I CROWN THEE KING

BY MAX PEMBERTON

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Garden of Swords

Kronstad

Féo

The Footsteps of a Throne

I CROWN THEE KING

A ROMANCE

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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BOOK I—THE FOREST

CHAPTER I

I READ OF MASTER MILES

"The air is ripe with wings
Rustling through wood or dripping over lake."
GEORGE HILL.

THE violets and the grass were springing to life; the linden bloomed, perchance the nightingale sang, as Heine willed, to make a virgin spring, when I carried Master Miles's narrative to the bower in the forest and there read at my will of the days of long ago. All about me was the awakening murmur of nature new-born; I beheld the stately avenues of elms ripe and green with the first gifts of Paschal time; the laburnums were crowned with gold abundantly; the lilac blossomed

everywhere; soft to the tread was the rich new grass; the violets perfumed the air as with an odorous rain sprinkled generously upon the willing earth; I could hear the music of the brooks as they raced upon the shining stones; bells tinkled melodiously; a distant village church chimed out the hour as with an echo of earth's welcoming. Spring, indeed, was at the gate, and who should remember the shadows of the winter's night?

I was many a mile from England when I carried the book (sent to me from an old library in Stratford) to the little wooden house they had built at the Gorge aux Loups in the great forest of Fontainebleau; yet I must bring my mind back, as I turned the pages of Master Miles's record, to the woods and meadows of my own country; must see the whitening snow as it blinds and drifts upon the road to Ollerton; must forget the sharp shrill note of this strange tongue I hear, to recall the full deep voices of the woodlanders who kept the feast so merrily when Mary was Queen in London and Roy was King of Calverton. No lamp of spring, shedding a golden light in the glades of Fontainebleau might put out the radiance of that old romance. For to Sherwood must I

go again as the leaves were turned and the record shaped itself; and with old Master Miles would I laugh or cry as the mood took me; and my breath would come the faster when Sir Roy rode out; and readily would I forget that to-morrow I must be in Paris again with a black coat upon my back and a railway ticket in my hand. Such forgetfulness Master Miles gave me. To him be the thanks, if they will serve him in that place whence he has met again the merry men of Ollerton.

Mary had been Queen three years when Master Miles sat down to write his book; and soured was his stomach at a task so new to him. "God wot, my masters," says he, "but I am the fuller of good honest ale than of this matter ye speak of. Yet, if it be that ye would hear aught of Roy the Outlaw, and of my lady who went with him to the Sanctuary, then lacking a better man, and in so far as I can sit me at a table shall Her Majesty's royal will and pleasure be done. For be it known unto your worships that I am a man of many words, and there be those that ride out from Mansfield and from Nottingham to hear me upon this matter; and many a cup have I drunk upon it, and many a good man hath got his crown broke

that did deny me — which your worship will duly make mention of to Her most Excellent Majesty."

Merry Master Miles, good bailiff of Kirkby-in-Ashfield—a man of generous words as he himself has said. To me such licence is forbidden, nor may I assume a later-day temper for such long-winded narratives as these. A new year would be heralded while we were still together in Sherwood Forest if but a half of that which he has written were here recorded. Rather, let us avoid the ale-house wherein this loquacious wine-bibber told, ay! a thousand times, the story by which posterity has known him; and, applauding brevity, let us go back as the crow flies to Merry England when Mary found her, and to one whose name will live among us until the grave of romance be forgotten, and all that was best of chivalry is no longer a tradition to them that keep the gate.

CHAPTER II

MASTER PELLET GOES UPON A JOURNEY

"Through the hushed air the whitening shower descends,
At first thin, wavering; 'til at last the flakes
Fall broad, and wide and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow."—THOMSON, *The Seasons.*

A NIGHT in Sherwood Forest, a bitter night of winter. The air all quivering with the feathery flakes falling broad and wide and fast upon the road to Ollerton. A moan of the north wind for the discord of the storm; a shimmer, as of silver, where the forest road has been. And upon that road goes Master Pellet, a squire of good renown; and with him rides René, the page; and the tread of their horses' hoofs is like a brush of the hand upon a couch of velvet; and their cloaks are drawn close about their heads—and the one is of good courage, going fearlessly as lads will, if only it be upon an adventure; and the other stops

often to curse the sun and the stars, the moon and the planets, the father that begot him and the night that sent him forth. Of such is the first picture that the merry bailiff paints for us.

A night in Sherwood Forest; a bitter night of winter — and Master Pellet, the squire to the Lord of Stow, and René, who was my lord's page (for who will hearken to the evil tongues that would claim a nearer kinship for him?) dreaming of supper and of bed five leagues from Nottingham town. Even here, upon a sunny spring day at Fontainebleau, I can see the travellers as they ride—the lad upon a willing pony, the gaunt and sharp-nosed squire upon his great black horse. An hour ago the red sun shone through the quivering haze of snow, but the red sun shines no more. Blinding are the white flakes which beat down from that whitening tracery of branch and bough. Silent is all the mazy path, as with the ultimate silence of the night of death. There no bell is heard, no church clock chimes the hour for them. Glade succeeds to glade, avenue to avenue; now is there a great white down rolled out before their weary eyes; now does the environing thicket creep close to them and lift up a

thousand spectres of the shaping snow. Wild figures with unearthly arms outstretched, great buildings of the tempest and the storm are shattered before their eyes, even, as nature builds them for her sport and jesting. The travellers go doggedly, swiftly, stubbornly. The lad could cry for pain of the cold, but there is no tear upon his cheek. The squire would sell his soul for a draught of the hot spiced wine, but there no wine may he drink until the Abbey door be found and the Abbey bell be rung—and those that dwell therein (if, indeed, there be a human thing left in that once proud fane) shall minister to his dire necessities.

The darkness deepens, the capricious wind moans anew, the flakes are tossed hither and thither as spindrift from an angry sea. To the squire's curses, the lad's appeals are added. He speaks for the first time since the red sun sank and the spirit of the storm was loosed.

"Oh, Master Pellet, Master Pellet, is it far yet to go?"

"A murrain on your tongue! Dost think, then, that I go for my own behoof and pleasure? God wot, if mine were the bird that Ollerton had caged these twenty years against the day

that love would warm me to the venture, then might she lie caged again a spell ere my amours took me from my bed this doleful night. How! 'Turn not to the right hand nor the left, Master Pellet, draw not rein for cup or sup; snow or fire, ay! though twenty devils forbid, you shall come to Ollerton to-morrow and give my lady word.' You heard him for yourself—you heard his words and will bear witness that I go right cheerfully — may the good God send fire to breathe upon my limbs!"

René the page beat his hands woefully.

"You are patience herself, Master Pellet. There never was so gentle a squire in all the hundred of Nottingham. Some, perchance, would say that your words belie you and that you are afraid."

"Afraid—the Holy Saints keep me, afraid of what, young sir?"

"That we shall find no lodging to-night, ay, none but a lodging in the snow, and a stoup of the clear white wine that flows in yonder brook."

He laughed boyishly, and pointed to the babbling brook, which would not yet admit the white victory, but tossed spindrift of the frost like a cascade of the purest gems. A lull of the

storm permitted them to see the fantastic copse beyond, and all the mantled forest so still and white and silent that the spirit of solitude might have touched it with a magician's wand. Master Pellet cursed again inaudibly, and wrapped his black cloak close about his mouth.

"Talk not to me of fear," said he, "for surely there is nothing in heaven or earth that I am afraid of. Nevertheless—the Father of Saints protect me—what cry is that?"

He drew rein and listened upon the very brink of the ford. René the page, laughing cunningly, rode up to him and had a word upon it.

"They say that strange tongues speak at Robin's Oak — tongues that no mortal man does well to hear. The tree lies but a hundred paces from yonder thicket, Master Pellet. Ay, surely 'twas no human thing."

"Let it be writ in devil's ink that I went forth this night," groaned the trembling squire; "stand close to my side, young sir. I would not have harm come to you for all the waiting dames in Nottingham. You heard the cry?"

"Ay, as a voice upon the wind; as the raven mocking; as the dog that cries the hour of

death; as the old owl hooting when the spirit passes."

Master Pellet began to tremble as he sat upon his great black horse.

"Give me a sword at my hip and a good staff in my hand, and I fear nobody that draws breath," said he; "but the things you make mention of, I will not deny that I have no stomach for them, young sir. For, look you, how shall a man who has a soul to save stretch out his hand to him whose soul is already lost? and what doth a true child of the Holy Church in the place of devils abiding—as most surely they are, Master René, or wherefore come they not abroad by day? God wot, I am no exorcist, and if, peradventure—nay, a plague upon your tongue, you laugh at me!"

He spoke a true word, for the page's laughter rang out in the wood like a clarion note, clear and sweet on the still night air.

"A coward—confess, confess, Master Pellet. 'Twas but a horse's neigh that I heard. No exorcist nor lustral water you shall need for them that keep the horse. Nay, up in your saddle, and if there be a monk still in Sherwood, compel him to lend us an ear. 'Tis the Abbey gate, man, and yonder lies your bed."

Master Pellet sat up as though one had pricked him in the back. Through the white vista, splendid now in the truce of storm, he saw the shadow of the great church.

"To God be the glory," cried he, "for here, surely, I will lay me to sleep this night, though all the lords in Christendom lack wenches' lips to-morrow."

* * * * *

The Abbey stood in a clearing of the forest, upon a grassy hill, wherefrom you could look over the vista of brake and thicket, opening now like a sea of frozen billows where the snow had stilled the forest life. A squat and rambling building, which had caught the fashion of no particular school but the charm of many, its hospitable gate once echoed with the merry voices of those that came and went to the guest-house of the willing monks. But an evil day had befallen the guardians of its sanctuaries. Heavy was the book in which their sins were recorded. They went forth at the Dissolution, no man knew whither. He who had borne witness against them, Philip of Hillingdon, was the first to petition for a share of that which fell into the gaping coffers of the libertine monarch. Others tilled their lands

and garnered the grain which they had planted. Grass grew in the cloister garth; no longer did the Angelus bell ring out a welcome message to the weary husbandman. By the postern gate the monks went out. The traveller beat henceforth in vain at the door of the once hospitable refectory. None answered him; no voice was heard in all that house; no prayer was said even for the dying or the dead.

Through Edward's reign of blessed memory, Philip of Hillingdon kept to his possession of the monks' land, and, as many said, of not a little of their silver and their gold. But in the first years of Mary's rule, fearing the new dominion of those that he had robbed, and having no stomach for any stool of penitents, he got him to Flanders speedily, and there waited for the day when the Pope's pack should be sent to exile again, and a Protestant queen should restore to him, Sir Philip, the goods which he had pilfered so adroitly. But a year and a day passed, and neither monk nor friar came to Calverton. The very place where the Abbey stood had been forgotten, men said. Whatever Queen Mary might do in London for the Faith she fostered so zealously, she did nothing in Sherwood Forest. The grass grew yet in the

cloister garth. The weed sprouted where the Abbot's foot had trod. No sweet savour of baked meats greeted the nostrils of the hungry traveller. Even the house of God found no wandering priest to be its servant.

All this, we gather, was a thing of common talk in Nottingham when Master Pellet set out upon his journey. He had hoped at the best for a little shelter from the storm; a corner in some forgotten cell when at last he should knock at the Abbey gate, and forget the dolour of his travail. And his surprise is to be judged when, riding swiftly up the hillside, a blaze of light flashed upon his astounded eyes, and the very welkin rang with the lusty song of well-tuned throats. For an instant, indeed, his old superstitions tightened his hand upon his bridle-rein, and checked the current of his hopes. What men, then, kept the carnival in Calverton that night? Whose were the voices? Had the monks come to their own again? He listened with beating heart.

"A strange song for the Lord's house, and little godly withal. Dost mark the rhythm of it, young sir? A groom at the bedding never had blither song upon his lips. 'Come, merry

men, merry men, merry men all.' God wot, 'tis neither Matins nor Lauds nor any office to my ken. I like it not, Master René, I like it not."

René the page peeped out slyly through the folds of his cloak.

"I have heard it said, Master Pellet, that the fiend loves well to light the candles which the priest has forgotten. Do not forget that we are at Robin's Oak! Ay, surely, 'tis no human hand that shall give us our supper this night."

"No human hand verily — nay, a plague upon you, rogue. Dost think to affright me, Nicholas Pellet, with your hags' tales and your clatter of ghoul and carrion like to that? Go steadily, young sir, I beseech you. I would not have a hair of your head come to harm, though the foul fiend himself set cup before me. Prudence is a kindly mistress if you bide her pleasure. Peradventure a little dalliance upon their threshold shall tell us if these truly be men of God come to their own again or others that we wot not of. Permit your cloak to fall upon your sword, Master René. Let none say that we come not as men of peace"—

Master René laughed again; so loudly, so

wickedly, that the very woodlands rang with the joy of it. Supper and bed and merry men for his boon companions—these, surely, were to be found where the painted windows flashed their glorious light upon the untrodden snow, and the lusty note of men's good voices waked the forest from its sleep. Once, twice, thrice, the lad hailed the wardour of the Abbey gate.

"Within there, within there—charity in the name of God!"

But Master Pellet came up the hill warily, and as he rode he muttered to himself—

"If this be not worth a bag of gold pieces when my lord is bedded, then out upon such scurvy service."

* * * * *

Master René beat upon the Abbey gate, and it opened at his knock as the door of a palace wonderful. So bright was the torch held up before his eyes that some moments passed and found him still blinded by the light. He could not see the hand which lifted the torch nor the cloister which lay behind the gate; but he heard a shrill voice greeting him with as odd a word of welcome as ever had fallen upon his ears.

"The board is spread, the cup is filled; why tarriest thou, O brother?"

René laughed at the greeting. His eyes were accustomed now to the glare of the light, and they showed him a figure no less odd than the voice. It was that of a mouthing dwarf, who had not forty inches of stature, who was dressed from head to foot in tunic and hose of a vivid green, and who stood upon the tip of his toes to inspect the face of the stranger.

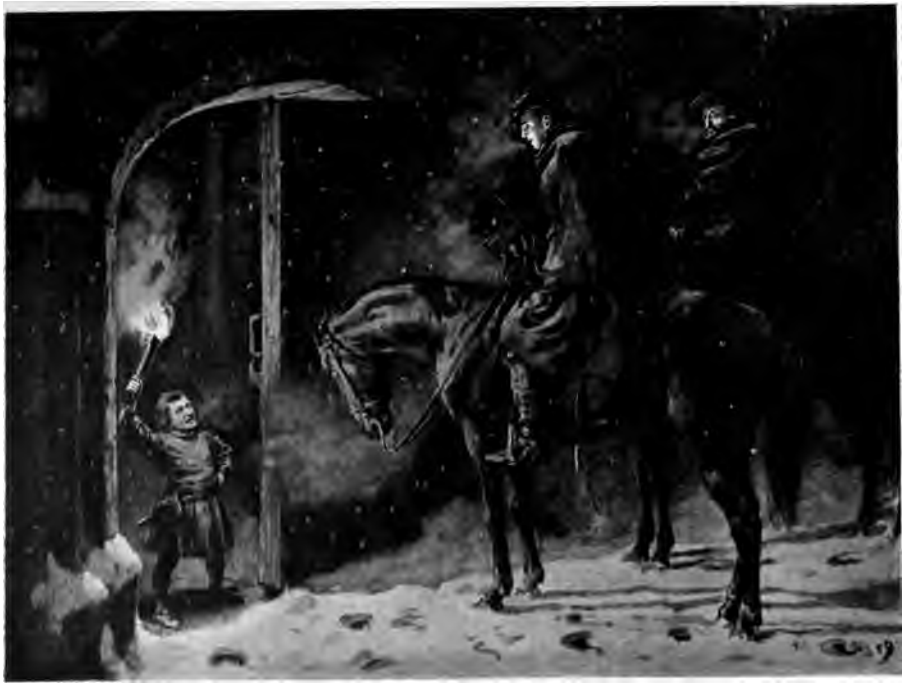
"Nay, sir, I tarry not at all," said the page; "point to a shed for my horse, and I will even see that the cup is emptied ere the Lord Abbot hath greeted me."

The dwarf uttered a shrill sound like a night-bird crying in the copse. Other figures appeared in the precincts of the Abbey. They, too, wore the tunics and the hose of green; but they carried swords at their belts and they swarmed about the travellers as though all nicety of ceremony were foreign to them.

"Whence come you, sirs?"

"Even from Nottingham town upon an errand of peace," hastily interposed Master Pellet.

"Does Mistress Peace walk abroad then in storm and tempest?"



"WHENCE COME YOU, SIRS?"

"Nay, she seeks bed and board, and so she comes to the Abbey gate," said René, leaping nimbly from his horse.

A very fat man, who waddled as he went, tapped Master Pellet roughly upon the shoulder.

"Canst drink a butt of sack, friend?"

"I know not, good sir."

"Nay, thou shalt this night, or beware of the sickness, beware of the sickness, man of Nottingham."

He laid a heavy hand upon the squire's shoulder as he spoke, but Master Pellet drew back apprehensively. The scene, the hour, the quaint figures moving upon the snow, the weird pictures which the windows gave affrighted him as he had never been affrighted in all his life. No more superstitious than his neighbours, he yet could ask himself if these were human things or the machination of the devil. Why were such men at Calverton at all? Who had given them this right of tenancy? Was it possible that the hags' tales were true after all, and that Robin Hood and his merry men did indeed ride the forest in the witching hours of night? Swearing to believe no such folly, he entered the refectory with his guides.

The spectacle that he saw was as fire upon his fears. The door of the enchanter's palace opened at last, and Master Pellet could look into the very heart of it.

It was a noble room, this refectory, in the fashion of the colleges which the seventh Henry named at Cambridge and at Westminster. Vast painted windows gave to it a mellow light by day and cast by night their saintly pictures on the grass of the cloister garden. Unknown artists, girt about, perchance, with rope and habit, had decorated its groined ceiling with many a legend and allegory. Images still filled the niches of its majestic walls. Hangings of fine tapestry gave warmth and colour to the daïs where once the Lord Abbot sat. Hundreds of tapers of the purest wax shed a brilliant glow upon the groaning tables and the cups of gold and silver that bedecked them. Never in the maddest moments of his dreams had Nicholas Pellet imagined a spectacle so brilliant. Men of all ages, men of many countries were gathered at that merry board. Cavaliers still wearing their caps and corselets of steel, bowmen in the famous Lincoln green, gallants in doublets of satin and mantles of velvet, mock monks in habits of brown and

black, pages, squires, serving-men, all helped the babel of tongues which arose deafeningly above the clatter of the feast.

The dwarf had been the first to break in upon this scene, and he stood now at the foot of the daïs crying: "Give ear, give ear to the travellers from Nottingham." For a little while no one seemed to heed him, but at last a man of fine presence who sat upon a great carved chair at the head of the high table, rose to his feet, and instantly a hush fell upon the assembly. Master Pellet was conscious of a hundred searching eyes turned cunningly upon him, but his fears were vanishing. After all the smell of the viands was very good. These men would not be robbers. He had no shadow of an idea as to their identity, and he half believed that he was about to sup with the devil; nevertheless he reasoned that he had not come there of his own will and intent, and that the snowstorm must make good his case with Providence. So he answered the questions which the president of the feast put to him, and began to carry himself with not a little assurance.

"I am Nicholas Pellet, squire to the Lord of Stow, and I go to Ollerton upon an urgent

business, your worships. Give me shelter for this night and I will hold you among my benefactors."

René the page, stepping fearlessly to the daïs, hastened to add his own account.

"Your worships," cried he, "reassure Master Pellet, I do beseech you, for his teeth have been chattering in his head since sundown. And he is a man of great courage, sirs, and there is no human thing which can affright him, as he himself will tell you. Put but a sword in his hand"—

Beads of perspiration burst out upon the squire's forehead.

"The devil burn your tongue!" cried he; "do not hear him, gentlemen, for surely he is a great liar. I am a man of peace, and love, not dispute or quarrelling. As for this sword I carry, 'tis a good sign against robbery and all violence, yet I vow, sirs, I would no more draw it upon a brother man than bleed myself with a barber's knife."

A smile crossed the president's face. He was a very fine man, who carried himself with an amusing gravity, and Master Pellet, when he observed his doublet of blue velvet and his vesture emblazoned with rare gems, said,

surely, that he was of noble birth and some estate. Moreover, there was a merry humour in his eye while he listened to the squire's protestations, and he answered as one who must be obeyed.

"Nay, sir," said he, "first satisfy your hunger, and then, if you will, there be many here ready to try the temper of your steel."

"The Lord God forbid that I should play so scurvy a trick upon them that befriend me this night."

"Oh, you shall not go unsatisfied, Master Pellet, be sure of it. We have good blades here and love a merry fellow."

"I am no merry fellow, sir, but a poor squire who rides to Ollerton upon a matter which may brook no delay."

"Art a priest's man, rogue?"

"May I drop to the nether hell if ever I sit at meat with such a fellow as your lordship speaks of!"

"Insult not a Holy Faith, or I will have you beaten with cudgels. Come, we must know of your business. What carries you to Ollerton?"

Master Pellet began to shake like an aspen at the tremor of storm.

