry him between us."

"Yes, Dick."

They lifted the body from the couch.

The procession was a very strange one. First went Harry Brown with a lantern, and then came Dick and Jack with the corpse. Then came little Lucy with her red cloak; and the farmer sometimes followed her, and sometimes walked by the side of her, and seemed in fear and apprehension about something.

Perhaps he was in an agony about the forty pounds? We hope not; but we are very much afraid that was the case.

In this way, then, they went along the corridor and down the stairs, and so on round into the garden. Oh! how the rain beat upon their faces; and how the wind tore and roared around them, as though wild and angry at the proceedings it in vain tried to thwart.

Harry Brown held up the lantern, and by that guide they went; and being, as of course he was, so well acquainted with the farm and all its intricacies, he led them by the shortest and the nearest route through the garden, and so on by a little paddock and a gate that avoided the farm-yard and the row of iron hurdles—



close to which poor Duval had received his death-wound—right to the entrance of the long avenue of tall and beautiful trees.

This avenue, owing to the wind taking a decided direction at right angles to its length, was very much protected from the violence of the storm of wind and rain ; so that when they all got safely into it it had the appearance as if that spot were screened from the rougher influence of the weather, which respected the solemn duty the mourners came upon.

And now Dick looked about him ; and seeing that they were close to the foot of a gigantic old elm tree, he said, in a low tone, to Jack—

“Will this spot do?”

“Yes, Dick. Yes.”

They slowly placed the body on the ground.

“Harry Brown,” said Dick, “we shall want the spade and the mattock.”

“They are here,” said the boy, “I brought everything you could wish to this place some hours ago, for I thought I should have to help you with the light, and so on, when you came yourself with the body.”

“Many thanks. Now, Jack, we will dig poor Claude’s grave.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said Jack.

It was quite evident, from Jack’s manner, that his mind was wrought up in some wonderful way to go through with the sad task he had set himself, and that there was no sort of likelihood of his giving way at it. Dick had a dread of what might happen when the reaction of feeling took place in poor Jack’s mind when all was over.

Harry Brown brought them the tools for making the grave, and then he placed the lantern on the ground, at the head of the corpse, and stood there with his arm round Lucy’s waist to support her.

“Can I help you, gentlemen?” said the farmer. “Dear me, I feel as if I ought to help you as much as I can, considering what you have promised to give me before you go.” This was a hint to them not to forget, and Dick took it as such, for, turning to the farmer, he said quietly—

“We never forget what we promise ; but we would rather dig the grave ourselves.”

“Much rather,” said Jack.

They now set to work in earnest, and after first carefully taking off the turf, so that they could use it again to cover up the spot, they began to dislodge the earth, and each shovelful that they took up for some time they cast as far from them as they could, for they knew that else they would not be able to leave the grave, as they wished it, level with the surrounding turf, without leaving a mound of mould outside.

It took a weary time to dig the grave : but the exercise was good for both Dick and Jack ; and it is to be hoped that it had the effect, in some measure, of dispelling some of the dreary feelings that filled, at times, the mind of the latter.

At length they had the grave to their mind, and then they rested from their toil, and stood upon the brink of it. There was a solemn stillness now, for the wind had gone down a little ; and the rain only came in a straight stream, pattering from leaf to leaf of the old tree, at the foot of which the last house of Claude Duval was made.

“It is done,” said Dick.

“Yes—yes!” faltered Jack, as he wiped his brow.

Jack moved to the body, and signed to Jack to help him, and they lifted it gently up ; and, partially holding by the cloak, and partially by the ends of the cravat that Dick had wound round it, they let it into the grave.

Then Dick lifted his hat from his head ; and they all shuddered as they stood by the grave.

“Farewell!” said Dick—“farewell, Claude Duval! We commit you to the earth! You had your faults—as who of us is without? But to a merciful Heaven, that searches deeper into human hearts than we can do, we leave you! There are those who will plead for you at the throne of All-grace ; and One who knows us

best, knows well that your faults were none of the worst ; and so you may have hope of the life to come."

"Amen !" said Jack.

"Amen !" said Lucy, in a low tone, and she clung to Harry Brown.