"Be patient with me, sir, I beseech you," said he; "the Catholic Faith lies near to my heart, as your lordship knows, and God forbid that I should slander the holy priests. Nevertheless, I go to Ollerton upon the business of my lord who has lately come from the city of Rome to this, his own country, and is now lying sick in Nottingham. A sure misfortune, sir, for his horse has fallen with him, and my lady must wait yet ere the priest shall bind them, since he cannot set foot to the ground, and God knows, he would not come to her upon a litter."

A ripple of laughter greeted the squire's apology. Down at one of the lower tables a merry youth chimed in with his suggestion.

"An' the lady cannot wait, good sir, here is one that has a whole foot and will hurry to her."

Other voices took up the cry. "A priest, a priest, and a good man for my lady. Nay, Roy of Calverton, why dost thou wait? Art one to leave a woman whimpering?"

The president, for he was Roy of Calverton, raised a jewelled cup in his hands.

"A toast, a toast, to my lady of Ollerton and him that rides to her."

The toast was drunk with acclamation. Fresh young voices made the rafters ring with their joy of youth and of the cup. Fired by the warming red wine and the generous banquet, the mock gallants leaped upon the tables and made arches of their swords for tipsy youths to roll through. A roar as of a human tempest echoed through cloister and through cell. But Master Pellet stood quaking in every limb. Well he knew the name of Roy the Outlaw. There had been no bolder knave in all Yorkshire, no name more feared, no legend more wonderful than that of him who had appeared so miraculously in these later days to play the outlaw's part in the great forests of the North, and to set the hags' tongues busy with their tales of spirit and of spectre. And now he was sitting for host in the Abbey lord's seat. Master Pellet told himself that if he left the Abbey gate alive assuredly would he be the most fortunate of men.

Order succeeded to the incoherency of carousal; the masqueraders seated themselves once more at the table; their leader offered a cup of the good-spiced wine to the hesitating squire.

"Now," said he, "of a surety thou art welcome, Master Pellet. Though I knew not that the Baron of Stow yet lived, the name of the Lady Barbara is not strange to me. Was she not the daughter of Bernard of Ollerton?"

Master Pellet, inspired by the wine to a little courage, answered bravely—

"Her father fell in the great king's time. She hath been lately under the charge of her uncle, Philip of Hillingdon; but he was of Northumerland's men and is now away to the Flemish coast. And you must know, sir, that the Lord of Stow has been twenty years out of this kingdom of England; but being betrothed to her when yet of child's stature, has come again with the Popish company—begging your worship's pardon—with these brave men of the Holy Roman Empire, to do even as his promise binds him. Yesterday he rode into Nottingham town, where dire misfortune befell him; for marry, sir, what name shall be given to him who bestrides a clumsy horse when the priest is waiting at the altar? Nay, my lady is like to lack a good man these many days if so be that she will wait my master's coming to Ollerton. To that end I ride forth

to-morrow, giving thanks likewise to your most excellent lordship for this bounteous hospitality."

He spoke boldly, and the outlaw heard him in patience, but vouchsafed no answer. In verity, a great idea had come to Roy of Calverton. He did not heed the jests of his men or the squire's new-grown loquacity. Once or twice he raised a bumper to his lips and drained it at a draught. Minute by minute the humour of his thoughts amused him the more. How if the good men, for whom my lady of Ollerton waited, should ride up to her house to-morrow? how if the priest found work after all?

* * * * *

At daybreak next morning Master Pellet awoke to find himself in a very strange place. Wan light of a winter's day streamed down upon his face through narrow windows in a wall of stone; there were great bells upon his right hand and great bells upon his left; his head ached sorely; he had a sharp pain in all his limbs; no voice nor sound in all that dismal place helped him to memory of the night of yesterday nor the wonders of the night. Long he lay, asking himself what miracle had brought

him to such a place, and why it was that René the page had left him in such a plight. When he came to his fuller senses, he discovered that he was in the belfry of the Abbey church.

"And, Lord God," said he, "they have taken away the ladder!"

CHAPTER III

MY LADY OF OLLERTON

"Come, bring with a noise,
My merrie, merrie boys,
The Christmas log to the firing."—HERRICK.

FAIR and broad were the lands of Ollerton; thrusting their pastures into the heart of the forest; bordering often upon gentle rivers; rich and fertile, and the home of many an honest husbandman. It was good, men said, to ride out of the woodlands to the great brick house that Bernard had built in the days before the King's mandate came to him, and he had gone away to London to stand arraigned with More and Fisher and the greatest of England; and had left his only child as a legacy to them that loved him. A proud house, in truth; a very palace in a day when the rich did not disdain hovels of clay, and many a manor had no bed in all its tenements.

High it stood upon the hills that beetled the swift-running river. Green gardens girt it about in summer; the snows of winter lay white and crisp to make rolling downs before its gates when the Christmas feast was kept. But the enduring pride of it, as the saying goes, was my lady, and men named her first when their hearts remembered Ollerton.

Fair and broad were the lands that Bernard's daughter came to rule when he was dead, and her guardian had fled the country because of Northumberland's deed; yet neither their extent, nor the snow that lay thick upon them, could keep the Lady Barbara to the house when the poor had need of her, and the first whisper of the season's joy was heard. Very early upon the eve of Christmas she rode forth with Master Hawkins, her steward, and Peter, the bailiff, and grooms a score to lead the packhorses whereon her gifts were heaped; and loud was the voice of Master Eleazar, the minister, when he protested—

"You go to beggar yourself, my child. The day may come, ay, sooner than ye think, when the need of these things will be a fruit of sorrow unto us."

My lady sprang up upon her horse—a fair

figure she was, as all the serving-men bore witness—and answered him with a merry laugh—

"Nay, I go to make the poor glad, Master Eleazar. To-morrow you may preach to them of avarice when the feast is done, and the Yule log has left a good ember upon their hearths."

She rode away, over the snows and into the hushed forest, a good figure of charity upon a pretty white horse, her eyes flashing with the light of a young girl's health; her cheeks all flushed with that radiance of colour which towns may never give, nor all the ornaments of those that live in palaces. By cottage and by hamlet; by the huts of the woodlanders; through ways that were arched with a dazzling tracery of the new-fallen snow—even to the homes of the lowliest, she went apace; and for each she found a ready word of greeting; bending often to kiss the child that knelt to her; most eloquent always when the mother's heart had voiced the gratitude that everywhere was spoken. The forest had seen no fairer apparition; Christmas had no type more perfect; there was no figure of the feast more welcome in merry England that day.

She hurried through the woods, drawing

rein often to gaze upon some frosted scene of surpassing beauty, of nature glorified in sleep as with a night-gift of fair jewels. There was no spot in all that forest which was not dear to her. No woodlander had knowledge more intimate, or could ride a straighter road, or come home again with surer instinct. Those who followed her muttered their curses as they spurred their heated horses; but she had no fatigue, no thought of the many miles of pilgrimage. She was going to make the poor glad. She had ridden out that she might do as her father did in the days when the forest sought no other lord.

"Charge her haste to the tidings, and God forgive me for the words I speak," exclaimed Peter the bailiff, as he splashed after her through the rushing water of the ford, and espied a little hamlet lying snug in the shelter of a mighty girdle of whited trees; "if this news be true, and my Lord of Stow be in England again, we shall find another master before the candles are blessed, Master Hawkins. I pray Heaven she will make love less hastily than now she rides. 'Tis a bad road for a stumble, and there be more outs than ins upon it."

Master Hawkins, who was shaking in his

saddle like a good sack of corn right badly roped, stammered an answer between his gasps—

"A true word, my friend, a true word—if my Lord of Stow will ride her pace, he needs a good horse and a saddle of flock. I am shook to the very marrow. The Lord be praised that the hamlet lies yonder!"

Peter the bailiff watched the jolting figure with some delight.

"God save you, Master Hawkins, but yours is a merry barrel. Do you ply whip and let my lady see you. She will rein for very charity. Nay, would you go ambling while a mistress waited for you in the guest-hall at Ollerton? She rides a maiden's errand, and if the message be true there will be one at home against her coming. My lord was at Nottingham yesterday. He would set out at daybreak, and the curfew should find him at our gates."

Master Hawkins reined back his horse, and, cold as the wind was, he mopped perspiration from his brow. They were in the village now, among the rude huts of the swineherds, who carried the Yule logs to their hearths, and ran out again from their hovels crying a blessing upon the mistress of the gifts.

"The night will tell us, good friend," said the steward when his breath had come back to him; "if the Baron be, indeed, come to Nottingham, then have we found a new master, as you say. For my part, I shall keep my wind against the day when I must cry the news. There be many things, good and ill, that God may send us in these dangerous times. I would as soon expect a priest as a lover for that matter; and while the Queen forgets who lives at Ollerton, 'twould be a fool's part to remind her of it, and do my lady a mischief. She hath need of a wise man's word; and the sooner such a one shall come, the better for those that serve the house."

He spoke with some confidence, as one who suffered a heavy responsibility and would gladly shift it to the shoulders of another. But they had ridden, by that time, to the place where my lady stood; and now the steward hastened to clamber down from his saddle and to hand such of the gifts as were needed to the women and children, who stood, in wistful expectation, before the doors of the little church. An old priest, bareheaded and ready to exert a kindly authority, came out of his house and raised his hands in blessings. Rough fellows snatched

off their caps and aped a fine humility. The little ones alone chattered fearlessly and with confidence.

"God bless the sun that shines upon you, my lady. Oh, we knew that you would come. Since dawn have we waited. Nay, stand back, 'tis not to thee that my lady would speak. Oh, lady, I am so small, I cannot even see you. Gifts, gifts — thou hast gifts for me."

Such were the cries, these and many like to them, as the children crowded about the horse, and the women ran out, and great hulking fellows, who had not laughed for many a day, stood humbly at the throng's edge. The lady Barbara had a word for everyone. Her strong arms raised the children up that she might kiss them on the lips. She knew the history of all in that place—their troubles, their sorrows, their needs. Good wine, cordials for the sick, stout stuffs for warmth, candles to keep the feast, even bells for the games—there seemed no end to the treasure which the packhorse had carried. And for each there was a message with the gift.

"You have a young wife—let this be for memory of your wedding day. Your mother

cannot come to me—bear this to her lest she tire of waiting."

Or again to a swineherd, who stood respectfully a little way apart from the throng, she said—

"Last Christmas your child lay sick unto death—let your heart be very full when you hear the Christmas hymn to-morrow."

The man bent his knee to her; but another, a sullen rogue who elbowed him, and had received no gift, muttered a word of scorn, yet not so low that my lady did not hear him. For an instant a hush fell upon the little company. They saw the blood rush to the young girl's cheeks, the laughter leave her eyes. This fairy of the woods had a temper, men said. They thought that she would strike the fellow where he stood; they could see her hand tighten upon her whip.

"Robin of Mansfield, remember my words," she cried proudly, "if to-morrow find you at Ollerton, my grooms shall show you where the whipping-post stands."

She was gone with the words away to the forest again, and Peter the bailiff, and Master Hawkins the steward, once more put spurs to their weary horses. Her impatience was no

secret to them. The Lord of Stow, who had not been in his own country of England for twenty years, was riding even then to her house. The import of his journey was undisguised. He had come to redeem the pledge made to her father in the days of old; a pledge that the lands of the one should be linked to the lands of the other in a union of houses which ever had stood, beam to beam and gate to gate, in all that concerned their friendship. An adventurer who had ridden half Europe in the pursuit of aught that adventure might give, it had long been understood that he was to marry Bernard's child when she entered upon her twenty-second year. That promise, made to the house in the days of its prosperity, held doubly good with such a man in the hour of its adversity. All that he could seek to profit of marriage would be his in such a union—the great estates of Ollerton, the lordship of the forest, the command of many an influence which even statesmen must heed. For the rest he cared nothing. They told him that the girl was fair—he had seen and loved fair women in many a capital of Europe. They spoke of her conversion to Edward's faith. He was a Catholic, and he vowed that he would

soon compel obedience. Men reminded him of the father's temper, saying that the child had inherited a devil's will to do as she pleased when the whim took her—he laughed at them; he knew the weapons with which women are curbed. He had come back from the wars not to be her lover but her master. He would have stood at the altar with her already but for that mishap which threw him from his horse at the gate of Nottingham town, and sent on Master Pellet the squire, and René the page, to be the ambassadors of his tardiness.

The Lady Barbara understood but a tithe of these things upon that merry day when she rode through the forest ministering her charities. Since her guardian, Philip of Hillingdon, had fled to France, fearing Mary's anger, she had been alone in the great house of Ollerton, the mistress of that splendid domain, accustomed to the obedience of many, fearing the disloyalty of none. Proud, generous of heart, firm in her purpose, with a true sense of the duty to which circumstance had called her, she was the mistress of the house in more than name, earning the ready fealty of those that served her, not caring that

the day might come when her faith and her guardian's crime should rob her of the trust. Mindful ever of that which her father had wished, she did not trouble her head about the future or its possibilities. If romance dwelt within her mind, she did not speak of it. Perchance she wearied sometimes of that solitude of life, there in the forest's heart. She could picture to herself the glitter of cities and of palaces, the fine words of gallantry, the pomp and ceremony of which her father had spoken when he came back from Henry's court. But she had her work to do, and these pictures were for hours of idleness when a young girl's dreams came troubling her. She would not idle with them; but followed resolutely the path where duty beckoned her.

This solitary life had she lived now for seven years. Her guardian, Philip, a man with a mind given overmuch to the excitement of intrigue and the pursuit of nomadic amours, came rarely to Ollerton even before the great pursuit sent him hurrying to Flanders to save his cunning old head. Once or twice in the last seven years—for she was then in her twenty-second year—she had heard news of the man to whom her father's will had betrothed

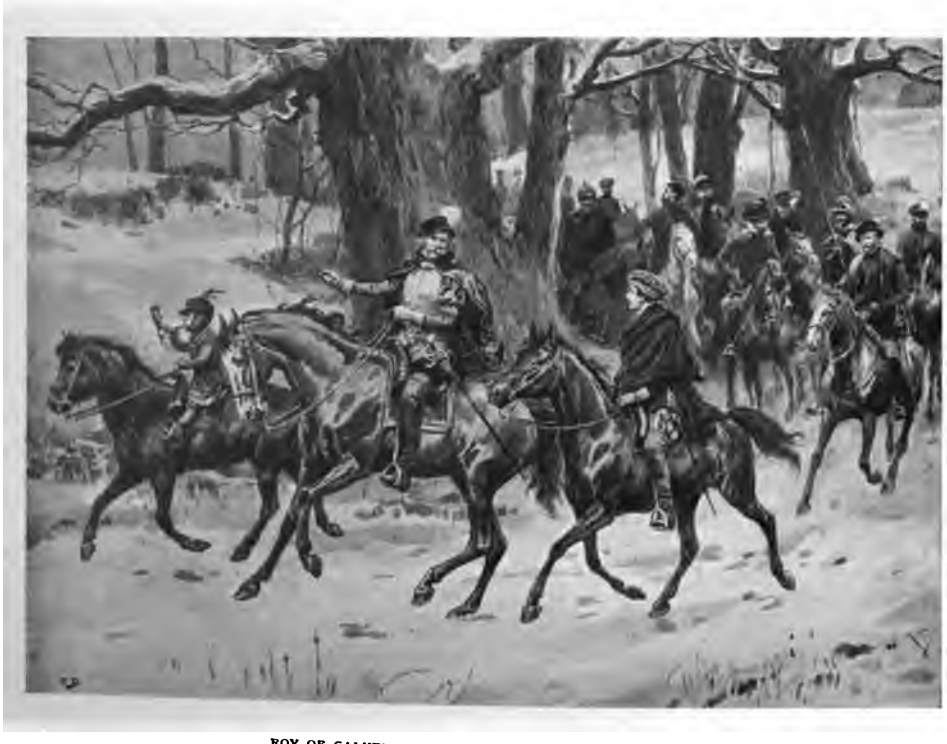
her. Now it would be a word from Rome and from the Court of Pope Paul III.; now news from a gossip who had come back from the palace of the French King; or, again, some tidings of what the Lord of Stow had done in the service of Philip of Spain. These things could interest her for a little while; but the years passed and the tidings were forgotten, and the tide of her solitude flowed once more and threatened never again to ebb. She had begun to forget that the man thus forechosen for her was one whose every creed of life was antagonistic to her own, when the news came that he had landed in England and was riding to Nottingham. The word was as new blood to her veins. A strange excitement possessed her from the hour of the messenger's arrival. Her woman's instinct awakened within her, and began to speak of love and marriage. Her father's spirit nerved her to the combat of will which must accompany a meeting so momentous. Her new faith, her dominion of Ollerton, the home she loved, the people who worshipped her—for these would she do battle strenuously. The very anticipation of the part she must play was a joy to her.

To such a meeting she rode on that merry

eve of Christmas when Peter the bailiff, and Master Hawkins the steward, toiled after her so wearily. Her day of charity was over now. Bright burned the fires of Yule in many a hut and many a hamlet. The sun shone red and full and solitary in the clear grey sky. The trees were white and still beneath their burden of snow. The robin gave colour to the bewitching glades. She heard the Vesper bell in chimes most musical when she emerged from the forest at last, and the gates of her lonely house stood open before her. For a little while she drew rein to gaze upon that home of hers and its hundred windows all flaming in the scarlet light. Welcome was the loom of smoke above the vast squat chimneys. Dear to her, beyond all words, dear were those halls her father had trod; those sanctuaries of her innocence; those walls which had sheltered the outcast and the exile. To-morrow another would have the right to rule that vast domain; the right to demand her obedience, to say, "This is my will, be it yours also." She knew not how she would answer such a claim; her heart beat quick when, there upon the threshold, she heard the fateful message—

"My Lord of Stow has passed the ford, and will be at our gates within the hour."

He had come then, the man to whom her father had wished that this sovereignty should pass. Slowly, and halting often, the laughter no longer in her eyes, she rode into the great courtyard, and so passed thence to the lonely house.



ROY OF CALVERTON RODE FROM THE ABBEY AT DAWN

CHAPTER IV

THE ROGUES' MARCH

"Ay, every inch a king."—*King Lear.*

ROY OF CALVERTON, and with him the Knight of the Bow, whom some would call Sir Percival, rode from the Abbey of the Holy Well at dawn upon that Christmas Eve. There were others in his train—Meagre the dwarf, upon a scampering pony, and the youth who yesternight had first spoken of the jest; and even Master René the page, caring not whither he went if so be a little colour of things adventurous should come into his life. But Pellet, the squire to my Lord of Stow, lay fast asleep in the belfry tower, and him they would not have waked though the Voice of Judgment had echoed in the forest.

"Wilt ride with me to Ollerton upon a merry jest?" said Roy to the page as they hastened contentedly upon that frozen road;

"nay, surely I know thee for a lad after my own heart?"

"Sir," cried Master René, "I serve my Lord of Stow, yet often he hath beaten me, and the food which I eat the dogs would not share; nay, nor the bed upon which I lie. I will go with you to Ollerton, and whatsoever is your will, that shall be a law to me."

"Right bravely spoken, young sir. Last night at yonder board they gave me a name which has been often in your ears. Tell me truly, dost know that I am Roy of Calverton?"

"Ay, a hundred times hath Master Pellet told it me. 'We find strange beds,' said he, 'for the forest holds no greater rogue than this.'"

The outlaw smiled and looked down upon the lad as one who relished a great jest. In all the forest, Master René thought, there was no finer figure that day, no horse more splendid, no man that sat upon a horse more surely. In the first prime of a hardy life, with a girth of chest so vast that men had named him Roy the Terrible; with muscles of iron; with long fair hair that curled as threads of gold upon his velvet cloak; with a glitter of spur and

accoutrement that would not have shamed a gallant of the palace—it was no wonder that such a man had loosed the hags' tongues again, and sent forth all the vanished spectres of the forest to point so great a mystery. Whence came this new King of Calverton none knew or cared to ask. "A robber," said some; but others cried, "Nay, he is no robber." "A fellow whose head the Queen would harbour," protested many an officer in Nottingham. But the women answered that so fine a head should never come to block.

"The forest holds no greater rogue than this, was that his tale? Ay, we will remember it when next we meet your squire."

"Give him but a ladder, sir, that he may touch good ground again, and you shall not see his face in Sherwood these forty months."

The outlaw laughed, but quickened the pace of his horse.

"I like a coward, Master René," said he; "give me but a man that squeals when the point pricks, and I will ask no merrier book. Art not afraid, lad, to ride with one that is so great a rogue?"

"Sir, I take no man's word for anything,

least of all that of Master Pellet. Prove to me that you are a rogue, and I will begin to show proper fear of you."

The winding mazy path, all aglow with the crimson radiance as of fire upon a lake of splintered jewels, now opened out, and brought them to the banks of a little stream and to a hamlet beyond the ford. Here Meagre the dwarf, who was ahead of the company, began to chant a ballad of the Christmas time in that old voice which had so affrighted Master Pellet yesterday; but no sooner was the first stave heard than the people flocked out from their houses and pressed about the outlaw clamourously. Some upon their bended knees, some seeking to kiss his hand, some crying a blessing, they gave him welcome as true children of the forest that owed allegiance to him.

"God save thee, good master. Thy gifts came with the snow, and to-day my children name thee in their prayers."

"Hark! Roy of Calverton — my son lay yesterday in Mansfield Jail. To-day he rides the road to York. The Lord give thee a soft bed this night."

"A blessing on thee, Roy of Calverton. The Bailiff of Annesley, that drove my daughter

forth, lacks ears to his head, they say. A merry poll, my masters, that we shall not see again for many a day."

"The Sheriff of Mansfield, he who threatened to have thee whipped at the cart's tail, to-day he lies abed of the cold he got in Winton mere. Ay, right well thou hast ducked him, Roy of Calverton."

Roy listened to the clamour, and quieted it with hand upraised.

"Good fellows all, and pretty wenches abundantly," said he; "I give you Christmas greeting this day. Go now to the Abbey gate, and if ye find not strong wine for your stomachs and fat meat for your paunches, do so to me even as I have done to the Sheriff of Mansfield."

Upon which (as the first reciter of this story bears witness, Master Miles, to wit) he stooped and raised a pretty wench that stood by his stirrup leather, and when he had kissed her, once, twice, thrice, he rode out of the hamlet joyously, and called René the page to his side again.

"Dost like thy rogue, lad? Art frightened as yon good squire that lies even yet in the belfry tower?"

The lad looked up at the frank, smiling face, and his cheeks flushed with pride.

"Give me leave to follow you, sir, and the world shall not be large enough for the venture."

"What! would you follow the biggest rogue in Sherwood?"

"To learn of his roguery, if it please you, sir."

Roy ceased to laugh. Before his eyes lay a witching scene of branches interlacing, and gleaming snow and frozen pool, and thickets where the tracery gave a thousand arches of boughs emblazoned by the full red sun. No breath stirred in all the forest. The air was clear as a draught from the well of life. The joy of living was beyond all human expression.

"Ay, learn of the rogue," said the outlaw, when he had gazed entranced a little while; "learn as the forest shall teach you, lad, and the great red sun, and the glory of the day. Learn of the sky, which gives the pent bird liberty; learn of the weak, who shall teach you to be strong; learn of the poor, that you may not wish to be rich. And so will you find a better creed than the priests recite, and neither Pope nor King shall come to trouble you."

He set spurs to his horse, and pressed on in a reckless gallop, over the frozen path, through the thicket's heart, out again to the dazzling sheen of white and the realms of snow untrodden. When his impulse had passed, and he had forgotten the sermon he preached, he drew rein and questioned the page concerning the Lord of Stow, and the purport of his journey to England.

"This lord of yours—is he a man of good courage?"

"Of right good courage—so that, gainsay him but a word, and he will cross the seas to contradict you at the sword's point."

"I like his quality. A man of my years, perchance, and not so old but that he could play my rôle and I his, and none be there to give us the lie?"

"Of your years and ten beside—yet not of your voice or temper, sir. Nay, I like not my lord, nor think that he could play your rôle; for his is a hand that carries the whip, and yours is full of gifts."

"A harsh man, you say?"

"As the winds of March, blowing ice and the forgotten winter wherever it may strike. A harsh man, that has killed his best friend in

a brawl, and has left bleeding hearts wherever his will has taken him."

"And yet such a one goes to the altar with my lady of Ollerton. Is not that thy tale?"

"Twice told already—he goes to Ollerton so soon as the surgeon will give him leave, and he may set foot to ground. They tell me that he shall find spring there, in my lady's house—yet believe it not; there will be no spring where the Lord of Stow may come."

"A wise head, lad, set upon good shoulders too. Here's one that will not weep when my lady finds another man!"

"If that were possible, good thanks should she give to her God this night."

"Even though he be the greatest rogue in Sherwood."

The page's heart beat quick.

"Sir," said he, "do you go to Ollerton in my lord's name?"

"In no other, Master René. Lord of Stow, or baron of the holy devils, or knight-errant and most noble esquire that Lucifer himself hath sent forth, I go to Ollerton this night to give my lady greeting. God forbid that any woman should wait at the altar when Roy of Calverton can hear her complaint. As Lord

of Stow I go, and as Lord of Stow must you call me, ere I come to prove how great a rogue is this who rides with you. Dost like the jest, young sir?"

The lad's eyes shone brightly.

"Sir," said he, "in all my life I have never heard a jest so good. To Ollerton would I go with you, though it lay a hundred leagues from my father's house. Yet I will be frank, and say that the jest must live its life while it may, and that to-morrow, or the next day, or the next, my lord will come to Ollerton, and will hang you from the battlement there. You have thought of that, sir—you love your life so little?"

The outlaw laughed a great ringing laugh that waked the forest to its heart.

"Bid him hasten, young sir, or he shall find that one lies where he should lie, and another who holds the table which my lady's welcome spread for him. God's truth! it shall need many a baron of Stow to affright the knave of Calverton when he hath set his mind upon a purpose. If ye love him, look well to him, or I will nail his ears to Robin's Oak, and all the barons in merry England shall not nail them to his head again."

René rode on silently. He could not believe that the outlaw spoke a true word; and yet, when he came to reflect upon it, the madness of the jest seemed linked to a certain method. None at Ollerton would remember the face of John, Earl of Stow. None would be able to say, "Here comes an outlaw to the gate." Roy of Calverton had then been but a few months in Sherwood; he had not come down to the South until the hills of the North drove him forth, and twenty of the king's officers were hunting him upon the great road to Scotland. It were a miracle, indeed, if the Lady Barbara should know such a man. A true jest, said Master René to himself, and one that fortune — that fickle mistress — perchance might befriend even at the steps of the altar.

Roy of Calverton troubled his head with no such reckoning; and, riding boldly while the sun shone, he came, at the full of the day, to a solitary house which lay a league from Ollerton; and there calling René and the dwarf, and him they named the Knight of the Bow, to his side, he sent the others back; and when he had clothed himself in a doublet of fine black velvet and hose of the

richest silk, and leathers for his feet that were all worked with ornament of silver, he drank a cup of wine, and set out boldly for my lady's house.

"And God knows," says the old narrator, as he records it, "such a jest as this was never played before in merry England."

CHAPTER V

THE JEST IS PLAYED

"All mankind love a lover."—EMERSON.

IT was at sundown (as that blithe narrator, Master Miles of Kirkby-in-Ashfield, bears witness) that Roy of Calverton made an end of his journey and stood before the gates of the house which Bernard had built. Thrice did the dwarf wind his horn as the little company crossed the snowfields of the park to that open place where the windows shone like flaming beacons and all the serving-men were gathered to give the exile welcome; and at the third blast my lady rode out to greet the traveller.

"Never," said the old record, "were there two so fit for priest's work as those that stood there upon the snow, the man bending even to his saddle-bow, my lady a little reticent, yet aglow with her curiosity as woman well might be. England held no braver sword; there

was no fairer thing in all this land than the mistress of Ollerton as she rode to meet her lord with the red hue of the fuller life upon her cheeks, and her blue eyes merry with the doubt of it, and her hair of auburn and of gold falling as a sheen of silk upon her sober habit."

My lady rode to give the outlaw welcome, and, stretching out her little hand to him, he heard for the first time that voice of hers, sweeter than the wood-bird's note, as many a man of Ollerton could testify.

"Welcome, my lord, thrice welcome to this house."

Roy of Calverton sat very still upon his horse. He had heard many a good word of the beauty of her whom the forest called mistress; but now, when he saw her with his own eyes, when he heard the low musical voice and held the hot hand within his, it seemed to him that all had lied and that the tongue must yet be found which could give true account of her.

"Cousin, to thee more than the heart can speak," he said at length; and those who stood by declared that the jest already had robbed him of his wit and put a curb upon his

courage. They did not know that the beauty of the woman was as an enchantment to him.

My lady spoke her word of welcome prettily and turned that they should ride to the door of the house together. The action gave rein to the man's tongue. He began to speak quickly, with that fine manner he could command so well.

"Let the frosted road make my excuses, cousin. To-day we rode from Nottingham, where a clumsy horse kept me to my bed for twenty hours. Judge of that mishap to one hastening upon so rare a journey. Nay, I come with little courtesy as a friar to your gates, leaving my serving-men to crawl as they may when the snow shall give them path. Here I swore to be when Epiphany mass was sung, and here am I, as you, sweet cousin, shall bear witness. Account me thrice rewarded already because I find you at the gate."

He leaped down from his horse and thrust aside those that would have held her stirrup-iron. The sun shone full upon his handsome face and found the jewels which clasped his velvet cloak. She could see his flaxen hair curled upon his shoulders, and she thought

that a gentler hand never lifted woman from her saddle.

"You ask a poor recompense, my lord. Had I known that you rode to-day, I would have sent men and horses before you to Robin's Oak. But your messengers named no certain hour, promising us that another should come. We did not think that the need of message would pass so soon. Indeed, we know not how sufficiently to thank you for the honour that you do us."

There are some who say that Roy of Calverton flushed like a girl at the question when she continued to call him "my lord"; but others avow that he was only thinking of Master Pellet the squire, who lay even then in the belfry of the Abbey church, and so, perforce, had dallied with the message from the Earl. Be it as it may, we have the word of René the page that the outlaw carried himself as one of noble birth, and that when he passed into the house with my lady the sun shone clear and full upon them; but, immediately they had entered, sank behind the great girdle of elms which edged about the park, and so gave place to the misty twilight of a winter's night. When next the lad beheld his master

it was at the head of the great table, in the hall of Ollerton, where he sat as some new lord enthroned, and ceased not to ply my lady with his gallantries, so that the whole supper through she laughed or was rosy red as the occasion asked. Perchance the season made opportunity better, for it was the custom at Bernard's house to keep the feast of Christmas as became the children of merry England; and nowhere was such a feast surpassed nor a more joyous scene of mirth to be witnessed. Rude and ready as were the nobles' mansions of that day, at Ollerton the newer fashion prevailed. Chairs of oak craftily carved, fine tapestries, rich ornaments of silver, splendid lamps which Bernard had brought from the East, beds of flock when beds were almost unknown—these were the things of which the country spoke wonderingly, and even travellers turned aside to see. Yet never in its history was the great hall more gaily decked out than when Roy of Calverton rode to Ollerton from the Abbey, and lost his tongue a little while because my lady called him "lord."

Right merrily they kept the feast at Ollerton, and right well Master Roy carried himself when the first edge of habit was turned and

the new estate he wore began to sit more lightly upon him. He had numbered many a joust and masquerade since fortune sent him to the exile of the moors, and so soon as he had accustomed himself to this rare homage there was none more truly to deserve it. At times, perchance, as he sat upon the right hand of her who ruled so rare a company, he could ask himself if the jest had not gone far enough, if he did not, in honour, owe it to her to declare himself before the feast were done; but a memory of the Baron of Stow and of his evil reputation kept that secret unspoken.

Enough that he took a strong man's oath to befriend my lady, and while he listened to her pretty confidences, and began to win upon her affections (as he rarely failed to win upon the affections of women) he swore that her own heart should be the mistress of her destiny, and that he would work her will even though it carried him to the jail of Mansfield on the morrow. In which determination he drained a bumper to her, and she in turn raised a silver cup and sent her henchmen leaping to their feet for a shout of welcome to one who should be henceforth both Lord of Ollerton and Lord of Stow.

"It is your welcome thrice renewed to England, my lord," she said; "though you come from the Holy City itself, you will find no truer hearts than those that serve me in this house."

"I doubt it not, cousin, or how should you have ruled so long alone?—with what success there have been twenty tongues to tell me as I passed through your kingdom this day."

She flushed a little at the compliment.

"I do as my father taught me to do. With God's help, I will never do less."

"Needing an agent of your bounty, here is one that will help you—if that may be—to do more."

She looked up to his face and tried to read the secret of it.

"My lord," she said frankly, "they did not speak of such a wish as this when they made mention of you. You are a man of courts and cities. You will weary of Sherwood before the leaves are on the trees."

"I will weary of it when the gates of Ollerton are shut and there is no light in all the house. Cousin, believe not that account of me—but my own story of one who has shame that a woman has done so much while his own score is but a crumpled leaf."

She sighed and turned away her head as one who lingered with a doubt.

"The hart to the woods, the swan to the mere," she said. "How shall I blame you if your road is not my road."

"I will blame myself to my life's end. Twenty years of exile have taught me many things, but the best lesson of them all is here in this house to-night."

"Then let us read it together, for the harpist waits to tune it as we will."

They had cleared a space before the great table by this time, and an old man, with white hair rippling abundantly upon his stooping shoulders, carried his harp and stood at the foot of the daïs, and there began to tune a doleful lay. He sang of knights and tournaments, the ballads made by them who rode the Borderland three hundred years before his day. And when he had done with it, Master Eleazar the parson, rose to put in his serious word; but Meagre the dwarf was before him, and leaping lightly to the table, he began to pipe a merrier song.

"Sir priest," cried the dwarf, bowing to the minister, who had begun to protest against the affront, "I will even look up to heaven where

your nose points. Since your message babbles of love, give me leave to prate of as many amours as shall make the lamentations anew. What, sir priest, hast no eye for a wench?"

A shout of laughter greeted the minister, who sat down quickly. But Meagre the dwarf took a lute in his hands, and when he had tuned the strings, he sang one of the old ballads which he had learnt in the forests of the South.

Hither, hither, merry maidens,
Hither unto me.
When the May is young,
I'll give thee good song,
Good song and tunefully,
And tunefully.
No fearsome wight,
But a right bold knight,
That so doughtily, so doughtily,
Shall tune thy lips to song, red lips to song,
When May is young.

Hither snow and hither frost,
Hither unto me.
If thou wilt be but kind,
The bitter winter's wind
Shall sing all tunefully,
All tunefully.
No halting knave,
But a right good stave
That shall tune thy heart, thy heart to song,
Ere the May be young.

The dwarf made an end of his ballad, and bowed drolly until his head almost touched the oaken board.

"Mistress of Ollerton," said he, "seek not a homily in yonder priest's sour ranting. What saith the proverb? 'He that tarrieth shall find a broken road.'"

Very deftly, says the old narrator, he tweaked the parson by the nose and jumped down from the table again. But Roy, turning to my lady, spake low in her ear, and when she looked at him again her face was all aflame.

* * * * *

Roy of Calverton had many dreams that night. They had sent him to the west wing of the house, to a fine room wherein once the great king had slept; and there he lay, perplexed beyond knowledge at that which had befallen him. Sleep would not befriend him, the stillness of the hour nor the bounteous moon which gave a sheen of silver to the bewitching woods. The jest he had played was ever there for argument or reproach. He had thought, perchance, when first he mooted it, to spend a merry hour at Ollerton, and then to ride away, crying a laugh upon those that had received him for the Lord of Stow. But now

my lady's consent put a chain upon his feet. He said, in the first moments of this self-reckoning, that he would not quit the house, though he must hang at Nottingham when the sun shone again. None the less, the lie gave him shame, and he remembered that the hour of discovery could not be distant. To-morrow, or if not to-morrow the day that followed upon it, would send a messenger from Nottingham to ask, who is this stranger that you harbour? Perchance the Lord of Stow would be well of his hurt by that time, and out upon his journey to the house. Roy laughed aloud when he remembered how he had been beforehand in that business. "If I spoke but the word, she would go to the altar with me to-morrow," he argued. He had the courage but not the heart to speak it.

There was a great stillness about the house in the first hour of that Christmas Day, and when the moon shone at the full a little choir of singers came to the windows of the west wing and there sang the Christmas hymn. The outlaw last had heard it when, as a youth of twenty, his father had left him to the care of the monks of Bolton Abbey, and had gone again across the seas to the dangerous life he

had not wished his son to share. What a rough road the monks' charge had ridden since that day. How many of his boon companions had gone to their account! What freedom and health of life the forests had given to him! No dishonourable day had shamed his life, as the story which those years of wandering could tell. He had played the outlaw's part; but he knew that England would be the better for many a freebooter such as he. Yet it was odd that this, the most momentous hour he had lived, should find him for the first time with the lie upon his lips. He swore, in a mood repentant, that he would ride away at dawn and see my lady no more.

It may have been the weird sweet music, or it may have been the good impulse of a big heart which brought a resolution so fine; but when the strains of the Christmas hymn had died away, and the stillness of the night fell again in strange contrast, Roy's argument took another turn. He recalled the history of the Lord of Stow; he remembered the gossips who spoke of that fierce temper, that masterful habit, that contempt of another's will which had been the Baron's boast in many a city of Europe. That such a man should come to

Ollerton upon such an errand fired the outlaw's blood. He swore a great oath that the thing should not be, even though he burned down the house which harboured him. Lying there in the darkened room with only a ray of the ebbing fire to shed light upon his bed, Master Roy could hear again the gentle voice of her who had welcomed him so graciously, could see her winsome face and appealing eyes; and realise, perhaps for the first time in his life, why men spoke of love as a sacred thing. No longer was there any thought of gallantry or jest. He knew that his own hope was beyond word foolish; and yet he could tell himself that if to-morrow found him still at Ollerton, it might find him also at the altar.

In this argument, this self-reproach and self-excuse, the long night passed. What sleep he had was fitful and unresting; giving him ever the vision of a bewitching face set about with a colouring of auburn hair; and of eyes alight with new affections, but waked to passion when the need was. Once, in truth, this vision was shadowed by another, in which he beheld himself riding the forest alone in the track of a horseman who neither spoke nor would declare himself. Veiled was the face of the man, and

far he went by mere and mead through the forest's heart to the distant city, and the light of the winter's morn. When at last he turned, and the veil fell from his face, the dreamer awoke with sweat upon his brow and trembling limbs—for the face was the face of death, and fleshless bones were hidden by that inky cloak.

"An omen, an omen—God's truth, how real these things are while the night lasts. Yet a flash of the daylight and they are gone as mists which the good sun scatters."

He sprang up from the bed and pulled the curtain back that he might give the morning greeting. Day was quivering in the heavens then; the heralds of the light won lagging victory; but Roy regarded neither the beauty of the morn nor the enchanting scene which lay before his windows. For a horseman had ridden into Ollerton, and was now in the very courtyard of the house, crying that he had tidings of importance for the Lord of Stow, and could brook no delay. When the servants answered the messenger, a memory of the vision came back to Roy, and for an instant he thought to see the fleshless face and the figure of his sleep. But, anon, he laughed aloud at this conceit; for he who came was

one of his own men, and no great head were needed to guess the business which had brought him there.

"I have ridden from the Abbey, master. There is a gossip of danger to be spoken most fitly where none may hear. They say that the Lord of Stow quits Nottingham this day and will be at Ollerton before to-morrow noon."

"Who carries the tidings?"

"A messenger that came to the Abbey gate yester-eve at sundown. He lies to-day cheek by jowl with the squire ye entertain, and God forgive them the hymn of Christmas they sang this morning."

"Was he upon the road to Ollerton?"

"Nowhere else. The Earl is better of his hurt and thinks to be upon a horse to-day. If you would not bide until the jest be stale, let some good excuse take you hence ere the mischief be done. 'Tis fool's work to pipe a stave when the flagon is empty. They say that there be long ropes at Nottingham, master."

Roy heard the man out and began to pace his chamber musingly. He realised that this was the moment when he must make the ultimate choice—either to live the lie out or

to go, as he had come, a jester who asked nothing but laughter of his jest. And they say that he had determined already upon his course, nay, had put bridle to his horse, when it chanced that my lady came out to the terrace of the house; and when he saw her there, so fresh, so radiant, so gentle to him, he turned back from his purpose.

"And," said he to himself, "here will I abide this day though all the men of Nottingham ride out to gainsay me."

CHAPTER VI

THIS IS THE OUTLAW'S KINGDOM

"The name, that dwells on every tongue,
No minstrel needs."—MANRIQUE.

MY lady came out to him, and when she saw that they had brought his horse to the gate, she was quick to express her astonishment.

"You ride betimes, my lord — is your business urgent, or shall we blame our hospitality?"

"Blame neither, cousin. I do but ride if you will ride; and when you will not ride, I am as good a footman as the best of them. Let your word be law to me at Ollerton."

"They spoke of you as one who would not brook contradiction. I begin to doubt the report. You are not masterful enough, Earl, that a woman may lead you where she will."

"Give a name to my mistress and I will tell you whether her road be mine or no. 'Tis better to doubt, cousin, if you would not presently be undeceived."

Frankly, says the old chronicle, she stretched out her hand to him, regarding him with a gracious smile as one who had judged him already and would not hear aught against her judgment. Those that were about the gate bore witness that never had a better man stood in the courtyard nor one they would more readily have called their lord.

"I will not gainsay you," cried my lady willingly, as he stooped to kiss her hand, "'let the sleeping dog lie,' says the proverb, and since you had the thought of riding out, my lord, they shall bring me my horse if my company be not unwelcome to you."

He did not protest how welcome her company was to him, but gave her a look which could bring the blood to her cheeks; and anon they rode through the park together toward the hamlets and the villages wherein the great feast must be kept.

"I will show you my dominion," she said as they went; "the Queen has many that wait upon her word, but not so many that give

service of their hearts. Look, Earl, upon all this great estate. There is no talk here of riches or of poverty, but only of content, which in itself is the surest gate of any kingdom. Here you may find none who turn to the city willingly. Our treasure of gold is the ripening corn; our faith is the bread which the children eat. If it be my lot to maintain them in this content, then is my duty to my father's name well done. But I am a woman, and I know that the day may come when those who remember my father's face will bethink them also of his house. The burden is the heavier for the thought—and where shall a young girl find her counsellors?"

"She shall find them in her own wisdom. No woman is weak, cousin, who remembers her own womanhood. The counsel which you seek will be given by one who has your eyes to see the forest as it is, and to know the children of it. The stranger will bring the stranger's law to alienate the people and to cast down your kingdom. Beware of him if you would yet rule at Ollerton."