Then Dick took a shovelful of the earth and cast it into the grave, crying—

"Come, Jack, our work is not yet done."

It was at this moment, then, that Jack raised a shriek of agony, and called aloud to the dead—

"Claude—Claude ! my friend—my brother!—oh, more than twenty thousand brothers are you to me!—oh, God, give him back to me, and take this wretched life for his ! Claude—Claude, come from the grave, and let me look upon you once again !"

"Jack," said Dick, "be a man."

"I am—I am ; but I am but a man. If I were more or less, I might be calm, but I am only human ! Claude—Claude, come back to me again ! Oh, Dick, what if he be not dead ?—what if we have been too hasty ? Claude, speak to me ! 'Tis I, your old dear friend, calls to you !"

"Come—come, Jack," said Dick, taking both his hands in his. "Let me implore you to be calm. This is but a paroxysm of feeling and will pass away. For my sake, and for your own, be calm. Claude is happy in death. Why should we even call upon his spirit in such a fashion ?"

"It is over," said Jack. "I—I am calm now."

"That is well."

"Yes, Dick—yes ; but—but——"

"What would you say ?"

"You saw him—eh, Dick ? He was dead ?"

"Oh, yes, Jack. Banish that delusion, I pray you."

"Yes—yes, I will. Forgive me, Dick, for giving you all this trouble. Come—come, what am I to do ?"

"Help me, Jack, to accomplish this sad duty."

"Yes, I will—I will."

They shovelled in the earth upon the body, and the grave slowly filled higher and higher still, till it was near to the level of the earth. They then very quietly patted it down.

"You should jump upon it," said the farmer, "and it will go ever so far lower down, I can tell you."

"Wretch !" screamed Jack, as he aimed a blow at him with the spade, "would you ask me to jump upon his remains ? Villain—murderer !"

"Stop, Jack—stop," said Dick. "Let him be. He did not mean anything of the kind in an unkind spirit. Let him be."

"But it shall not be done !"

"Certainly not. There, we will manage without. See, now, all is flat, and ready for the turf."

They replaced the turf, and to that operation Harry Brown lent a hand, so that it was soon done ; and so Claude Duval was buried, and the rain from the saturated leaves of the old tree fell like tears upon his grave.

"It is done," said Dick, as he threw down the spade.

"Yes, it is done," said Jack. "Oh, God, yes !"

"Jack—Jack !"

"I am calm, Dick. Don't scold me."

"Farmer," said Dick, "here is the gold we promised you."

"Oh, really gentlemen, I'm quite sorry to have to take it. I hope you may never want it, upon my word I do ; but, you see——"

"Silence ! Where are our horses ? We each had a horse when we reached this place."

"A horse, gentlemen, had you ?"

"Yes, and you know it."

"Oh, dear me! Well, is it possible! Didn't anybody see 'em? Well, I never! A horse, did you say?"

"Three horses," said Dick. "Where are they?"

"Why," said Harry Brown, "they were in our stable, but they are now under the shelter of one of the haystacks, quietly eating, I hope, and I can bring them in a minute or two to you."

"You wretch!" cried the farmer; "what do you mean by that? Oh, you ungrateful boy! you villain! how dare you say anything about the horses? Oh, I'll kill you, I will!"

"No you won't," said Dick.

"I will—I will!"

The farmer made a movement to go up to the boy, to execute some of his threats against him; but, with such an expression upon his face as the farmer's better judgment, if he had any, might well shrink from, Dick interrupted him, saying—

"Lay but a hostile finger upon that lad, and you die upon the spot."

"Die upon the—a—spot? Oh, Lord!"

"Yes. Be warned, I beg of you, for I can assure you that we are in no sort of humour for trifling."

"Oh, well, I—I really——"

"Silence!"

"But I didn't mean indeed——"

"Oh, never mind him," said Harry Brown, "I don't care whether he turns me away or not. I can always get work to do."

## CHAPTER CCCXCVIII.

### THE CONCLUSION.

BOTH Dick and Jack felt a little distressed when they heard Harry Brown say this, for it led them, of course, at once to the conclusion that he foresaw his own discharge from the situation he had in the farm.

"No—no," said Dick. "This must not be. It is not fair, Mr. Farmer, to sacrifice the boy to any malevolence you may have against us. I beg that you will not do it."

"Oh, no—no," said the little girl, "he surely will not, and cannot be so cruel."

"I don't care a jot," said the boy. "I work, and work hard, too, for all I get in this homestead; and to the one who does so, the favour or the disfavour, the passions or the caprices of employers are as nothing. What is it to one who does his duty, and gives, as too often is the case, to some testy and stupid employer forty shillings' worth of real work for every twenty shillings he receives, what that employer chooses to think? He can't take away our arms, and while a man has them, is he not independent?"

"You rascal," said the farmer, "this is the gratitude I get from you, is it by keeping you in my service all the time I have?"

"Gratitude? Stuff!"

"Oh, dear, me! this is the way of the world," added the farmer. "I have had the boy with me for two years, and see how he treats me now. Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"And he did not suit you?" said Jack.

"Eh?"

"I say, he did not suit you?"

"Oh, yes, he did, though."

"Well, then, what on earth has he to feel grateful for? I rather think you ought to feel grateful to him."

"Harry," whispered the little girl, "don't say too much, for if you do, I, too, shall lose you."

This was a view of the subject that had not occurred to Harry Brown while his blood was up from the unmerited reproaches of the farmer; but when now, it came at once across him in all its terrors that he would lose the society of the dear girl whom he loved so well, he certainly felt shocked at himself for having gone so far in the tone of defiance with which he had treated the farmer.

Dick Turpin saw the effect that a few whispered words from the little girl had had upon Harry Brown, and he could well guess what they must be to produce such an effect; so stepping up to Harry, who was looking very crest-fallen, indeed, he said—

"Harry Brown, I don't think you need regret what you have said. On the contrary, it is just as well that you have defied the farmer in the way you have."

"Think you so, sir?"

"Yes. There are very many natures who always behave the better in proportion as they are so treated; and I should not at all wonder but that after this night the farmer will think more of you than ever he did."

"I hope he may, sir."

"And so do I," said the girl. "It is quite impossible, though, that he or any one can think too much of Harry Brown."

The young creature in saying this, uttered nothing but the really genuine sentiments of her heart. She did believe that there was nobody in all the world to be compared to Harry.

Far from smiling or being displeased to hear her speak with such enthusiasm of her young lover, Dick Turpin was glad of it, and turning to the farmer, he said—

"My good sir, neither I nor my friend choose to take the trouble of coming to any conclusion with regard to what you have said of our horses. It is sufficient for us that they are to be found, and are even now forthcoming; and it will be much better for you to say no more upon the subject. Harry, you know where our steeds are?"

"I do."

"Then let us have them, and we will be off at once from this place."

The farmer had seen enough to know and to feel that it was quite madness to say anything more about the matter; and anything in the shape of an apology, or an attempt to explain away what he had said, would inevitably tend to make matters worse; and he had the prudence to hold his tongue.

No doubt, though, the man whose cupidity had been so strongly awakened by the thought that he would get possession of the steeds of the highwaymen, was deeply mortified to find such a capital source of profit slipping through his fingers in such a way; but, as there was now no help for it, he could only utter divers groans, and bite his lips in silence.

Harry Brown, with alacrity, ran to fetch the horses; and, in the course of a few moments, he brought all three of them to the brink of poor Claude Duval's grave.

"Here they are," he said; "and I have taken upon myself to say that they are none the worse for being here for the time they have. I have taken good care that they are well fed and groomed; so that they are all three as fresh as so many daisies."

"They are, indeed," said Dick, as he patted the neck of his superb steed; and then he said—"Jack, just step this way a moment. I wish to speak to you, if you please."

"Yes," said Jack. "What is it?"

They whispered together for a few moments; and then Jack said—

"Yes, be it so; I am perfectly willing, Dick. It may be the making of him, for all we know."

"Will you say it?"

"No, no—you."

"Very good."

Upon this, Dick turned to the farmer and his little niece, and to Harry Brown; and, addressing them as a group, he said—

"I believe my friend here,"—indicating Jack—"has satisfied you, Mr. Farmer, by paying you all that has been promised you?"