He spoke very earnestly, forgetting the rôle he played; but she was quick to remind him of it.

"The stranger brings the stranger's law—you speak a riddle, surely. Have not twenty years passed since you were in this kingdom of England?"

The outlaw turned away his head.

"Twenty years or forty—the heart does not grow old in affection for the homes we leave. My road of exile has crossed many a city and taken me to many a kingdom, cousin, yet I would sooner own yon hut in this forest of Sherwood than a palace in the city of the Cæsars."

"Heroic in the vow yet difficult in the deed, since yon is the hut of a swineherd, Earl."

"A swineherd, if you will, nevertheless one whose coming can bring the sunlight to the house and whose going thence may make it a place of darkness."

It was the first word of his love he whispered to her upon that momentous morning; but taking courage of her silence he began now to be more bold with it.

"Yesternight," said he, "I rode to Ollerton thinking that dawn would find me again upon my journey. Shall I tell you, cousin, why I have rested yet a day?"

He looked at her as though he would read all her heart, and she did not turn from him.

"Of what else shall we speak," she said, "if it be not of the things that give you pleasure?"

"They shall give me pleasure or pain according as you answer me. This day I find that which twenty years of pilgrimage have withheld from me. I find one whose kingdom borders upon my own, whose words are my words, whose people give to her the dominion that I have claimed of the forest since destiny sent me out to make my home in it. Is not this my good happening, that I should ride with her, here in Sherwood, to say to her, 'Let our sovereignty be linked, let our state be one state, let her womanhood vouchsafe that which my manhood ever has lacked'? Ay, cousin, what a kingship she would make for me this day if she did but read love aright. To speak of that I linger at Ollerton even though I weary her."

My lady heard him out; but she did not turn her face toward him when he made an end of it. There was a rare humour in her eyes, the humour of one who would jest in her consent because of the happiness which consent brought to her.

"A woman never wearies of the story you tell, my lord," she began; but he stopped her abruptly.

"Call me not Lord of Stow," said he, "for that is not the name I bear. Yesterday I rode to your house with a lie upon my lips. To-day I bear my own name, and am ashamed before none that I bear it."

"A pretty jest, indeed. Would you have us play at Phyllis and Corydon now when the snow lies in the forest?"

"If that same sport may keep you at my side, I would even play it until the crack of doom. Acquit me of my shame, cousin, and you shall find a better man than ever the lands of Stow sent out of England."

They say that my lady became very grave when thus he spoke; for there was no thought until this moment of aught but a lover's whim when he confessed the trick that he had played upon her.

"I do not read your riddle aright, my lord," said she; "be a little plainer with me, and tell me what name I shall give you, since you have shame of your own."

The outlaw pointed to the woods below them, for they had ridden to a high place of

the forest, and the silvered landscape lay spread out before their eyes as a vision of an enchanted country.

"The name that I bear is the name the people give to me. I will wear no other. And since you have shown me your kingdom this day, cousin, ride on with me a league, and I will show you mine."

The girl's heart beat quick when she heard him. Vaguely she began to understand that she stood upon the threshold of a mystery.

"Your lands lie to the north; we ride to the south," she replied. "Has your dominion shaped itself anew since last you were in England?"

"It shapes itself every day, cousin. Each hour brings me some vassal who would live the life God called him to, and forget the city and the city's bonds. Last night I came to you for the love of the jest. Bear with me a little while this morning, and I will show you the kingdom you shall share."

She gave him no answer; for a great curiosity was waked within her. Half believing that he was there to plan a trick upon her, conscious that her weaker mind bent to his, loving a mystery as women will, she rode into

the forest with him; and there he showed her his kingdom. As upon the eve of the Feast, so upon that Christmas Day, the women and the little children ran out to cry a blessing upon him. Men of the forest thronged about his horse, and did homage on their bended knee. Poor priests, standing at the doors of their churches, named his charity, and gave thanks for it. Wherever he went, they called him Roy, the King of Calverton; whatever houses of the poor he passed by blessed him for the gifts which had come to their doors that day.

"Here, my lady, here is my kingdom," he said, as they pressed on to the forest heart. "I would barter it for no other. No palaces you may see but the palace of bower and brake; no state but God's state, which is nature; no court save the court which honest men, who till the ground, make worthy. You asked the name I bear. A hundred tongues have told it you. Call me, therefore, Lord of Stow no more."

He turned to her, fearing nothing now that she might do or say. But a great passion of shame brought the blood to her cheeks, and she knew that if any other had so con-

fessed, she would have struck him with her whip.

"Well I know you, Roy of Calverton," she cried; "to-morrow you shall lie in Mansfield Jail."

Roy laughed joyously.

"Not so, my lady," exclaimed he, "say rather that this night shall give you the half of my kingdom."

My lady answered him with a word of scorn.

"The kingdom of the outlaw and the felon; I have joy of your promise, sir."

"A true word, cousin—for I must still call you so—since to-morrow the Baron of Stow will be at your house, to drive out the people you have loved, and to bring in the priests who accomplished your father's death. Did you think of that when you went out to welcome him? Oh! here is a brave heart, which would wage a war with her company of loutish serving-men. Shall I tell you that I offer you the half of my kingdom because I would that your own may stand? that I come to save you from the priest's man, and the shame which he would put upon you? above all, cousin, that I do this because you taught me yester-eve to love you? Nay, I care nothing for your displeasure. Though

Queen Mary herself should ride to Sherwood, I will find harbourage against her. But you—I cannot leave you, or else what love had I for you in this moment perilous to those that served your father, and would die this day for the honour of his name?"

She rode a little way, silent with his argument—yet he perceived that she did not turn her horse's head again toward Ollerton; and he began to pride himself upon victory, already half achieved.

"What did they tell you of me," she asked at length, "that you should put this shame upon me?"

"Ask rather, cousin, what report they gave of me that I am called by you outlaw and felon."

"Claiming neither name, you seek a defence, sir."

"I seek nothing, cousin. If men call me outlaw and felon, it is because they have no other name to give me. Outlaw, yes, if it be outlawry to shun the town and flee the city, and come to this good harbourage of Sherwood. Felon, ay, truly, if the felon commands the homage of honest men, and has, to his life's end, the service of the poor. Such a felon am I, Roy of Calverton; and I have singed the

sheriff's beard so often, when he went out upon a work of cruelty, that to-morrow he will hang me in Mansfield Jail, do you but point out to him the place of my abiding."

"A kingdom, lacking a king—shall I come to you to share that?"

"Not so, for if that day shall ever be, the king's road and the sheriff's will lie many a good league apart. Nay, cousin, acquit me of my sin. If I have played a jest upon you, none the less have I saved you from the shame that another would have brought upon your father's house."

She checked her horse, and when she looked at him, he saw the tear upon her cheek. So wan and pretty and pitiful she was, that he swore no other should claim her, though the oath might cost his life.

"God help me!" she said, "for I have help of no man in my father's house."

"Say it not, cousin, for here at least one friend stands near. Before God, I swear to be your friend for the faith's sake, and against them that would harm you. Give me but a word of forgiveness, and I will light such a fire in this forest of Sherwood as shall be seen, ay, in London city and the lands across the sea.

To-day, perchance, the Baron's men are on my heels. To-morrow, I will send them packing across the border, and not so much as one herd found to bid them God-speed. Wilt trust me, cousin?"

She was a woman, and she was alone, and never in her life had a man so compelled her as this one, whose jest already she had the mind to play a part in.

"Give me good cause to win your trust, and it shall not be withheld. The tale they tell of you I will not believe. You are called Roy of Calverton, but you bear a name more honourable. Let your confidence wait upon my curiosity, that I may learn to call you friend."

"That will I do right readily, when the place be found and the opportunity. For this day, at least, I will be Roy of Calverton still, since others share your curiosity, and are even coming now to satisfy it at the sword's point."

He reined back his horse at the words, and listened with the trained ear of a woodlander. The still air carried an omen which was to her no more than a distant murmur of the forest life; but he read it aright, and knew its purport.

"The dogs cry upon our path," he said, girding up the belt which bound his short

riding-coat; "if they be from Ollerton, their bark should speak of the Lord of Stow."

She regarded him curiously.

"I named no place where a message might find me. You must seek some other account, if, indeed, you hear aright."

The outlaw touched his ready horse lightly with his spurs.

"My lady," said he, "what a name mine is that it can bring the Sheriff of Nottingham to my kingdom even upon this day of Christmas."

"You believe that these are sheriff's men?"

"Assuredly they are. And since it would become you ill to be found in the outlaw's company, turn, I beg of you, and leave me to show them the road they seek."

This he said to put her to the proof, for he was sure of her now, and he knew that sunset would find her still at his side. When she hesitated upon it, and the ring of the hoofs upon the road was more distinctly to be heard, a merry laugh betrayed his confidence.

"There are three that ride after, and we are but two, my lady. Stand at my side when the need is, and you shall be worth ten good blades to me."

She answered him by encouraging her horse,

so that they began to go at a canter westwards through the forest.

"God knows I would not have harm come to you this day," said she, "for you have spoken words of friendship to me. Nor will I turn to Ollerton until you bid me."

"When a rose blossoms on Robin's Oak, then will I bid you, cousin. Three or thirty, it shall not matter presently. See how this king fleeth from his kingdom."

He checked his horse again, for flight was not to be contemplated. Well he knew that this was the hour when his courage must win upon her hesitation. He would teach her the meaning of his kingship.

"Weary not your good horse for varlets such as yon," he exclaimed presently; "nay, cousin, do you but give me leave, I will even parley with them in this place."

They had struck upon a narrow track, leading upward to a mound of grass, upon which the sun now shone to make it as a great down-turned cup of silver. No more than one horseman could pass at the time upon so treacherous a path, and when Roy had come to the height of it, he wheeled his horse of a sudden and drew his sword. My lady said that the moment

showed him to her as one transfigured. No book of knight or tournament had depicted a figure to win so quickly upon her imagination. She had called him outlaw and felon; nevertheless she could utter there a silent prayer that no ill might come to him.

"Sir," she said, "if harm befall you, there is no friend left to me in all the forest."

He raised her hand to his lips and covered it with kisses.

"There is no ill that can befall me if it be not your displeasure, cousin. This would be a poor day for me if I must bow my head before any sheriff's lout that comes galloping out of Nottingham. Draw back a little, I pray you, and you shall hear a merry answer. Nay, you do not fear for Roy of Calverton?"

She looked him full in the face, and told him that she did not fear for him. A strange excitement possessed her; but it was the pride, anticipated, of his victory. In the thicket through which they had just passed they could hear the breaking of the boughs and the low voices of men. A little spell of waiting yet, and the first of the horsemen rode up to the mound's edge and called upon the outlaw to surrender.

"In the name of Her excellent Majesty and of the Sheriff of Nottingham—to Roy the Outlaw. See that ye do no shame, rogue, on this day of Christ's birth, for it shall avail you little. I have good men at my back, and I carry the Queen's warranty."

He was a slim man who spoke, one Master Fisher by name, chief officer to the Sheriff of Nottingham; and two others, sturdy townsmen both, were at his heels. He had ridden to the mound's edge with great ardour; but when he saw the glittering blade, poised there as a wand of silver, he reined speedily, and drew his ill-shaped mare back upon her haunches.

But Roy laughed until the woods rang again.

"Ye have good men at your back, Master Fisher, ay truly, and by the looks of them, there they will stop until this day's work be done. Go tell the sheriff that my answer is upon Robin's Oak, where hangs the fellow he sent me at Candlemas."

"I will not parley with you, knave. Put up your sword, or surely you shall perish by it. We are three blades, with many another in the woods behind us. I exhort you, commit no folly, for this is a great matter."

"If I put up my sword, there will be three on this mound to bear witness to its quality. Say rather that you ride back to Nottingham to thank your master that he sends one with a thin neck, which will come handy at the hanging. Dost hear me, Master Fisher? Then hasten, lest I quicken you at the sword's point."

The sheriff's man glanced round in some alarm. He began to repent of the zeal which had carried him so far ahead of his company. The two that were with him quaked in their saddles. "Let it be a stratagem, master, or assuredly we are dead men," one whispered. The other dropped his reins that the outlaw might see he held no sword.

"Come, Roy of Calverton, we would not do you any hurt."

"A truth as plain as your somewhat ill-fitting nose, Master Fisher. Let me see your back, that my eyes may be no longer offended."

"The devil burn your tongue! To-morrow you shall see a gibbet in Nottingham Jail."

"To-morrow — to-morrow — to-morrow a sheriff's man shall lack his ears. Art going on, Master Fisher, or must I turn your horse?"

"Turn or stand as it please you, knave, for surely I will teach you a lesson this day."

He called to the two that were with him and rode a little way up the path, until, indeed, he saw my lady; who, fearing no longer for him she had called her friend, was aglow with laughter at the sorry spectacle.

"God wot," said he, "there be two of you, then, and my Lady of Ollerton!"

"As you say, Master Fisher, the Lady of Ollerton, who would as lief see your back as your face if you, of your gallantry, will but ask her to name it."

"The greater cause that I remember my office. Come, have done with this braggart's talk, or it will go ill with you."

They say that the humour of it had kept Roy merry until this moment; but now he seemed to remember himself, and setting spurs to his horse, he leaped down toward the sheriff's man; and so adroitly did he drag him from his saddle that the fellow hung suspended by the back of his cloak as a sack from a branch. And thus holding him by the middle and swinging him to and fro, Roy, with all his great strength, threw him presently over the bushes upon his left hand, and so deep down into a

bed of the snow that had been a week driving there.

"A bed, a bed for the sheriff's warranty. Dost like the rushes, Master Fisher? Your music tells me that you like them not. An' you bawl like that, you will fetch the Lord Bishop from York. A little patience, man. They will find you ere vespers be done to-morrow."

He had drawn his sword now, and, wheeling his horse deftly in the open, he rode at the second of the men, and with such ferocity of attack that horse and rider went down headlong, and lay still when he had passed by. But the third man waited for no parley, and, galloping through the forest, he cried to all in his fright, "The outlaw is here, the outlaw is here!"

"My lady," said Roy, when he returned to the thicket and put up his sword, "yon fellow is but winded, and if there be any bones broken, his own men will ride up to bind them presently. As for Master Fisher's music, I have no ears for it. Ride on a little way with me, and I will show you Sanctuary. You do not fear now, dear cousin."

He bent to kiss her hand again; but there was that in her eyes which gave him courage,

and suddenly he took her in his arms and held her in a strong embrace.

"The half of my kingdom, cousin," said he; "nay, here is all my heritage, as God may will, to my life's end."

My lady did not answer him, but the secret was still to be read in her eyes and upon her pretty cheeks; and so she rode, very content and silent, away from the home of her childhood to the sanctuary of love new found and of her friendship.

CHAPTER VII

THE COUNT OF BRIVES

"What thou bidd'st
Unargued I obey."—MILTON.

THE Sanctuary stood upon a hilltop, a little church built of grey stone with a spire rising up above the girdle of silver birches and the low house which served the solitary priest. So high was it placed that you could see even distant Trent from its windows; and many were the pilgrims who came to its doors to make a vow to St. Wilfred, who was named for its patron. Here, as tradition held, was there a refuge for the lawless even from the justice of King and Parliament; and while those that made the laws would have put the claim to ridicule, it was good in all Sherwood Forest; and no man so bold as to break that Sanctuary had yet been found in the Queen's service.

"There has been a refuge in yon church since the first Henry's day," said Roy, as he rode at length to the door of the secluded presbytery. "God knows, it is not for sanctuary that I come here, cousin. Nevertheless, the tradition may serve us well, as you shall learn presently. Before to-morrow dawns a hundred will seek me in Sherwood. I care not if there be a hundred more added to them when you have heard my story and I have heard your answer. You are fatigued, cousin?"

She was weary of her ride; and mighty troubled now, both with her venture and with the thought of the leagues which lay between her and her home at Ollerton; but she answered him with a brave word.

"We forget fatigue in the houses of our friends. Show me the Sanctuary that I may remember the precept."

He touched her hand with his lips, and then, spurring up the hillside, he called loudly, "A Roy! a Roy!" and instantly the door of the presbytery was opened, and a young priest came out into the sunlight. For a moment he stood shading his eyes and regarding the travellers curiously. But when he recognised

the outlaw, he uttered a loud word of welcome and hastened down toward them.

"The Count of Brives—I had looked for any other but you, my lord."

Roy sprang from his horse to hold my lady's stirrup.

"Then you will give us a better welcome for that. We come to keep the feast with you, father, and God wot, our sack is empty enough. Hast meat and drink in the house? I hunger like a wolf of Saxony. Set but a pasty before me, and I will account it a dish for a king."

The young priest laughed.

"A pasty I have not, my lord, but such as I have, ay, and such as those hereby can offer, shall be yours to-day. I am too much your debtor already to be backward in aught of service or of duty. And to you, my lady, the daughter of one whose name ever is held in honour here, I give a humble welcome."

He had a pretty manner, says the record, for he was one of the lads driven out, by Harry's edict, from the monasteries. The forest life had opened his eyes to see the fields of liberty and to read the books of truth. A Catholic, he cared as little for the Pope's

dominion as for those who sang the new Queen's praises. But Roy of Calverton was ever a king to him, and long he remembered the day when the outlaw thus honoured his house.

"If I had but known, my lord—yet the day is far spent, and there be few to hear the horn's blast now when it is winded upon a feast day. Nevertheless, enter in, I beg of you, for the wind blows sharp, and at least we may burn a merry log."

This to Roy, but to the Lady Barbara he said: "The lad shall take your horses, lady; fear not for them, for there is a gentle hand."

With this word they passed into the hall of the little house, a low panelled room, black with age and the smoke of the vast fire which, summer or winter, gave its ruddy glow to the deep recesses of the ingle. A young lad had taken their horses to a shed at the rear of the presbytery; and presently they heard him winding a horn cheerily upon the hillside. The priest himself girded up his cassock and began to work with the skill and the quickness of a serving-maid.

"He called you Count of Brives," said my lady to Roy, as they bent over the warming

logs together; "was it another jest, or must I learn your name anew?"

"You shall learn my name anew, cousin, when you would wish me to forget the land which gave you birth. I am the son of the Count of Brives, indeed, and there is a heritage for me in my father's country. But to you I would still be Roy of Calverton."

She sat upon the bench, where the firelight could play upon her pretty face and show the doubt which troubled it.

"Surely," she said, "I have come up on a strange errand this day. Yesterday I was the mistress of my father's house; and now, whither am I going, what am I seeking? What folly keeps me from my people and my home?"

Roy took her hand in his, and sat himself beside her on the bench.

"The folly which wages a good war with the enemies who seek you vainly. Did you return to-night, cousin, it would be to recognise the mastery of one who has sworn to drive your people out, to crush the faith your father died for, to trample on all that is holy to you because your father gave it sanctity. Yesterday when I rode into Ollerton there was a vow

upon my lips that, in so far as I could serve the mistress of the house, I could serve her as God has endowed me. To-day, here and now, I renew that vow. Go back to your home, and it will be your lasting regret and self-reproach; it will be to forget the life you have lived, to depart from your own people, that you may become the slave of one who never yet knew the true kingdom of womanhood, nor has any mercy for those who make that kingdom's laws. God knows, I would not press this argument upon you unduly. If I love you, let my own love be silent in the hour of your adversity. Claim the friendship none the less because I am silent. Say to me that I shall be your ally, and I will give my life to the service. Bid me show you the path to Ollerton again, and I will bring you to your gates ere the sun has set behind yon hills. Yours shall be the choice—no word of mine shall put the argument if your own heart be silent and your own will be troubled."

There was a great tenderness of his words toward her; and when he had made an end of it she did not withdraw her hand from his, nor answer him; but for a spell she sat gazing into the ruddy fire; and he knew that the clever

little head was battling in perplexity with the greatest trouble of that troubled life.

"You are Roy, the Count of Brives," she said at last, "my father has said that there is no braver name in France. Why, then, are you here in Sherwood Forest to let men call you outlaw and felon?"

He answered readily.

"Cousin, if it be outlawry to love the bounteous gifts of God we find in nature; if it be outlawry to feel the sap of the forest life in your blood; if it be outlawry to shun the cities and to breathe where the air is sweet and the groves are silent, and the music is the music of the birds, then am I outlaw truly, and merit the Queen's judgment. As for the matter which keeps me from the French King's court, I have been so long in this your England that the land of my birth is already a stranger's country to me. Twenty years ago my father came to Henry's palace to find an English wife there—the Lady Damara, my mother of beloved memory, who would have me in England always, and sent me to the monks of Newstead Abbey that my learning should be English, and English the tongue I spoke. Her death in Paris, my father's death in the

Battle of Pavia, when I was but six years old, left me to the monks until the edict sent them out and compelled me to seek a new home and a new task. To France I would not go, and so to this forest of Sherwood I came to play the outlaw's part for jest of it. Such inheritance as was bequeathed to me from my mother's house, that I claimed and enjoy to this time. But I will not be Count of Brives while the forest is open to me, and I have kingdom in it, and the poor bless the hour of my coming. Nay, indeed, it is a man's ambition to stand foremost in that which is nearest to his own heart. Yesterday I had no thought but to maintain my kingdom against all that should endanger it. To-day there is another desire, and it must prevail above aught else. Shall I whisper of that, cousin — would you hear the story anew?"

"If the story lies near to your heart, I will hear it, sir."

"Ay, near my own heart it is—yet it is but a story. Would to God that she of whom it speaks would let me so hold her until my life's end!"

He spoke a lover's word now, for she had made a slave of him; and when he saw her

thus surrender to his desire, he protested anew as lovers will. She, in turn, was recalling her own sagacity, how that she had said he wore a nobler name—yet still she wished to speak of him as Roy of Calverton. The romance, the mystery of his story, appealed to her girlish imagination. The dangers crowding upon her own home, the knowledge that the Lord of Stow was then at her gates, — above all, this first understanding of a woman's love, compelled her to seek of him that great, that final friendship she had sought all her life but never yet had found.

"What shall I do — what counsel do you give me?" she cried in her perplexity; "am I not an exile from my home already? shall I turn my back upon it for ever?—shall I see no more the people that I love? Oh, I know not what to answer—I know not why this day has come to me."

Roy answered her very gently.

"Dear cousin," said he, "if I did not read your heart aright, my lips should be for ever silent on that which I now would have you know. Here in this house, if yours be the will, you shall give me the greater right to say,

'Ollerton is mine, mine are the enemies that seek to encompass it about.' Speak but the word, and I will tell you that the man who rides there to do you ill, shall meet me face to face and answer for that ill ere the month be out. In winter or summer, in sickness or in health, king or serving-man, you shall be the mistress of my heart and will to my life's end. Ah, cousin, if you but speak the word!"

She thought upon it a little while, and then, they being alone in the room, she turned to him and kissed him on the forehead.

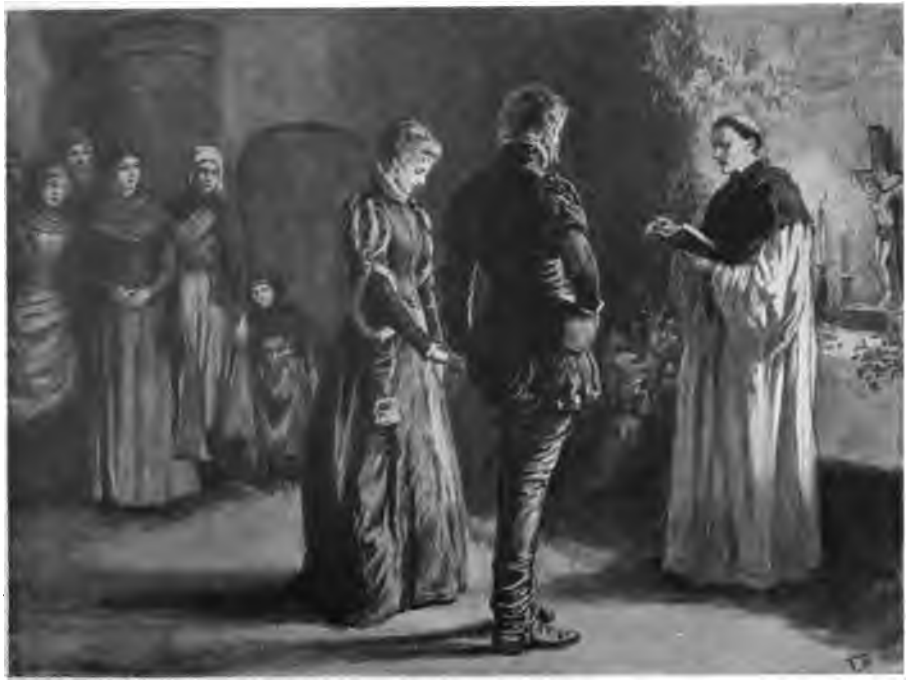
"Until my life's end," she said, "I will seek no other friend. Dear heart, take up my burden, for I have no courage left."

* * * * *

The priest returned to his house when the half of an hour was passed, and brought a little company of woodlanders with him. He found my lady radiant and aglow with her blushes—but Roy of Calverton, again, was as one transfigured. He stood there as some king of men, the lord of the forest he governed so well; knight, courtier, a very noble of his deed and his inheritance. And when the priest carried

in his gifts, when the table was spread, and the tapers were lighted, and the sun had set behind the hills, Roy said to him—

"A merry feast let it be, father, for this night you shall give me my heart's desire."



IN THE HOUSE OF THE SANCTUARY THE YOUNG PRIEST MARRIED THEM

CHAPTER VIII

THE ARREST

> "In worst extremes and on the perilous edge
> Of battle."—MILTON.

AT midnight, in the house of sanctuary, the young priest married them. My lady said in after years that the whole burden of her life was lifted from her shoulders in that hour. As the years of her childhood were closed for ever, so in good measure, beyond her childish hopes, she found the friend she had sought. No longer did any doubt or scruple trouble her content. The name of Roy, Count of Brives, was worthy of her homage. She would have sought no nobler master of Ollerton; and she beheld the hand of Providence which thus had sent the chosen to her in the hour of peril and of her great distress.

They were married at midnight before the

simple altar upon which many tapers burned brightly, and where the garlands of holly and the great boughs of mistletoe made good the winter's deficiency. Though the hours had been few since they rode up to the priest's house, news of an event so momentous spread quickly through the forest; and many hurried from their homes to kneel in the little church and to wish the master "God speed." Woodlanders were there and shepherds from the hills, and many a young girl who remembered an outlaw's caress, and many a child whose hands the greatest of the outlaws had filled with gifts. Lanterns shone in the purlieus of the forest; many a merry word, and music of young voices, went up to scare the birds from the trees and the hare from her sleeping-place. The Sanctuary itself was a blaze of light, a beacon, bright and clear, in the darkness of the night. Even to the distant towns the message went, that Roy of Calverton had found a bride that day.

The people cheered the master; hot wine and the hissing wassail-bowl went round in the presbytery when the service had been read, and the priest had raised his voice to bear witness that those who knelt before him were

man and wife to be put asunder by God alone. Distant travellers, hastening through the forest toward Ollerton, heard the music of young voices, the clash of bells, the sturdy cries of the woodlanders; they knew not what the omens meant. Many a village waked from its sleep to send the messengers out with tidings so joyful. It was a night to make history for these men of Sherwood; yet scarce had the new day dawned when Roy came out of the priest's house and began to busy himself with the good horse which had been his friend through so many fateful years. Well he knew that the gentler pleasures of sanctuary must not keep him from the peril of that road which henceforth was open to him. He had a work to do; his very joy of love drove him to its speedy accomplishment.

"There will be a hundred seeking for me in Sherwood Forest this day," he said to the priest as they stood at the church door together, and all the beauty of the forest life, all the glory of frost and the jewels of frost were quickened to splendour by the mellow sun, "you know well what shrift I shall find at the hands of the Baron of Stow when his dogs scent the trail. Nevertheless, I would not have my lady hear

of the peril, and she shall lie in your house until the way be clear and the news of them at hand. As you would stand in my affections, so let your care of her be."

"My own sister shall not claim a surer watchfulness, or be in my mind so often, Count. Do we look for you again to-day?"

"If it may be. I ride to Ollerton now to learn how it has fared with them that hold the house. But if opportunity wait upon inclination, I will return here before the Angelus is rung."

The priest remembered afterwards that there was a shadow upon the Count's face very foreign to it; but Roy was ever one to lock up the secret places of his heart, and now, when he knew the danger that lurked about his path, he had this only in his mind, that my lady should not share his knowledge. Very tender, as the priest could witness, was his farewell to her. That night of his life, that night when he had held her in his arms, and she had willed that he should take up her burden, remained ever afterwards as some hour outstanding in all the years, to be unforgotten through the ages. She was his wife —the forest had given him to her. She was

the mistress of his kingdom—the kingdom of one whom men had called outlaw and felon. For her sake, he was content to be outlaw still, to ask of England naught but this, that the forest might harbour her even as it had harboured him.

"Good-bye, thou dearest of my heart," he whispered as they stood together, there at the gate of the church wherein she had given herself to him, "I leave you but an hour—yet it shall be to me the longest hour that I have known."

"I will not gainsay you—dear husband," she answered, "let your desire be my desire. Gladly would I ride to Ollerton with you this day—yet if you will not"—

"I will only to hear the whisper of your voice, to touch your lips with mine. Nay, sweetheart, a man may canter where a woman's horse shall stumble at the walk. Fear nothing for me, for there is none that may harm me in this forest of Sherwood. You will see me ere sunset, and, perchance, with better tidings than you think."

Thus saying, he put his arm about her, and spoke again of farewell and again of his love for her; and so, at last, fearing to linger, he

turned swiftly and sprang upon his willing horse and rode down towards the wood through which they had passed together yesterday. For a spell she saw him, the sunlight glowing upon his cap of steel and the bright points of that caparison; and though she feared not for him, she went again to the church, when the thicket hid him from her sight; and her morning thanksgiving was wedded to a prayer that she might ride with him to her home before another day had dawned.

Now, Roy pressed on through the by-paths of the forest and was already a good league upon his way to Ollerton, when, as he crossed a little down of untrodden snow, he espied a steel cap shining through the interstices of the trees, and drawing rein roughly, his good horse lost footing upon the treacherous ground, and together they rolled in the snow. Nor could he extricate himself from the plight before twenty armed men were upon his back; and he was held to the earth as by hands of steel.

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There were twenty upon him, and man vied with man in a good grip upon so redoubtable an enemy. What with some who knelt upon

his chest, and some who called for rope to bind his hands, and a great clamour of voices which deafened him, and strong hands upon his throat, Roy thought that they would make an end of it there and then; but in this he was mistaken, for they had other design — and chiefly the wish to boast of so great a day before their master, the Lord of Stow. As for their captain, a squat man upon a big grey horse, he had not lungs enough for his delight; and he rode round and round the troop, bawling incessantly that they should by no means loose a hand upon their captive.

"Ye have the outlaw himself—God's faith I name it a lucky day! Hand and foot, hand and foot, Master Relton, let him be bound hand and foot. I tell ye that the old wolf is caged. Would ye see us all dead men?"

He urged them on with antics ridiculous to behold, and bawling incoherent, and good care that he himself should not ride within a bow-shot of the danger. When, at last, Roy was so bound that he could not raise one finger above another, the captain waxed more bold and bade them set him on his horse again.

"We have thee, Roy of Calverton," cried he;

"to-morrow a new rope shall be added to these. 'Twill be about thy neck, fellow. Dost like the thought? Nay, glory to God this day for the road that I have followed. Canst dance on nothing, boaster?"

Roy did not hear him. He had no breath for wit, or even to implore a little mercy of them that held him upon the horse. The fall had dazed him; and when his senses were returned, his first thought was of her he had left but the half of an hour ago at the door of the Sanctuary.

It was an admission, bitter beyond words, that his girl-wife might wait for him when the sun had set, and wait in vain. He knew that yesterday he would have laughed right well at such a predicament as this; but to-day, to-day when her hope was his hope, when the memory of her caress could quicken his heart and send hot blood coursing through his veins; to-day when he rode out with all his brave promises upon his lips! Shame of his defeat moved him to a frenzy of despair all impotent. He wrestled with his bonds until his hands were cut by the cords, and those that held him cried to their fellows, for God's sake, to help them. Even the discreet captain, holding himself

aloof from the danger, could implore him to remember how he stood.

"Art mad, Roy of Calverton? Dost think to better twenty good men with halberds in their hands? Nay, show that trick again, and I will hang ye from yon oak. 'Tis our day, man, and that you shall learn quickly."

Roy laughed.

"I did but breathe upon these women that wear a doublet," said he, "and they go to ground like the leaves in winter. Ride on, my masters, and you shall find me merry company."

"Merry company you shall be—and the merrier when the cord is about your neck. What, you ride to Ollerton in my lord's name, and keep the feast with my lady, and carry her from her house—you that are outlaw and felon, and then can talk of merry company! A murrain on such impudence! If my lord do not hang you as high as Haman, then I, that serve him twenty years, am a stranger in his house."

He swore a great oath upon it, but would not draw near; and when the twenty had closed about the captive and driven their horses close to his, one of them winded a

horn, and was answered by a horn's blast heard in the heart of the thicket.

"An' you be wise, Master Bates," said the fellow, "you will wait until the devil's imp, that brought us to this place, is taken by the ears again. Since twenty years not one of us hath set foot in Sherwood, and 'tis no country for an honest man to find himself astray in."

"Well spoken, Master Relton, well spoken. As for me, I stir not a foot until the guide be found. To Mary be the thanks when I am out of this forest of Sherwood, for, surely, it is an abode of devils abundant and of all kinds of wickedness. Heard you the stories the hag told us yester-eve? Lies they be, yet such lies as make the flesh creep and the tongue to refuse its office. I will have none of them—yet, God wot, I would hasten to the Baron's house lest night shall find us still abroad."

His desire was the desire of every man in that company; for the forest and the solitude, and above all the hag's tales, had warred upon nerves which cared naught for the living, but had a very ready terror of the unseen. Roy, on his part, heard the muttered complainings and the impatient requests that some should ride out to find the guide; but he could not

hope in them. Quick-witted as he was, ready of decision, the bravest man that ever claimed dominion of the forest, this seemed an hour of his life fateful beyond all telling. What mercy, he asked himself, might he look for at the hands of the Lord of Stow? What expectation was there that news of his calamity might come to the ears of his comrades before his own life were ended? And my lady, she who to-day was the mistress of his kingdom, what of her? To-morrow she would be a prisoner in her own house at Ollerton. Well he knew the argument that such a man as the Lord of Stow would urge upon a helpless woman. Well he knew that his girl-wife would hardly find one friend in all that kingdom of England. And he himself, he whom men had called the King of Calverton, what a figure he must cut! To be carried as any rogue of the forest, and hanged from the battlements of the great lord's house! His blood burned at the shame of it. He went near to losing for the second time that self-mastery which alone could help him in the direst hour of his eventful life.

There is no cloud so black, they say, that it has not the silver lining if you do but wait a better wind. And it was odd that in this

moment of his despair, when his quick brain could not help him, nor any help of man might be foreseen, a trifling circumstance should, upon the instant, have scattered his fears like chaff before the wind, and brought back that mocking smile and gentle voice of his. Yet so it was: and so it befell, even while he still debated his plight, that the guide's voice echoed in the thicket—and no sooner had he heard it, than Roy took heart and all his courage came back to him as a freshet to the pool which a dam has blocked. For the voice was the voice of Meagre the dwarf; and at the second word spoken, Roy beheld the lad, mounted upon a gallant pony and carrying himself as bravely before that company as any captain of halberdiers.

The dwarf rode out of the thicket, we say, and capering up to the captain of the twenty, he greeted him with a bow so comical that every man in the company, save the captain alone, must make the woods ring with an honest laugh.

"Sir Captain," said he, "when the quarry is taken, what more need have ye of the hound?"

"The need that I must carry the quarry to my master's house, young sir. What! you

would hold argument with me as some grown man that has a beard upon his chest and a staff in his hand! Out upon you for an impudent fellow whom I will teach a good lesson presently."

The dwarf sat up in his saddle and put on the air of a man that has received a great hurt.

"Sir," said he with a doleful air, "though I have no beard to hide my stomach, as your worship has (for which you must bless God daily), yet if you and your twenty fear this rogue ye have taken, then will I seek to be of service to you. Of a truth I observe that your worship is in great peril. They that rule in Sherwood like not the evil eye; and if your worship is not the devil's good cousin, then never saw I one that might put the claim more honestly. Saint John, I doubt not that you can see Nottingham with one eye and Trent with the other. Shall I make bold to show the road to such a man?"

The captain breathed heavily; but, being impotent, gave no tongue to his wrath.

"I have not been in this England for twenty years, nor any man of my company," said he slowly; "show me the nearest road, and one

whereby a man may pass safely to the house of the Lord of Stow, and I will give you twenty crowns."

"Here and now, upon the spot, let the money be paid, and I am your worship's most faithful servant. For look you, if I come to Stow and have not the money in my pouch, than shall your worship's right eye see it in your hand while your left shall declare it in my wallet. A bargain, a bargain—by your worship's red hairs I swear it is a bargain!"

The company shouted with laughter again; but the captain's hand tightened upon his sword.

"I am of the mind to slit your ears," cried he.

"Nay, sir, but let a little blood from that neck of yours and you shall go free of an apoplexy."

The dwarf had a great zest of the encounter, and would have continued it, but as he spoke he chanced to catch his master's eye, and a mute message passed between them. Upon this, without further parley, the lad clapped spurs to his pony and began to ride northward at a brisk pace.

"The shortest road, knave, and twenty crowns when you be come to Stow."

"As the crow flies—were it not for your worship's colour, which, on my life, is as red as a priest's coat at Whitsun."

He waited for no sally from the captain, but led them gaily into the thicket and so toward the forest's heart. Those that guarded the outlaw began to breathe more freely. They had done a right good work, and their lord would know how to thank them. To-morrow the forest king would swing from the battlements, and his people might gather in the woods below to see the spectacle. They had but to go a matter of a few leagues and all would be ended. Roy, in his turn, recognised the path which Meagre followed. It was the road to the capital of his kingdom—to that place where a hundred would lay down their lives for him and account it a blessed thing so to do. The certainty was like wine to him. He began to exchange a merry word with his keepers.

"Ye be right lusty men, sirs, and over-bold to seek me in my own place. Had my horse found his feet, I promise you 'twould have been a better day's work. Account me innocent that ye had such poor sport."

"Ride on in this content, Roy of Calverton,

and I will even make mention of it to my lord himself, and find a full cup of sack at the first inn we pass."

"A safe promise, friend, for the man that finds an inn upon the road to Stow is a magician truly. Say rather that you go where tradition has set strange fellows—the dead quickened again; the rider that bestrides no horse; the bells that ring when no hand is on the rope; the churches where we shall see the tapers burning, yet never a living man to kindle a taper on those altars. A strange world, my masters, that ye are wise to quit as speedily as may be."

The trooper shrugged his shoulders as though to say "a woman's superstition"; but he scanned the dark places of the wood narrowly; and others, who had heard Roy's talk, crowded close upon him and were quick with new questions.

"We go by Robin's Oak," exclaimed one of them, "no honest man's road they tell me, sir?"

"They tell you truly," Roy answered, "there have been ten in gibbets by that very tree since Whitsun. I doubt if such will find a gate of Paradise open to them, and lacking the

way, 'tis not odd that they should turn to Sherwood again."

"Witches' talk, witches' talk—a tale for the ingle and not for them that be grown to man's estate. I'll wager, now, that thou hast never seen aught in all thy life which is against the Holy Book and the Church's law."

Roy answered with a great show of indifference.

"The forest has born and bred me," said he; "it is not for such as I to be afraid of the forest. Nevertheless, sirs, I hide it not that I would give a hundred pieces of gold this day sooner than take the road to Robin's Oak. Perchance 'tis but witches' talk, as ye say, yet I have known men who so accounted it, and they have ridden by that road, and God knows where their bodies lie, to say nothing of their souls' resting. Do not think that I seek to turn you from the path. Ye are brave men and accustomed to sights and sounds which may well affright the vulgar. Ride on, sirs, and God guard you."

"'Tis well enough to cry 'ride on,'" exclaimed he whom they called Master Relton; "but, for my part, I would as lief ride another way than on."

"Well spoken, well spoken, Master Relton; another road, and not by Robin's Oak. We shall come there at sunset, and God save us all."

"Belike we shall be as those whose bodies lacked the burial?"

"I am an honest man and have a soul to save. God keep me from this evil forest, say I."

Others chimed in with a new complaint. The captain himself, hearing the clamour, drew rein to wait for his men, and three voices together besought him to take a wider road.

"Pass not the oak, Master Bates, and my lord shall say you have done well. There may be many rough fellows in these parts, and their den is no inn for my stomach. Pass another way and you shall earn good thanks."

"We lose but the half of a day, master, and my lord will have no tongue for questions when he sees whom we bring in. A wide road, sir, and a cup of wine for them that have earned it well."

Master Bates listened eagerly, and his red face lost its colour.

"I have heard the tales ye tell of that same

road, and beshrew me if I ride on. Hark! sirrah; carry us to Stow, as I bade you, but pass by Robin's Oak and I will even slit your ears."

The dwarf—for the latter part of the address was to him—laughed shrilly.

"Where you will—where you will," cried he gaily; "there must be many a brother of yours at Robin's Oak, Sir Captain. I see that you have no great affection for them, and I will even turn aside as these bold fellows crave."

Again he waited for no argument, but quitted the path they had been following, and pushed into a little wood upon their right hand, and so led them nearer yet to the heart of the outlaw's kingdom. Great groves were here; dark places of the brake; ravines and glades, all frosted in exquisite tracery; trees so high that the sun no longer gilded the habiliments of the troop, nor gave a sheen to the bright points of its caparison. And in among these trees, flitting as shadows from bush to bush, Roy's quick eye perceived some of those that had loved him and stood with him in many a stout emprise. Bold hearts they were, honest woodlanders with cudgels in their hands, by here and there a swordsman riding stealthily; but

soon a very army, so that its presence was not to be hid, and even Master Bates took alarm at it.

"What do these rogues in such a place?" cried he. "God's faith, I like not their company."

Meagre the dwarf reassured him.

"The hamlet of Calverton lies near by, Master Bates. These be good fellows that hear of your coming, and are mindful to do you a service. Push on a spell, and you shall find good meat and a cup of sack to warm your heart."