"Oh, yes—yes," said the farmer, in a great hurry, for fear the sum he had stipulated to receive would be mentioned, and so get to the ears of Harry Brown—"oh, yes, I am quite satisfied upon that head. Say no more about it."

"Very good. As for you, my dear, kind, good girl,"—to the little niece—"I can only return my sincere thanks; but I am quite sure that you desire nothing more."

"Indeed I do not."

"Nor do I," said Harry Brown. "We are both quite repaid, and it has been a great pleasure to me to be of service to you."

"No, Harry Brown," added Dick. "My friend and I are not going to let you off so nicely as all that."

"Let me off?"

"Don't look surprised. We are but two of us now. He who was with us, and whom we so deeply regret, lies now in the cold and silent grave. What good will his horse be to us?—none at all; so, Harry Brown, as some slight expression of our grateful feelings to you, we give the creature to you."

"Give it to me?"

"Yes. Take it."

"It is well worth a hundred pounds," said Jack, "and I advise you to sell it for no less a sum."

"Oh, gracious goodness!" cried the farmer, "you don't mean that, gentlemen? Why, what is the good of the horse to Harry Brown? If, now, he were a farmer, it would be quite another affair. I will accept it in his name, if you please."

"Oh, no, no!" said the little girl. "I think Harry had much better accept it in his own name."

"Silence, miss! I will have you well corrected when you get home."

"No," said Harry—"no, you won't, sir. Beware of the consequences of any bad treatment of the girl. I daresay these two gentlemen will have the goodness to call at some odd time or another if ever they should be near to this place, and inquire how we both get on."

Dick quite understood that Harry Brown wished him to frighten the farmer with an idea of a visit from them; so he said—

"That we intend to do."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" said the farmer; "but the idea now of giving a horse worth a hundred pounds to a lad who is earning his half-a-crown a week and his victuals only! Oh, it's really dreadful to think of, it is, indeed!"

"Take the horse, Harry," said Dick, "and sell it. Much good may the money do you, as I am pretty sure it will. If you are very careful of it, such a sum as that mentioned may possibly be the means of placing you in some position of life which may be the high road to that independence which you so well deserve."

"I will take care of it for her sake," said Harry, as he glanced at the young girl.

"Do so. You could not possibly have a better incentive to well doing than your love for one who so well deserves all the affection you can possibly bestow upon her."

As he spoke, Dick took the bridle of poor Claude's horse, and placed it in the hands of Harry Brown, saying—

"He is yours: take care of him."



"Yes," said Jack; "and when you sell him, be a little careful, though, that he goes into kind hands."

"I will—I will, indeed."

Dick and Jack now mounted their horses, and they seemed to be upon the point of riding off; but yet there was a host of struggles in their minds, which prevented them from quite so easily leaving the spot of earth where Claude Duval lay in death.

"Come," said Dick, "this will do, Jack."

"Yes—yes, I am coming. Oh, Claude—Claude!"

"Jack, you promised you would be firm."

"I am—I am! Harry—Harry Brown?"

The boy sprang to the side of Jack's horse in a moment.

"Will you," added Jack, in a tone of emotion, "take what care you can that the grave is not disturbed? I do not ask impossibilities of you, but only as far as you can, you know."

"I will, indeed."

"And I will plant some flowers upon it," said the girl.

When Jack heard this, he turned to speak again, and to say something that should convey to the young creature how grateful he felt to her for that kind thought, but he could not speak, so he merely waved his hand, and then galloped down the avenue.

"Farewell!" said Dick.

In another moment he, too, was off; and before he could reach Jack, the latter had got to the end of the avenue, where they would either have to get through the hedge into the high road, or to go over the ploughed field again, which had proved such a distressing thing for their horses.

"Hold, Jack!" cried Dick. "Let us to the road, my friend. This way—I see a gate."

Jack obeyed the call of Dick, but he said nothing. A white gate, that each moment became whiter and whiter as the morning dawned, was close at hand; and Dick dismounted, and, with the aid of a large stone that he found, he broke the padlock that fastened it, and swung it open. Leading, then, his own horse through it, he said—

"Come on, Jack; there is no danger now, I think, for our enemies seem to have left this spot."