"Ay, marry! let that be soon, for I am perished of the cold, and this good beast of mine is in a sorry plight."

He urged his wearied horse onward; nor did he see the mocking laugh about the lips of the man he guarded. At every step now the breaking branch, the muffled steps, the low sounds of voices told of a great following, a spectre army hidden away in wood and glade, yet ever pursuing those twenty as the hunter may stalk the deer that shall die presently. Roy's ear, trained to every note of the forest life, told him truly what those sounds meant. "I have thee, Master Bates," he said to himself exultantly; "I have thee, and

to-morrow one shall wait for me and shall not wait in vain."

The twenty pushed on, and with them went the hidden enemy, silently, relentlessly. At midday, the dwarf protested that they must have passed Calverton, and that the company would do well to halt the half of an hour at the hut of a woodlander he named to them. There they rested their weary horses; nor saw anything whatever of those who peopled the forest about them and watched their every movement. It was late in the afternoon when they were on the road again; and now they began to follow a path exceeding dark, a narrow dangerous way, by swamps and morasses, and evil depths, where the sunlight came not, and the day had close kinship with the night. Minute by minute the difficulty of the track waxed greater. Horses stumbled, and men came to earth in boggy places. Towering oaks with bare branches, in shape like that of spectres upstanding, stood sentinels of the path. Deer fled before the advancing horsemen. Birds rose up with a great noise and twittering of fear. Master Bates himself swore many a good oath, yet knew not whither to turn.

"As I live, I will have thee whipped at a

cart's tail. Is this the road, this the path to Stow? Must I sleep in a morass, Beelzebub's son? As God is my witness, if thou dost not bring us to the broad way upon the instant, I will nail thy ears to Robin's Oak, though a fiend of hell forbid me."

Meagre the dwarf raised himself in his saddle and uttered a shrill cry, almost inhuman in its weirdness.

"Bear witness, bear witness—I have kept faith with you, son of the evil eye. Yonder stands Robin's Oak. I would not pass it for a thousand crowns. The road to Stow is before you, my masters. Follow it if you can, and the devil bear you company."

He turned his pony adroitly, and leaped into the thicket—and so was gone from their sight and ken. Master Bates, reining in his horse, saw a little glade before him, and in the centre of the glade a vast oak, with gnarled trunk and mighty boughs bearing now a heavy burden of the snow. Other trees fenced in that bower; the setting sun shone in fires of crimson, and illumined the glade with a radiance of unearthly lights. It was a place to impress the imagination, even of one who loved the forest, with awe and wonder; but to the twenty, who

remembered the hag's tales they had heard, it was as some abode of evil spirits.

"God save us, Master Bates! See you yon gibbet with a body still upon it?"

"I see it, Master Relton; yet what is that to twenty men that have halberds in their hands?"

"If the soul be dead with the body—yet I mind the fable. The Virgin befriend us! what was that?"

As the man spoke, a wild cry, as of a soul in agony, rose up from the distant brake. Other cries, no less fearful, succeeded to it, so that the whole forest rang with those dread sounds. From copse to copse, and hill to hill, the moaning voices echoed. There was not a man of the troop whose knees did not quake and whose heart did not fail him when he heard such sounds, and remembered the tradition of Robin's Oak.

"The Lord forgive me my sins this night, for never yet have ears heard such music. Push on, Master Bates, I beseech you."

"An' I push on, I must pass the gibbet, Master Relton. See ye not that the corpse hath life still in it? I am no braggart, Master Relton. God forbid that I should claim precedence above my fellows."

He pointed to the gibbet by the wayside; and as the men turned to look at it, they saw a strange thing. The body that was hanging there began to swing in its chains. From that which was but the perceptible tremor, it took, in slow measure, a great movement — was bent double, thrown from side to side, twisted horribly. Those that witnessed the horrid sight sat very still in their saddles, nor would their tongues utter a single word. And as they continued to gaze, fascinated, upon such a marvel, a hundred of Sherwood's men leaped out of the thickets about them—woodlanders, outlaws, sons of the hamlets and the fields—and falling upon Master Bates' riders with a frenzy indescribable, they dragged them from their saddles, and would have made an end of them in that very place, but for Roy's loud word and the love they bare him.

"Forbear, forbear, ye sons of mine!" he cried. "These be but the servants. Let justice fall on him that sent them."

They obeyed him reluctantly, and came crowding about him, some to cut his bonds, some to chafe his hands, some to cry incessantly—

"A due! a due to Roy of Calverton!"

The twenty were twenty no more. Those that found a path were riding for their lives through the forest's heart; those that were unhorsed craved mercy on their knees. But Master Bates cast himself at Roy's feet, and his complaint was the merriest music in all that merry day's work.

"Ye will not take my life. I cannot die, sir; I am a sinful man. Oh, pity, pity! I would have done well to you when we were come to Stow. God witness I was your friend"—

"Who would have witnessed that friendship even from the battlements of my lord's house. Nay, for you, Master Bates, I shall find no mercy at all. To a gibbet did you think to carry me—to a gibbet you shall go this very instant."

He whispered to one of those about him; and from ear to ear the word went that Master Bates was to be hanged in chains upon the gibbet—but only by his body, so that no harm should come to him; and that, when he had hanged thus for twenty hours, he was to be sent to Stow again, tied upon an ass, and with thistles for a crown. But the man himself—thinking surely that they meant to hang him

CHAPTER IX

LANTERNS IN THE THICKET

"Dead sounds at night come from the inmost hills,
Like footsteps upon wool."—TENNYSON.

MY Lady Barbara watched at the window of the Long Gallery in her home at Ollerton, and turned often to Master Eleazar the minister to hear his dolorous argument, but not to profit by it. Nigh forty hours had passed since she stood before the altar in the chapel of sanctuary, and had found the sweetest consummation of her love; but to her they had been relentless hours of doubt and of calamity. Hardly could she bring herself to believe that she, who yesterday had taken a great courage of her affection and friendship, was to-day a prisoner in her own house, the scorn of those who guarded her gates, the victim of insult unendurable. Yet so it had befallen, and such was the truth with which the old man at her side wrestled impotently.

"Bear with it yet a little while, my lady, and God will point the road. If the Lord of Stow has, indeed, come to possession of your father's estate, then shall there be other homes open to us. Some such thing as this I looked for in Sir Philip's absence—but not for the unkindness they have shown us nor for this outrage upon our house."

She turned from the window wearily.

"Is there no man in all Ollerton to draw a sword for a woman's sake?" she asked. "You heard the words that were spoken—you were witness of the shame he put upon me. Must I be dumb before him, I who am Bernard's daughter? God, if I might pray to be unsexed this hour."

"Say rather that in prayer shall your comfort lie. We cannot combat destiny, my daughter. To our fathers' faith we pay this debt. Let it be paid humbly and with reverence until the light shine again in this our England and justice be done upon them that have hidden it."

She turned from him impatiently and went to stand at the window again. It was a dark day, with heavy clouds gathering above the woods of Ollerton; but not so dark that she

could not see the steel caps of the soldiers who had carried her yester-night from the sanctuary, and had brought her to her home—there to hear the anger of my Lord of Stow and to suffer worse things at his hands. The agony of that shame was not to be told in any words. She was Bernard's daughter—in her own house she had been named with the unnameable and the outcast. He, who had become her jailor, showed the Queen's writ for his authority. The lands of Bernard of Ollerton, held to forfeit by her guardian's treachery, passed now to this man, who sought them only because Bernard's daughter was the mistress of that house. Her name had been often in his ears since he had left his own country for the nomad's life in distant France and the Holy City. Since her childhood, he had remembered the promise, that one day his own estate should be linked to hers and that she should be his wife according to her father's will. And now he found her—in an outlaw's house; driven, as he said, by her desire to share this outlawry and the last shame a woman may know. No longer was there any thought of honour in his dealing toward her. He would make her his jest, as many another woman had been in the

western cities of Europe. Armed with good authority, the master of her house, with a hundred men-at-arms in his service, he cared nothing for this tradition of her sovereignty and of the loyalty she might command in Sherwood Forest. He had her in the trap—and ere she went again, she must pay the price he named.

She had been carried to her home yesternight at the very hour when she looked for her lover's return, and had waited to see him riding up the hill again, as he had promised. To-day she knew not whether he were alive or dead. Watching at her window through that long day, she beheld the deserted park and the silent woods and the snow falling again upon the whitened forest. Yet of message from the world without there was none. Her own servants had fled the house. Those that moved within it were roving troopers, who often spake strange tongues. The food that was put before her was carried from the soldiers' tables. She heard from time to time the clatter of arms and the ribald laughter. There was a sentry even at the door of that Long Gallery—and she could mark the glitter of the halberd he carried, and reflect

how vain all thought of help from those that loved her must be. Yet Roy had left her with a word of promise, and to that word she clung bravely. If he lived, he would save her. In his affection she had found the one great friendship of her life. All had she given—for nothing was to be withheld when his voice besought her and his strong arms were about her heart. He would save her if he lived—her lover, her husband.

Such a slender chance alone ministered to her courage that day. She did not see the Lord of Stow nor have any word from him. Last night the loud debauch had kept sleep from her eyes and affrighted her through the long hours of the darkness. To-day the man left her to herself, thinking perchance the sooner to win his victory.

"If they would but speak their will, Master Eleazar; if we might crave of them the right to go our way! God knows what is in store for us here."

"Say not so, my child—else is all justice fled this country. Ye have many friends in Sherwood—ye will find other friends as powerful, it may be, as the Lord of Stow."

"There is no friend but one, Master Eleazar.

How shall I hope that he yet lives since I am left a prisoner in my own house? Nay, look at all the forest. No desolate land is more lonely this hour. The very birds have ceased to sing. The sky is dark as my own heart."

"Dark it may be—nevertheless ye see but the gates of Sherwood, my child. Who shall tell what fires burn behind them, who watches there, the words that are said? Nay, as I live, there be some abroad or else are these old eyes grown weary as the heart that asks a question of them."

He pointed to a wild thicket lying at the gates of the park; and while she, at the first, did not read his word aright, when she had looked a little while, she beheld a lantern swinging there between the trees; and anon, other sparks of fire, as glow-worms in the twilight, began to pass from place to place, and spoke all truly of the watch he named.

"There are some abroad in the forest as you say, Master Eleazar—they carry lanterns in their hands and pass from place to place. Oh, believe it not, believe it not. Our hope has set a vision there; we are children to think of it."

She turned from the window impatiently;

but, when a minute had passed, was standing there again with flushed face and a hand that trembled when it drew the curtain back. So great was her hope that the old man dare not utter a word lest disappointment should wait upon it; but, none the less, he told himself that there were men about her home, and he knew that they were her friends.

"My lady," he said, "peradventure they will let an old man come and go as he please. Or, if they will not, there is a way out of Ollerton by which I have passed many a day, for love of the venture in my youth. I purpose now to learn the names of those who fear to show their faces, yet do not fear to swing their lanterns where we may see them. God have you in His keeping if any ill befall me."

She did not thank him, but continued to stand there, by the window, a wan white figure in the gathering darkness.

* * * * *

At the same hour that Master Eleazar quitted Ollerton by a wicket-gate of which none other had the secret, Roy of Calverton sat in the hut of Martin the woodlander, which lay almost within bowshot of the mansion,

yet was so hidden by the thicket that few who passed by could find the crazy door. It was a wretched abode, built of mud and stones; but a cheerful fire burned upon its hearth, and a rushlight, flickering in an iron holder, cast a mellow light upon the faces of the silent company gathered there. Never in his history had old Martin seen so many brought together in that mean abode. For Roy was there; and there was he whom they called the Knight of the Bow, and with them the young priest from the sanctuary; and many a good fellow that had heard the tale and had answered the outlaw's cry, and many a stripling who swore to serve my lady. No room, indeed, in that poor place for a tithe of those whom Sherwood had sent to Ollerton. Caring nought for wind or storm; bearing bows and cudgels in their hands, the strong sons of the forest kept vigil in the woods, and awaited the master's word. "We serve the daughter of Bernard of Ollerton," they said, "let no man fear this night."

It was a bold resolution; but Roy knew well how little resolution would help him at such a time. Every hour brought fresh tidings which warred upon his hope. Every

messenger who beat upon the door of Martin's hut had a gloomier tale still to tell.

"They hold the gates, master—there be ten about the stable doors. I went unseen to the Italian garden and beheld them in Bernard's hall. They swarm about like dogs upon a carcase. And they say that the Lord of Stow himself is in the house. He met my lady when she came in yester-night, and there be strange tales told."

Roy, who until this time had been brooding over the fire, now lent a good ear.

"What mean ye by strange tales? Am I a woman that you fear to loose your tongue?"

The man, an honest shepherd long in Bernard's service, cast down his eyes and began to fumble with the cap he held.

"They said that a blow was struck, master. He had many a hard word for her, and when she would not answer him"—

Roy leaped to his feet, and by the impulse of his anger half unsheathed his sword.

"God," he said, "would you have it that he struck her?"

"The tale is told, master. I do repeat what I have heard."

For a little while Roy stood mute and

pensive. Then he turned to the company about him and spake the oath.

"My friends," he said, "ye can bear witness that I am not a man of many words—yet here and now I swear to you by the Holy Cross of Christ that if the Lord of Stow be not requited at this hour to-morrow night, you shall carry me dead from the house."

A low murmur of assent burst from the company. Well they knew the meaning of that oath. But Roy continued with his questions.

"Has there been no word from Ollerton to-day?" he asked; "has none passed out?"

They answered him that none had quitted since the servants fled, yester-eve, before the soldiers.

"The lanterns stand in the thicket as I commanded you?"

"They so stand, master."

"And ye have seen no light at any window?"

"A lamp burns in the Long Gallery. I thought to see my lady there and one who stood with her—but now the light is gone and returns not."

Roy bit his lip.

"The postern gate over by the stable court,

do you find halberds there, or is that way still open?"

"There were five there at sunset. There are fifty horses tethered in the stalls this night. Ye will find no way by that gate, master."

A burly fellow kneeling by the fire put in his word.

"God send them so to sleep that, when we go in, they will forget to wake again."

"Peace, thou crack-pot," cried his comrade, "if thou hast no better tale than that."

The fellow shrugged his shoulders.

"For my part a stratagem," said he. "God wot, there is naught better than a stratagem when you be pressed."

He subsided and continued to gaze into the fire. None other had the courage to speak, seeing that the master could find nothing to say to them. And if he were silent, they knew well how sorely the night's work troubled him. For the first time in his life Roy of Calverton had no plan.

"I see no way," he said at last, as one driven to the admission; "there is naught to do but to lay down our lives upon it and meet them face to face."

They were about to answer him with some

reassurance and protestation anew of their fidelity, when a loud murmur of voices arose without; and the door being opened at once, and a lantern held up, an uncouth figure appeared there and wrestled with the sentry who had uttered the challenge. It was the figure of Master Eleazar the minister—and never had he come to such strong speech.

"In God's name," cried he, "am I quarry that ye fall upon me so? Where is Roy of Calverton who cometh with such devouring wolves?"

He stood, dazed by the light, in the doorway of the hut. Water of the snow still ran down from his hair and beard; there was half-melted ice upon his gown, and his hands were palsied by the cold. But never had he carried himself so boldly or spoken a braver word.

"My children," said he, "I have come to show a road to Ollerton which yet lies open to them that will follow it. And if any be afraid, I, old man that I be, will go first where the danger is."

CHAPTER X

THE CHOSEN SIX

"Come like shadows, so depart."—*Macbeth.*

TWO hours had elapsed from the moment of Master Eleazar's promise until Roy set out with the six he had chosen to find that gate of Ollerton which no soldier guarded.

"If your road be secret, Master Eleazar," said he, "then the fewer that follow it, the less need of a gentle foot. One thing yet there is to be named—I speak of the chamber wherein the Lord of Stow lies this night."

The minister drew back and seemed to hesitate.

"An eye for an eye—so preached the Pagans," exclaimed he.

"Ay, surely, and this man would have made Pagans of us all."

"A true word, sir, that I will not argue upon. My lord lies in King Harry's room,

which is upon the right hand as you mount the great stairs. To-morrow I will seek to satisfy my conscience—yet to-night I could pray God that I wore another cloak than this."

They laughed at him, for all were keen strung now, ready and primed for the venture as men who follow the road of their choice. They were about to strike a good blow for Bernard's daughter and another for the men of Sherwood Forest. If the dawn found their bodies stark and stiff, they cared not.

"Let those who wish us well keep watch at the western wing. A lantern at the window shall tell of our need. Fear not to show yourselves when that is swung, and let your voices make what music they may. I go to answer the Lord of Stow as one who alone has right in this matter. When that answer is spoken, I will remember again that I have a soul to save."

It was Roy's word of farewell to them, and when he had uttered it, and the six he had chosen had drunk a cup of ale together, they quitted the hut and began to walk swiftly toward the west wing of the house. The darkness of the night befriended them beyond their hope. No moon shone, nor was there any

light of the stars upon the driving snow. Those that had kept the gates of the park during the day kept them no longer, but were asleep in byre and stable. "What had the Lord of Stow to fear from a rabble with staves in their hands?" they argued. The boast sent them to their beds disdainful of any peril that was not peril of their own debauch. Others, within the house, were gathered about the great fires in hall and kitchen; and my lord being still abed of his bout of yester-night, they winked at their posts; and many a one dreamed already of France and of a dark-eyed wench he had left behind him there.

Dark, indeed, it was in the purlieus of the forest; yet neither storm nor darkness kept Master Eleazar from the path he knew so well. Now skirting the great Italian garden which had been Bernard's pride, now passing in the gloom of the chapel walls, now crossing stealthily the grass-plot by the stables, he led the silent company up to the very wall of the west wing; and so, halted at last before a great buttress which mounted to the roof of the Long Gallery, he told them that the door was there.

"As your lives are in my keeping, sirs, not a word again until I give you leave. There

is a secret of the house here known to Bernard and to me. When I press my hand upon this stone, it will turn as a wheel upon its iron. Your own counsels shall be the best thereafter. May God be with you for my lady's sake!"

He dallied no longer with their impatience, but putting a hand upon the stone of the buttress, he turned it very easily and showed them a great aperture through which a man might climb without distress.

"Pass in there and let each man stand until I follow. Go as those that have shoes in their hands; and remember how ye go lest ye hap upon a halberd when least ye look for it."

He pointed to the aperture, and Roy, girding his cloak close about him, bent himself and went under. He appeared to pass through a low arch of stone, but stood presently in a great bare room through which a ray of light came from some window in its roof. So dark was it, nevertheless, that he could find no door to the room; and he halted there until the six were through, and with them Master Eleazar.

"Join hand to hand and follow me," said the minister in a low voice, "the danger grows with every step ye take. Do not despise it if you wish my lady well."

He gave his hand to Roy, and Roy in turn held the hand of the next to him. As a human chain of eight good links, the men passed from the bare room to a narrow passage where there was no light, not so much that one might see a hand before his face. In this dark place they moved for twenty paces; until, indeed, Master Eleazar stooped to lift a panel—and so suddenly gave them sight of each other again and of their environment. With hand upraised to warn them anew of their hazard, the old man showed them a great curtain which hung before him; and when Roy had pulled aside the curtain—yet no more than a hand's-breadth—he knew why the minister was silent.

He stood above the great hall of the house, in a niche upon the first broad landing. The curtain that he had pulled was arras, hung as arras then was, some feet from the panelled wall behind it. Below him, around the ebbing fire upon that mighty hearth, were a dozen men-at-arms, some still wearing their corselets of steel, some clothed in jerkins and breeches of French cloth; but all stretched out before the blaze as dogs upon a day of hunting. What light there was in the hall came from a smoking lamp at the hearth's side and two tapers

burning in the niche of the entresol. There was not, upon the instant, any sign of waking men there nor of sentries at their posts; but when those behind the arras had listened intently for a spell, they heard a step on the landing above them and perceived a man who loitered at the door of the Long Gallery and forbade access to it.

"He is at my lady's door," whispered the minister, who could no longer hold his tongue for excitement of it, "she has suffered much at his hands. If you must deal roughly with any man, I beseech you deal first with him."

Roy shrugged his shoulders. The danger of the place was not to be disdained even by him. He knew that a board's creak would bring that sleeping company to its feet; a full breath might wake the house and set a hundred upon seven. Never had he needed his courage so much.

"Hark ye," he whispered, "when that fellow shows his back to us, I go to change a word with my lord. Wait until ye see me enter his room; then, an' ye love me, forbid that any pass the stairs' head. I count upon your love; for never stood we in such an extremity as this."

He drew his sword, and seven blades were unsheathed behind him. The man at the stairs' head yawned and turned to pace the gallery again. Roy waited a little while until he heard his muffled step, and then boldly drew the arras back and began to mount the stairs.

It was a moment perilous, the hour of his life, as he has said. Would those that slept by the hearth below see that figure mounting, mounting step by step to the vengeance it desired so ardently. Were they, in truth, asleep, or did they but nod? Roy could not answer that question. Foot by foot he made his way. Sometimes he would move in the shadows; once he lay stiff upon the stairs while the sentry halted an instant upon the landing above. But ever he gained upward until at last his breathless comrades beheld him at my lord's door and saw it yield at his advance.

"And," said they, "God keep the fellow now, for surely he will not see the day."

* * * * *

Roy pushed the door open, and when he had passed through, he closed it instantly behind him and set his back against it. The room in which he found himself was the largest that

Ollerton could offer to its guests—an apartment in which kings had slept, and to which Bernard had carried the richest of his treasures. For here stood a great carved bed from Italy, and here a chest which had come from the French King's court; and mirrors from Venice, and candelabra moulded in Rome, and even a carpet from the East. But the greatest boast of that apartment was its carved chimney, carried upward until it touched the frieze of the ceiling, and bedecked with a wondrous tracery of figure and foliage which was the marvel of the country.

A king's room, in truth, yet Roy passed its splendours by when he shut the door and sought the man who had brought him to Ollerton that night. He had looked to find my lord asleep upon the bed, and heavy still, perchance, with his debauch of yester-night; but the bed was empty, and my lord himself, seated in a great oak chair before the fire, as wide awake as ever he had been in his life. Nay, he saw who entered there—and this was odd, that he continued still to sit crouching above the blaze—nor made any movement as of one who would defend himself or seek help of his servants.

Roy shut the door, and keeping a good hold upon his sword, he crossed the room and stood at my lord's side. The light of many tapers shone out to serve him; noble and outlaw, the men could search each other's faces and read the message of their purpose. And the face of one told of anger and of the will to give anger her due; the other was a heavy face, puffed up and swollen, and offering a riddle to him that scanned it.

"My Lord of Stow," said Roy frankly, "I have come here this night to see which is the better man—he who rules at Ollerton, or one that Ollerton has named outlaw and felon. I beg you help me to answer that question."

The Lord of Stow turned in his chair and raised bloodshot eyes which had no confession of fear in them.

"Ha!" he said, "I have answered that question many a time, but never across the bed I slept in."

Roy lowered his sword.

"I like your quality," was his reply; "if it were any other in England, I would name to-morrow for your courtesy. But since it is you, my lord, and for the due you have earned in this house, it shall even be to-night. Nay, to

fight across a bed should be after your own heart. There is many a worse ground."

The Lord of Stow continued to ape the manner of one heavy with sleep and brooding.

"How came you here?"

"By the door I will go hence."

"And if I summon my servants."

"I will kill you before the summons reaches them."

"It reaches them now. Someone knocks."

Roy raised his sword as in a flash, and held it at my lord's throat.

"Bid him enter—he will find your body."

The man did not move. He who knocked upon the door now asked a question.

"Did my lord summon me?"

"I did not summon you. Get you gone."

They could hear his steps growing fainter in the corridor. When all sound of them had died away, Roy spoke again.

"You try my patience, John of Stow," he said; "must I kill you as a butcher kills a sheep?"

"Unless you put a sword into my hands? Would you have me fight you with a staff?"

"I see your sword by the great chest

there; take it up, for there have been words enough."

For a spell my lord did not move, the record says. But driven to it at last, and very reluctantly, he raised himself from the chair and stretched his limbs.

"'Twill be an odd affair," said he.

"To sharpen the relish of it."

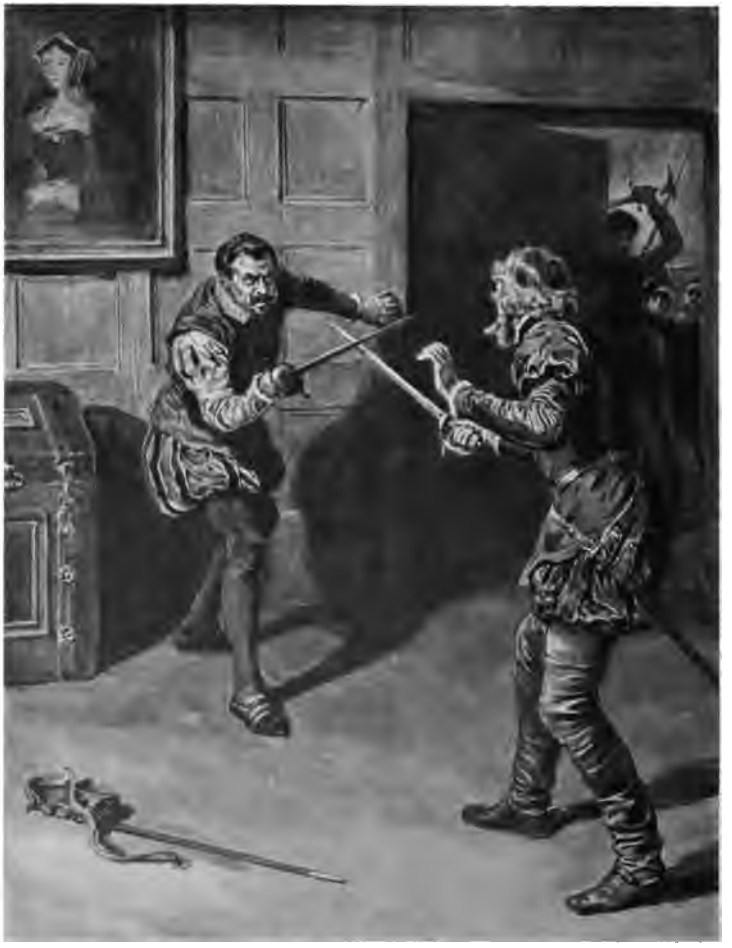
"My sword lies there by the great chest as you say."

"Take it up, my lord—take it up ere I lose patience."

"You have a nice wit—'twere a pity to cut at it."

"It shall be sharpened upon your villainies. Come, my glass is nigh run out."

He lowered his blade again, and watched the burly ill-shaped man who crossed the room slowly and made pretence to find his sword and to try the edge of it. But my Lord of Stow played a knave's part from the first—and now, when he was a little way from his adversary, he took an impulse, and leaped with a young man's agility across the bed to the door, and began to clamour for help. So quick he was that Roy stood taken all aback; nevertheless, coming to his wits before the surprise was



THE SWORDS RANG OUT WITH A MERRY MUSIC

wholly executed, he had my lord at the sword's point in the very door of the room—and they two stood to that affair.

All the house was awake now. Men-at-arms leaped to their feet and came shouting up the stairs. The six that Roy had chosen burst from their hiding-place behind the arras to hold the landing at peril of their lives. The Lord of Stow himself, with sweat upon his forehead, bawled incessantly for aid. But Roy had pinned him to the wall. The swords rang out with a merry music. "I have thee, valiant against women—to-night thy book is written." It was the outlaw's boast.

The clash of steel, the loud oath, turmoil within, turmoil without; the cries of men who had steel at their hearts; at the stairs' head, six that no twenty there might pass; in distant halls and kitchens, panic of the night and of the surprise; in the woods without, horsemen riding wildly south for Nottingham, to tell a doleful tale. But to Roy an instant of quickening delight. The man whose bloodshot eyes looked into his own, the man whose savage mouth was now puckered up in timorous resolution, the man who had struck Barbara of Ollerton—the heart of that man his good blade

sought, and he knew that it would not seek in vain.

"Foe to women, be a foe to men this night. Must I kill thee like a sheep? Engage, thou braggart, thou young wife's whip, engage, engage."

The taunt was a spur upon the coward's hesitation. He raised his sword, and the blades met with a shower of sparks as from a smith's anvil. The outlaw had but one object, to kill the man who stood before him. The Lord of Stow sought only to pass the stairs to his servants below. No mean swordsman, a boaster who had won the right to boast in many a tavern brawl, he would have played a good part had it been any other but Roy of Calverton —at whose name his company had refused to march, whose history and whose achievement all the forest told him. But now the tavern bravo was half-drunk with wine; he heard the clamour as a brawl of hell; the lights danced before his eyes; instinct alone kept the point from his heart. He must die, there at the stairs' head, that Sherwood might mock his name.

"Hither, hither!—do you not hear me, ye milk-livered cravens? Is there none to stand

with me? Oh, have at them, have at them! It is I, your lord, who calls—God's faith, must I die before your eyes?"

Roy's touch waxed more sure upon his sword as he heard the pitiful appeal.

"Ha!" he cried triumphantly, "we need no audience, my Lord of Stow, where death is the player. What, dost fear to die? A craven in a cloak of brass! Play on, thou braggart, play on, for I will surely kill thee."

He had courage of the truth, and driving the man before him toward the place where his comrades held the stairs' head, he lunged at him cleverly upon the very brink of the topmost step. It was a brave stroke; but as he played it there happened that which was stranger than any event of a night eventful. For my lord, springing backward to parry the thrust, missed his footing and fell headlong down the stairs; and his servants pressing upward in the dim light, and unable to see who it was that fell upon them, one of them drove a sword through his body, and, before the steel was withdrawn again, my Lord of Stow was dead.

But Roy, seeing what had befallen, ran swiftly to the Long Gallery, and finding my

lady, standing patiently at the door of her chamber, he put his arms about her neck, and holding her close to him, he told her that he had kept the oath even as he had sworn it at the chapel of the Sanctuary.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUSH

"Under which king?"—SHAKESPEARE.

"HE is dead," he said, as he held her close to him, and raised her trembling lips to his, "the debt of yesterday is paid, dear wife. His own have struck the blow—ay, thou art glad?"

She whispered that she was glad; but recollection of the hour and place compelling her, she drew back from his embrace presently, and spoke of his own condition.

"And you, dear husband, you come to me unharmed?"

"Ay, unharmed as them that follow and befriend me. Think not of that, sweetheart—for there is a work to do."

She clung to him anew, fearing that he would return to the stairs' head whereat his fellows stood; but he pressed his questions

upon her, ıor he knew that the moment was perilous.

"Is there no way, no staircase here, by which you may pass to the forest? I go to argue with my lord's men, but if the argument prevail not, 'tis well you should not hear it. Hast no way of passage, dear wife?"

She raised her pretty face to his, and answered with the courage of her race—

"Though there were a hundred ways, I would not leave your side. If my lord's men lack a master, shall not they find one in you? Let your argument be that, dear husband, and they will hear it readily."

For an instant he thought upon it. The course to which she prompted him was worthy of Bernard's daughter.

"I come to a good counsellor," said he, "that notion passed me by. We may find our safety in it. Stand here yet a moment, sweetheart, and when I raise my voice, show a flambeau at your lattice. There are friends of ours in the thickets yonder, and their argument may even prevail above my own."

He stooped to kiss her again, and so returned to those that waited him. A hush had fallen upon the house now. In the dim light of the

great hall men carried tapers to peer into the dead Earl's face, and to tell each, in low voices, that my lord was gone, and that his own had killed him. Elsewhere troopers loitered in awestruck groups; but some pointed to the six upon the landing above—and none had yet sheathed his sword.

"They hesitate upon it," said Roy, "and one is lacking to us. Who, then, has fallen?"

They indicated a body sprawling upon the stairs—the body of Renfrew of Calverton, who had been Roy's best friend.

"He fell at the first attack—God rest his soul. There is no other hurt, if it be not for Sir Percival that nurses a scratch. Think you they will engage again?"

Roy walked out into the light, and stood where those below could see him. He knew that there were fifty armed men in the house, and that, but for the terror of his name, he and his would now be lying as Renfrew of Calverton, stiff and stark for the new day to find.

"Men of Stow," he cried suddenly, "your lord is dead. Will ye go forth now, lacking a master, or will ye serve one who is ready to give your lives this night?"

His clarion voice was like a note of music

ringing through that hall and the corridors that gave upon it. The troopers about my lord's body raised themselves from their knees and looked at the speaker. Other groups, that discussed the new attack, ceased to whisper, and came to the foot of the staircase. But no man answered Roy, and so he spoke to them again.

"You that have followed the hard road, you that have served the servant of hell, will ye seek a new way and a new service this night, or shall I bid my own come in to repay? Think well upon it, men, for that which ye say now, to-morrow ye shall not recall. 'Tis Roy of Calverton who puts the question, and never asked he fidelity of any man twice."

Again that hush prevailed in the great hall. Men looked at each other as those questioning; but none so bold as to answer the argument. When a little spell of silence had passed, a voice was raised, and it was that of my lord's page René, who had ridden with the outlaw from the Abbey of the Holy Well.

"You are but six, Roy of Calverton," cried he, "show us your fellows and we will believe."

The lad's temerity loosed other tongues.

"Ay, what fellows hath he? 'Tis a

woman's tale, friends. See how he will tell it, when we hang him from the battlements presently."

But René the page, anxious to do Roy a service, would not be silenced.

"Let nothing be done in haste, lest we repent," cried he. "There was never a boast yet that Roy of Calverton has not made good. Bid him show us why we should serve him, and then shall he have our answer."

"Nay, are we to take children for our counsellors? Let the man first be cut down and then we will hold argument with him!"

Roy, standing as a figure of stone above them, heard their dispute, and realised that one ill-spoken word would bring that company upon him. There, below, was a great crowd of armed men, men of many countries, lusting for his blood and for a last debauch in that house of death. A taunt, a movement, would send them as hounds to his throat. He stood smiling like one who feared nothing, either from his own temper or from their enmity.

"The lad is right," said he, "if ye would serve a new master, ye must know what kind of a man he is. Let those who follow my service bear witness to it. They stand in

the woods at your door. Even as I send a messenger to them of my will this moment, they will answer me. I bid you hearken to their voices!"

He lifted his hand for silence in the place; and all listened because of their curiosity. For there was no man there who knew that my lady stood at her lattice with a flambeau in her hand; and anon, when all had given an attentive ear for a moment, and could swear that Roy had not moved from the stairs, they heard a low murmur of voices—at first faint and wavering like the murmur of waters, but anon thunderous and distinct, a mighty clamour as of an army advancing—a human avalanche upon that house. And at the sound, knowing not what miracle had raised it, there were some who fell upon their knees craving mercy of Roy; and some who rushed wildly to and fro seeking escape; and others who cried with all their voices—"We serve, we serve!" A very pandemonium it was of men shouting that the outlaws were in the house; of others striving upward to Roy's feet; of those who did but wave their swords and protest again—"We serve, we serve!" And to this wild scene there came, when a few minutes had passed,

that honest band which long had waited in the woods, but now ran out to its master's help, and swarmed through the doors and the windows of the house, and filled the hall and all the rooms about, and raised anew with lusty voices the cry that so often had led them on —"A Roy, a Roy of Calverton!"

Higher surged that human tide, higher yet, and higher; a serried press of faces upturned, of arms outstretched, of swords shining in the dim light, of staves wavering. So loud was the clamour that many heard it in the forest's heart; so fierce were the cries of triumph that all the house echoed as with the turbulence of an army come sacking to a fallen city. But Roy stood, like some prince of men, a noble figure above the figures of those who loved him; and the music of the night was this cry of theirs, "We serve, we serve!"

* * * * *

No man thought of sleep in Ollerton that night, and when the stress of victory had passed, and those who had been the servants of the Lord of Stow had fled the place, or were sworn to a new service in that house, the Lady Barbara came out among her new guests to receive their homage and to requite them. Never had

Bernard's home opened its doors to a gathering so strange. Woodlanders were there, and honest fellows from the hills, and shepherds from their huts, and many a one who had been called outlaw, and many a trooper who had tales of other lands; and, gathering in the splendid hall of banquets, they keep the feast again, and drank of wines that never yet had been lifted to their lips. Dawn found them still within the house. The tale of this night, they knew, was being told in many a town about Sherwood Forest—the story of it repeated to many a troubled sheriff; but for the morrow they cared not a straw. Roy of Calverton would lead them to victory as ever he had led.

Tapers burning brightly below, winecups passing, the merry ballad, the clamour of tongues, the cry of triumph, the temper of plenty; but in my lady's chamber the word of love, the protestation anew, the sweeter joy of possession and of promise. Roy was there alone with her; and standing together at her lattice, they looked out upon the broad domain of Ollerton, and watched the dawn-light as it waked the sleeping forest and showed to them the glories of the frosted fields and all that

witching world of whitened bough and jewelled tracery.

"How shall I repay—what gift anew can tell of my love?" she asked, as his arm closed about her and he lifted her face to his.

"You have given me yourself. What else should I seek?"

She was silent a little while; and when she spoke, she betrayed her fear for him.

"They will send from Nottingham. They will tell of this wherever my lord's friends gather. Ye have won safety for the night, dear heart, but what of to-morrow?—ah, God! what of to-morrow?"

He knew not what to answer her, for the morrow, indeed, must be the day of reckoning. From Nottingham, as she had promised him, the challenge must come; the call of that justice which the forest alone might enable him to defy.

"We have always the refuge of stout hearts, the haven of our love," said he, "and in that is our true security. Nay, who shall harm me while Sherwood's gate is open and your road is my road? The morrow to the morrow. It will need more than a sheriff's oath to drive out Roy of Calverton when he hath the mind to stay!"

He sought to cheer her with a man's good confidence, but her woman's wit read him more truly, and there were tears in her eyes when she answered him again—

"Stout hearts ye have, dear Roy, and the haven of your love; but how of those who will come in the Queen's name because of yesterday? Think not that this shall be hid by Sherwood as any woodman's brawl or passing of sheriff's men. You know that it cannot be. Had not the Lord of Stow friends enough that some must cry it in the palace where the Queen may hear. Nay, think me not cruel—thou art all to me now, and the day is dark as mine own heart!"

He had no answer for her, but fell to pacing the room like one whom thought had mastered. This little wise head, so dear to him, so hardly won—he knew full well that it spake as he must speak anon. Through all that good country the hue and cry would go presently. Even the forest might not shelter him from Mary's justice and the judge's officer. And what of Ollerton then? What of my lady's house, which he had sworn to hold for her?

"They shall not drive thee out," he said,

but with the voice of one who first must convince himself; "they shall not drive thee out while there is a bow to bend in Sherwood or a smith to forge a blade. Let that be thy consolation, dearest wife. Nay, the omen went with me and it shall serve to the end. The shield of Roy of Calverton bears hope for its blazon, and is lifted still by Sherwood's grace. Was not yesterday so dark that no night of love's winter may ever surpass it? Oh, believe me, sweet wife, this Ollerton shall be thine while brave men serve me and owe thee gentle allegiance. Have I failed thee yet from the beginning that you should charge me now?"

She put him to shame with her loving rebuke, and, resting in his embrace, a ray of the sunlight fell upon them, and found them heart to heart in that hour of their resolution.

* * * * *

The day broke with a winter glory of the tempered sun. In Ollerton men moved restlessly, some looking from the windows for news of the pursuit; others saying that the sheriff would ride in ere nightfall and that the end would be then.

"The Lord of Stow had many friends.

What will keep them from this house, masters? Is Roy of Calverton a new prophet that he may work a miracle? They will burn it, byre and barn, and ye who owe allegiance, how will ye dance when the feet swing high? A fool's truce, I say. Let us hasten hence lest worse befall."

So croaked a craven trooper of my lord's remnant, and anon with his fellows fled the house and the woods. One by one the laggards dropped away, until at midday the archers alone were left to Roy of Calverton. And even these must turn their eyes oft to the forest, asking each other, "How many hours ere the news be known?" Their master, they told you, was without plot or plan, as he had never been before. Never had they seen him surrender to circumstance as he seemed to surrender that day. Yet no man begrudged the faith he always had given. The master would find a road though a thousand barred it.

Now, the outlaw spent the early hours of the morning in the room where the body of the dead man lay, and thereafter he called to him one of my lord's troopers and began to question him very closely.

"This man ye served, why lingered he at Nottingham?"

The fellow was taken aback at the charge, and began to mouth an excuse very clumsily.

"They say that he fell from his horse; yet, sir, I was not so well advanced in his company that I know whether it be true or false. If your worship so desires it, inquiry shall be made"—

"At Leicester, where my lord lingered. Was it not so, Master Tonguestruck?"

"Indeed, your worship, my lord did bide at Leicester no longer than a man might crack a flask and kiss a maid."

"Ha, and my Lord of Suffolk, what of him? Was there maid also for his humour and flask to crack? Ye have a poor memory, my man. Yet I have known more sullen speak when Roy of Calverton had a mind to make them."

The trooper shifted uneasily at the charge, and observing that Roy held the dead Earl's papers in his hand, and that nothing further was to be got by lies, he began to tell a plainer story.

"There be some," said he, "who wish no good thing to Queen Mary or her house. God forbid that I should number myself with such

rogues, unless it be that your worship is of their way of thinking so that a man may speak honestly before you. My Lord of Stow called all men brothers, like many a fine gentleman, yet not so loud, your honour, that it should be heard at every inn-door; and, God wot, 'twas little he got of Mary when his letters to Northumberland came into Her Majesty's hands. So off goes he to the Midlands, where men do say that if the new Queen hold her head so high, she be like to buss humility, which is no thing for the priests, as your honour bears witness. Nay, sir, I was with my lord for five years in the wars, and never cared he a crack for argent or sable be the crowns put down and the words fair. So what should befall at Leicester but that the Duke has speech with him, and the red wine is drawn, and 'God save you all, my brave fellows,' says he, 'for ye will surely hang ere the Easter Mass;' and that, by the Holy Word, I believe we shall, and your worship no higher than the rest."

He stood for very want of breath; and Roy, merry at his tale, which was also a message of his own safety, pushed his quest still further, as a judge with a prisoner.

"Ay," said he, "an' I hang, man, ye shall have pride of place beside me, I do assure you. Disturb not yourself with any pride which would swing from a lower peg. Indeed, ye deserve a considerable honour in that ye make the Duke known to me and his good intention. He hath his camp at Leicester, you say—then the standard is lifted and the troop rides in already. Nay, tell me truly, for this is a great matter."