They passed through the gate, and then it swung shut with a heavy clang behind them, and Dick mounted again. As he did so his face was turned towards the east and he saw that the coming dawn was already with rare and singular beauty tinting the horizon with many strange colours.

"See, Jack," he said, "this night, with all its terrors and all its griefs, is already over."

"It is," said Jack.

Dick was glad to hear him speak at all, although it was in rather strange accents that he did so. It was in vain that Dick tried to get a glance at his face; Jack's hat was pulled down so far over it that that was not possible.

They cantered in silence for about the space of two miles, looking at the advancing sunlight, and discovering that soon some great changes took place in the face of nature.

In a long streak, that must have been some hundreds of miles in extent along the horizon, there came a gleam of stange, greenish-looking light, which shed its reflection across the meadows and the trees that lay beside the road on which Jack and Dick were.

After a time a slightly yellow tone seemed to take possession of the lower edge of this streak of light, and then it vanished and threw up into the air long pencils of light, that had a very beautiful, though rather a cold effect.

A lark in the meadows close at hand awakened and went up—up—up into the sky till it caught a glimpse of the sun, and then it began to awake solitude with the sweet melody of its voice; and from every tree and every bush there came

the twitter of awaking birds as they heard the songster of heaven proclaim that a new day had commenced.

"The night is over, Jack," said Dick, who wanted to get him into conversation if he possibly could. "You see that there is still much beauty and much gladness left in the great earth."

Jack raised his arm before him, and then turning to Dick, he said—



"Yes, there is beauty and, there is gladness for all, save me! It is he alone who, with a capacity for suffering beyond that possessed by another creature, may look upon such a scene as this and feel no gladness."

"For a time, Jack, I admit. But there is no balm to a wounded spirit like nature and time."

"Dick, I am going to say something that, I am afraid, you will think unkind. Will you forgive me?"

"Oh, yes, since you ask it; because I feel quite sure that it is not intended as an unkindness. What is it, Jack?"

"We must part, Dick."

The manner in which Jack uttered those words were such that if he had spoken for a month about the subject, Dick Turpin could not have felt more thoroughly convinced than he at once did that Jack meant what he said.

The silence that ensued between them was somewhat embarrassing; but, at length, rather from feeling that he ought to say something than from any idea connected with what he said, Dick said—

"Do I understand you rightly, Jack? Did you say, part?"

"I did, Dick."

"And you mean it?"

"As Heaven is my judge, I do!"

There was another rather long silence now; and then, as Dick patted the neck of his steed, he said—

"God forbid that I should say anything to keep a man in my company who prefers being out of it. I don't suppose you have said such a thing as this, Jack, without giving it some sort of consideration. It would be quite an insult to you to suppose you had, old fellow; so, of course, if you have made up your mind to it, why, there's an end."

"As I suspected," said Jack.

"As what?"

"As I suspected: you are hurt about this affair."

"Hurt? Oh, no!"

"Yes, Dick, you are; but I expected you would be, only I preferred coming out at once with the fact, and then telling you why I had so made up my mind, to going a more roundabout way in the matter, and leading you to that conviction. Now, Dick, I will tell you why I think of leaving you."

"Well, Jack, go on."

"My heart is in the grave with poor Claude; and—and——"

Jack paused, and his head drooped upon his breast—he thought he had more strength than nature had given to him. The pronunciation of the name of Claude had completely, for the moment, unnerved him; and he was unable to proceed in what he had meant to say.

Hot, scalding tears gushed from his eyes, and trickled down his cheeks; and his bosom heaved with emotion.

Dick, to tell the truth, was himself too much affected at this paroxysm of grief upon the part of Jack to say anything of a comforting character to him for some seconds; but when he did speak, it was as well to induce him to retract his resolution to separate from him, Dick, as to try to assuage the agony of regret that was at his heart for the death of Claude.

"Jack, my dear fellow," he said, "let me tell you one thing, and that is, that you are coming to too hasty a decision. When the mind is full of any great passion—such as grief for the departed, or the like in magnitude—the judgment is far, very far, indeed, from free to act; and, therefore, you should be specially cautious of coming to any conclusion as to what you will do, or what you will not do, under such circumstances."

"Yes—yes, I know."

"You comprehend me, Jack?"

"Fully. The weakness of the moment is over, and I am able now, Dick, to tell you more calmly, that I have something to do, which will take me from you at once and for ever."

"Something to do?"

"Yes—yes, but I cannot tell you."

"I can hardly think, Jack, that you can have any work in this world now to perform that a friend might not help you in."

"You are wrong. Oh, do not ask me! Dick, will you leave upon my mind the gratification that we parted quite good friends, without a shade of ill feeling—"

without any dim consciousness of offence upon your side? May I take with me that thought?"

"You may, Jack."

"With all your heart do you say so?"

"With all my heart Jack."

"Give me your hand, Dick."

Dick stretched out his hand to Jack, who grasped it firmly, and looking Dick in the face, he then said—

"I think I have said quite enough, and that it is better now that we say good-by to each other as we are, than enter further into a subject that must be painful to both of us."

"But, Jack, you half promised me an explanation of the reason why you are forced to leave me."

"I did, but I cannot now say more. Look there, Dick."

"Where?"

"To the west."

"Yes—well, I see. What of it?"

"There is where I am going. I shall keep that way, Dick; and when the early sun overtakes me, and throws his later beams into my face, I shall still follow it. When the night comes, I shall lie down to rest, till I can see my way again by the first faint beams of the morning. Yes, Dick, I have a mission to the west."

"Well, but, Jack?"

"Say on—I attend you."

"Come, now, my good friend, this is not kind to me. It is not kind to the memory of him whose grave we have stood by the side of. I ask of you but to stay this one day with me, and then if at this hour to-morrow morning you still have this strange determination to depart, I will no longer oppose it."

Jack shook his head.

"No—no, Dick," he said. "How sorry I am that you have asked me this much, because I cannot do it. At once, now, and for ever—farewell!"

"But why say for ever?"

"Because we shall not meet again."

"Oh, yes, we shall, Jack. Farewell, if the word must be uttered, for a little time; and when you wish to find me you know twenty places where you can go and inquire for me. The time will come when you will wish to sit down by the side of one who can speak to you of Claude Duval."

Jack held up his hand as if he would beg Dick to be silent, but Dick went on.

"In that time your feelings will be cooled down to a more sober state; and although neither you nor I, who knew him so well, can ever cease to feel regret for the death of our old friend, yet time will do much towards softening down that feeling to something of the tenderness of regret, without any of its wild and passionate feelings. Then, Jack, you will seek me."

"I will, if that time should come; but it will not. Farewell, Dick—farewell!"

Jack gave his horse an impulse forward, such as the creature was but little accustomed to, and after a plunge it darted off like the wind. By a dexterous movement of the bridle the creature was turned to the right, and a hedge and ditch together were cleared in gallant style. Another minute, and Jack and his steed plunged into a little copse in the meadows, and Dick was truly alone.

"Gone," said Dick—"gone! Claude Duval and Jack left me. I am alone now in the world! How still and sad the feeling is. No, I am not quite alone while you live, my gallant Bess—you who have borne me scathless through so many trials!"

The creature arched its neck and made a grateful snort as Dick patted it upon its silken mane.

"Hark! for the road!" cried Dick Turpin. "I must conquer reflection in the excitement of a life that is still open to me. Come, Bess, you and I are now all the world to each other, for there is an end of GENTLEMAN JACK."

In thus concluding the life of one of the most celebrated highwaymen that ever lived in this country, we may say, that one of the great sources of amusement which the contemplation of the career of such a man as Claude Duval affords to the reader must be looked for in the fact, that never again can the same circumstances that afforded facilities for highway robberies exist in England.

The railway train has put an end at once, and for ever, of the old class Knight of the Road; and we may truly say that the first sound of the first railway whistle was the knell of the old-fashioned mounted highwayman.

Dick Turpin and Gentleman Jack, and their friend, Sixteen-string Jack, might stop the York mail, but not the York train; and we may truly say—

"The highwayman's occupation's gone," and "we shall never look upon his like again."

THE END.















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