"A great matter, your honour, and so assuredly it is that it shall be a matter of life or death to some in London town before many weeks be passed. I am no mouthing clerk in gown and stole to chide a flock or set myself before my betters—yet if a Spaniard be indeed coming for the Queen's bed, and the irons grow hot for them that lag at the Massing, then will I saddle up for London town, and none more willing. Let your worship remember what an honourable employment might be found in my Lord Duke's camp, where a sheriff's ears shall be set for blazon, and they that cry 'Justice!' shall have it of the pikemen. God wot, sir, were I in your honour's shoes this day I would draw no rein until Leicester's gate were passed and the Duke's cause mine own!"

Roy put him to silence with a sudden word, very quick and unlooked for.

"Nay," said he, "if I draw rein, it shall be at London's palace. Wilt go there, rogue, to find a noble rope? I promise thee a place before the Duke."

He had turned upon the trooper so swiftly, that for a little while the man was deaf to his meaning; but, discerning the way of it at last, he fell to cursing and swearing, and with a great oath would have it that Queen Mary knew no trustier servant. But Roy drove him from the house, and hastening to my lady's side, he gave her the glad news.

"Sweet wife," said he, "thou hast bidden me choose according to my discretion; and I have found a road for thee, and it lies even to the Queen's house and those who will seek me therein."

She turned to him with a cry of fear and dread.

"London! London! what meaning hath this?"

"The meaning of thy safety, which I would find."

"Ye speak a jest, dearest Roy!"

"No jest, dear wife, but of my love I speak,

saying, 'Ride with me to London and I will make thy estate secure, and win thy pardon!'"

My lady knew not how to answer him. In the halls below men spoke of the hours passing, and said, "This night Roy of Calverton must answer to the sheriff."

But one of them, wiser than his fellows, spoke of my Lord of Suffolk then in camp at Leicester, and to his friends he said—

"Let him look to his steps. It may even be that he shall find no Queen in London when he rides in."

END OF BOOK I

BOOK II—THE CITY

CHAPTER XII

THE ADVENTURERS

"There is nothing so quick to raise the hopes and fears of men—ay, and of women too—as a city's lights seen a little while after the hour of sunset upon a winter's day, when the traveller bethinketh him of meat and lodging, and the perils of the way no more disturb his serenity."
—*Old Chronicle.*

IN the beginning of the year 1554, towards the close of a sunny day, a little company of travellers rode into London by the great highway from York; and being come to the common at Finchley, such of the wayfarers as knew the place looked joyously for the city's lights, and for that warm welcome which the inns at Charing should vouchsafe them. There were forty of the adventurers, says the record, both men and women of the poorer sort and of quality; and while you might have seen archers

from the forest by Sherwood, priests from the abbeys which the great Henry's reign had closed, and even merchants from the northern towns, joined for security to the bowmen's troop, nevertheless, the gossips by the wayside pointed first to the figure of the Lady Barbara of Ollerton, and of Roy, her husband, and asked by what means such folk had happened upon such a venture. Which curiosity had reason, both in the appearance of the travellers and in the friendships which the road had found for them. As for the man, he was dressed beyond the ordinary in a tunic of Lincoln green, with fine boots of leather, and an ample cape embroidered with fur, and fine spurs of the purest gold; and he rode with that good assurance which spoke of mastership and of authority. All obeyed him readily, and even the priests did not dispute his ruling; a word, it may be, of his story having been dropped here and there at an inn-door, to win some sympathy for his enterprise, and not a little doubt of its accomplishment. Long a fugitive, this man who rode so bravely had won the allegiance of Sherwood Forest as none since Robin and his fellows. His marriage, men said, was a story from the fables. "He goes

to London to crave pardon of the Queen," the gossips added; to whom the knowing ones made answer: "Let him keep a good horse to bring him out again, for assuredly he shall have need of him, and of one for my lady, who is not of the faith."

This was their word as the cavalcade passed on in the twilight, and one by one the strange figures disappeared from their view: a word of praise for the woman's face, and of pity for the man who would befriend her. In London, they foretold, there would be many to question Barbara of Ollerton; many to ask the strange history of him who now rode so gallantly beside her. For those were the beginnings of the gloomy days when the shadow of the Spaniard loomed already above the city; and men remembered in whispers that the foreigner was in and the devil was out, and that it would be a sorry hour for England when Philip came from Spain and won the kingdom for his dowry. In all of which they but echoed the gossip of London city — as good neighbours oftentimes regaled by a passing traveller who drew rein to feed their wonder.

Now, Roy of Calverton had been for many a year in Sherwood Forest, and knew little of

the Queen's will, nor of those swift events which befell upon her accession. Set upon a purpose, and confident of some achievement, he carried a great hope to the city; and spoke of it often to my lady at his side as one who would ask of her good courage, and that abiding faith which first had won her love. Many times as they approached the outskirts he would bid her be of good cheer; nor would he hear of an evil outcome, or consent at any time to abate that expectancy which had led him from his stronghold in the North.

"We shall lie the night at Charing, but to-morrow to the house of my Lord of Taunton," he said, when Finchley was passed, and the silent countryside encouraged them to confidence. "I would not go in to-night, dear heart, for that would be to knock thrice upon their gate; and he who knocks thrice may lack the welcome he looks for. Nevertheless, my lord has promised us shelter, and I see that it will be no little security to enjoy the protection of such a house. Let us not forget that we are as those who go to cast all upon a single throw, and if it befall that God is not with us in the venture, then have we naught but our own courage and great love for our

consolation. Yet of that I will not think, for my hand is set to the plough, and, God willing, I will never look back. Nay, let us carry a brave resolution, for that alone will befriend us in London city."

She answered him as he would have wished, for the record goes that there was no braver heart in England that night than Barbara of Ollerton, the outlaw's wife.

"Your road is my road, dear husband—to the darkness or the sunshine; I care not if you be with me. Yet I would not hide it that we have need of our courage and of any friendship we can find in London city. If I think kindly of my home, it is because I go to a house of strangers who knew not my father's name, and who may hear mine with no pleasure of the history. Do not count me less worthy of your praise if I must hold Ollerton always in my affections. Nay, I go to London as one who says, 'To-morrow it will be homeward again.'"

She spoke a little wistfully, like one weary of the fatigue of that long and perilous journey, and lacking something of the hope of it, now that it drew near to accomplishment. But a month ago she had been the mistress of a fair estate, winning gladly the obedience of

a loving people, ruling with a gentle hand that fair domain which Bernard, her father, had left to her. And now she was a wife, and had laid her allegiance at the feet of this man whom the world called "outlaw" and "exile;" the very dominion she had claimed threatened to pass from her sway; even the life of him to whom she had given her affections was in peril, men said. In London alone was pardon to be won, the kingdom to be found again. None knew better than Roy of Calverton the hazard of that for which they wrought. This London city which gave so much should give them all or give them nothing. That had been his determination from the outset.

"Homeward again, God grant it!" he retorted, as he pressed his horse close to hers, and covered her outstretched hand with his leather gauntlet. "Homeward again when the work is done and the clouds are lifted. I speak with no confidence to which the day doth not entitle me. Yet, dear wife, were the price we asked a thousand times that which I shall demand of them, nevertheless they will pay it when my story is told. Ay, fear nothing. A house for a house, and for a dynasty, dominion. Many a year in Sherwood

Forest have those about us owned no king but Roy of Calverton, nor asked any right but the good service they yield to him. In London city it shall not be different. The friendship of the forest goes with us, dear wife. Account it no little thing, since it has given me my right to live."

Seeking to encourage her yet more, the story says, he began to renew the jest of it, winning laughter from the group and a new promise of their fidelity. And, therefrom, he passed to a new avowal of his intention. To-morrow, very early in the morning, they would ride to the house of my Lord of Taunton, and there claim of the janitor that hospitality which had been offered to them. And, being established in the house, it would remain to seek audience of the Queen and to plead their cause before her.

"They say that she hath a right sense of justice and will lend a ready ear to those that come obediently. The jails are already open to such as treason did not charge, and if there be a pardon, as I am told, my name may well be written there. But I go to her with other claims, dear wife, and they shall make good what is lacking in the law. She hath need

of such service as I and mine can give this day. Nay, if the truth of it be as I think, her own case is no less perilous than ours. Let us press on, then, with good hearts. Yonder are the lights, and beyond them lies London town."

They had passed the hills about Finchley by this time, and traversing the dangerous common in all security (they being forty in company, and armed, moreover, as few that rode abroad in those days), they came now to that stretch of heathland which borders upon the northward heights of the city; and thence, looking down through a break in the woods, they beheld many lanterns clustered together, like constellations of stars, and above them a loom of crimson in the sky, like a beacon shining above the city of their desire. And it was here, while still speaking of their intention, that they overtook others upon the road, and so encountered as sorrowful a spectacle as any which the journey had given them. For hereby an old man, seated upon a grey horse, was being carried by the sheriff's men to judgment; and asking of what circumstance he was, the men answered that it was Master Latimer, the Bishop of Worcester, being taken to his trial upon a charge of heresy.

Now, those in the North had heard but little at that time of any being accused for the faith's sake, nor was it known to them that Parliament had made new the forgotten Statutes against Heresy which were of Henry's reign. The new Queen, men said, would practise her own faith, and leave all men to theirs; in which belief Roy of Calverton, caring as little for Pope as for devil, set out with confidence to deride the fears of those who warned him. But now, while he rode at the good Bishop's side, he remembered the friendly words, and began to ask the old man, very curiously, as to that which was charged against him. Upon which Master Latimer, professing that he knew not, if so be that the faith of Christ were not a felony, went on to wonder that a man should ride into London when he might another way.

"We go to a place of dangers, sirs, and God knows what of His justice shall be our portion hereafter. It may be that this England of ours will sorely need those who know best how to befriend her. I speak as it is given to me. The time is past when any servant of our Lord and Master may hold his peace."

He went on to tell them how that Parliament had renewed the Statutes, and how a prying

spirit was abroad, each man asking his neighbour, not of his love or charity, but of his Massing, and of what he said and did in the company of the priests. Yet so gentle was his word, and so readily they found a fathership of his counsels, that even his guards gave a willing ear and bade him not to be silent.

"Be of good faith, for in that shall your justification be, masters. Let no man compel your 'ay' when the Book has written 'nay.' And for me grieve not at all, for I have my Master's voice, and how shall I turn back when He is calling me?"

They answered him: "God guard thee, Master Latimer, and bring thee to thy home again;" and he, in turn, gave them blessing; while for Roy of Calverton and the Lady Barbara, his wife, he added a word of warning, saying that he would sooner hear of their taking any other road than the one which carried them to London city.

"A place of peril, sir. I would even one should say to you, 'Turn back; seek your home again,' even as the Wise Men were warned in the visions. Nevertheless, I speak in ignorance, which ye may not account good friendship."

He looked at my lady, the record says, and observing her youth and prettiness, and the fear which possessed her, he bade her be of good cheer. And the city's lights now shining very clearly in the vale below them, all cried, "London! London!" and even the horses pressed on with lighter step as though yonder were the goal of their desire.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WOLF TO THE CLOISTER

"These can lie,
Flatter and swear, deprave, inform,
Smile and betray."—BEN JONSON.

AT nine o'clock on the following morning, Roy of Calverton, bearing a letter from my Lord of Taunton, came to the palace at St. James's, where the court was then held; and, disdaining any parley with the ushers, he demanded audience of Her Majesty. To such as challenged him at the gate, and afterwards in the ante-rooms, he let it be known that the matter was of grave urgency; and his manner being not a little authoritative, and his dress such as rarely had been seen at Queen Mary's court, the news of it was carried quickly to my Lord of Norfolk, and afterwards to Gardiner, the Chancellor.

"A messenger from the North upon an affair of urgency; one who has been thirty hours in

the saddle that Her Majesty may have his tidings."

Now, many messengers had ridden in from the northern counties during the first year of Mary's reign; and rare was the day when some news of the doubtful country did not come to the Chancellor's ears to play upon his apprehensions or to awake his fears; but of late, report had lulled him to some security, and he had begun to think of an affair more pressing than that of the shiremen and their complaints. For which reason, one messenger the more gave him but little concern, and being unaware of any business which rightly might be named "urgent," he sent a page to the door to bid the Northman wait until such time as his lordship's curiosity might conveniently be gratified.

So behold Roy of Calverton in an ante-room of the palace, looking patiently for that good hour when he must seek his pardon and declare the price of it. Many years had passed since last he set foot in London city. The glamour of pageantry and all the splendour of dress about him seemed as a picture of a past which he thought to have forgotten. In the old days, when, as Count of Brives, his father had presented him at the French King's court, he

had known, perchance, a scene more splendid, a life as full of joyaunce and display as any which London could show him; but long years in Sherwood Forest, the dominion of wood and thicket, the silence of the groves, had blotted the picture out; so that now, when it came again, it was as a thing unreal, a puppet show into the spirit of which he could not enter. A sturdy Northman, the friend of liberty, blunt of speech, self-appointed guardian of the forest's justice, he beheld this group of priests and esquires, of jesting women and self-seeking men, with that contempt of estate and authority which the forest fastness had so truly taught him. And he, in turn, was observed by them as closely; pointed out as a rare figure for their gossip; remembered as Roy the Outlaw; esteemed not a little for the courage which carried him to that place. A king of men in stature, his long hair falling upon a cloak of Lincoln green, his velvet cap tossed negligently to the seat behind him, his high boots of leather —a jest upon fashion—his spurs of gold (for these were my lady's gifts to him)—assuredly such a man had not escaped remark wherever circumstance had placed him. And of his story, not a little was known even at the

palace of St. James's. He had ruled Sherwood as an outlaw, yet had ruled it with a royal justice, men said. Never had the poor and needy sought him in vain; no abbey gate, they knew, which did not open at his knock. And now he had come to London to crave pardon in those days of a doubtful amnesty. Men wondered at such temerity, and feared it; the women in their hearts wished him "God speed."

A full hour passed in this remembrance of the old time and doubt of the new before any word was sent to him, or the Chancellor so much as remembered his request. Once, indeed, he heard a great stir in the courtyard of the palace, and, looking from the window, he perceived a company of gentlemen upon horseback, and in the midst of them the Queen herself, dressed very sombrely in black, and wearing that grave countenance of which report had spoken with no kindness. But the cavalcade passed out with little observation and no welcome of the people at the gate; and thereafter another hour went by before Roy was summoned. When at last a groom called him, he answered with a word of raillery more prudent than his impatience—

"Let not my lord so much as miss a Paternoster when the safety of this kingdom hangs upon that which I shall say to him. Nay, sirs, I had rather wait some days yet if my lord's devotions be hindered by my coming!"

They heard with astonishment, for few were bold enough to defy the Chancellor publicly; but Roy of Calverton was ever bold in jest; and knowing not what to say to him, they led him to the audience, and promised him a gibbet for his recompense.

* * * * *

My Lord of Winchester, but recently made Lord High Chancellor of England, has been shrewdly judged by many that came after him; but in his own time the city had yet to hear his name with feelings other than those of admiration for a zealous servant of the faith, and for one who had paid for his fidelity by long years of dour imprisonment during Edward's reign. As Roy of Calverton found him upon that morning of January, in a little library adjoining the Queen's apartment, he was a man of thoughtful mien, well filling the capacious chair in which he sat; one, moreover, who had no little subtlety of grace

and conversation for those he favoured. Schooled since his youth to be a judge of men, he sat for some while casting a close glance at the suppliant who now claimed right of audience; and when he had satisfied himself that it was an honest face, he put down the pen with which he had been toying, and leaned back in his chair that he might listen patiently.

"You come upon a matter of urgency," he said slowly, "and you are Roy, the outlaw of Calverton. A strange purpose, sir, that brings the wolf to the cloister-gate."

Roy seated himself at the table, so close to the Chancellor that he could have put a hand upon him, and answered with much readiness—

"Roy of Calverton, as your lordship says. I account it an honour that my name is known to you. Yet, my lord, it is of others and not of myself that I come here to speak."

The Bishop, still leaning back in his chair, and pressing his finger-tips together, took up the point adroitly—

"Wisdom, Master Roy; indeed, I perceive you to be wise, for, let a little of your story be known, and Her Majesty's Judges may wish to hear both preface and conclusion."

He observed the outlaw closely, meaning to hint at a threat, yet not to press it unless the need arose. But Roy took up the words, and bluntly, as his fashion was, he grappled with the challenge.

"Let them hear it when and where they please, my lord. Am I not come to London for that? Let them say that I am Roy of Calverton, outlaw since Henry's reign, the servant of the forest, the master of the archers; ten years called 'King of Calverton' by them that love me. Let them say that I am he who played the jest, riding to save Barbara of Ollerton from my Lord of Stow, who would have compelled her to the altar. Let them say that I killed my lord in fair fight, and am ready to answer to those who have his honour in their keeping. Let them say that I have ridden now to London to serve my Queen, in a matter where no other may help her. Ha! my lord, will your Judges listen to that? The wolf is at the cloister-gate, as you say; but those within would be wise to open. I speak an enigma: be it yours to read the riddle aright."

Now, Gardiner, the Chancellor, was accustomed to deal with divers orders of men—with

sycophants and dissemblers, and those that spoke the honeyed word, or sought, in the garb of candour, to cloak their disloyalties. But such a man as Roy of Calverton he had never met before.

"Hath the wolf, then, lost his teeth, that the brethren shall fondle him?" he asked, a smile upon his puckered face. "Nay, if I am to read the riddle aright, be it yours to help me, Master Roy. And first, of the Queen's business. I were no true servant of Her Majesty to be deaf to that. Speak, and you will find a ready listener, I promise you."

Roy drew his chair closer to my lord's table, and taking in his hand a sheet of paper that lay thereon, he, to the Chancellor's great surprise, set it down as though waiting for the other to write.

"My lord," he said, "you bid me to be frank with you, and I make haste to comply. Pledge me there security for my wife's estate, and for myself a pardon, and I will speak with all my heart."

It was a bold offer of a compact, and in that sense my lord was quick to be suspicious of it.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "This King of Calverton dictates, then, to his unwilling subjects!"

"Not so, my lord. But, as a faithful subject, he offers them yeoman service."

"Upon a matter wherein they are ignorant"—

"But wherein they may be enlightened before the hour has passed."

"Having security of an outlaw's word?"

"Of the word of a man who never yet lied, my lord."

"Yet who is afraid to speak the truth. Come, what security have I?"

"The honour of a man who will answer for that honour to any in England. Write me the pardon, and I will save Queen Mary's throne this day. Write it not, my lord, and the month shall find you old in regret. I speak an enigma: God grant that others may not answer the riddle for me!"

He spoke with an unwonted earnestness, putting off for the nonce that air of security and command so habitual to him.

And my lord, who was quick to judge men, said in his heart: "This fellow comes with great tidings." Nevertheless, the manner of it was so strange, the threads were so many,

that he must cloak his impatience. And so he fell to the subtler mood again.

"They say that Barbara of Ollerton is not of the faith," he hazarded, looking the other full in the face. "Does she ride into London, then, at such a time?"

"My lord, a woman is of her husband's faith; if not, then hath she no faith at all!"

The Chancellor sighed.

"And being of her husband's faith is not afraid to share her husband's peril?"

"There is no woman in the kingdom to-day less afraid — be it of Queen or Chancellor— than Barbara of Ollerton!"

The Chancellor laughed at the taunt. The oddness of it pleased him, they say.

"By the word of Christ," he exclaimed, "I do believe you, truly!"

"And believing, will write as I wish?"

He asked it very earnestly; but my lord, fencing with him still, took up his pen, and very deliberately he began to make a new point upon it.

"Master Roy," said he at last, "I will be very plain with you. The death of the Lord of Stow, and that which you did in Bernard's house, was made known to us by

messenger but yesterday. Imagine, then, what little hope I had of seeing in London this day the man against whom such things are charged. Still less was it in my thoughts that he might come with promises and threats, as one who is the master of the Judges. I should be no true friend of yours did I hide it from you that you are in some danger here, or if I forbear to say that the mistress of Ollerton had been wiser to avoid the city. But you are here, and you seek a compact, and I must answer for Her Majesty. Let me hear of your tidings, and I will answer you upon the instant at what price they are to be valued. Are we not as two that barter, while one has not seen the merchandise which the other would sell?"

Now Roy perceived the intent of it, and nimbly turning the words, he yet replied in all honesty—

"Ye have not seen the merchandise, truly—nor I the money. As you are plain, so will I be plain, my lord. Set your name to the bond I seek, and I will change with you the promise of Roy of Calverton, that never yet was broken. Nay, more; I will tell you of men in arms across the Border, of a company of brawlers

that shall ride up from the South presently to cry a name which is not of the Queen we serve; ay, and of a standard lifted in the Midlands against this Spanish marriage you wot of. I will speak, my lord, of men and tidings which, an' you hearken not, may bring another Chancellor within the month, who will not ask the faith of Barbara of Ollerton, nor say that she is wise to quit the city. Is it a bond, my lord? Doth this matter concern you? Ay, surely, the merchandise is well if, for lack of it, you find yourself a beggar!"

He spoke with much exultation, says the record, wearing that air of authority he had won of the forest. No judge or prison in all the kingdom had affrighted Roy of Calverton that day. Even the Chancellor began to see with how strange a suppliant he must deal. Nevertheless, he remained the master of soft speech, the pleasant, smiling ecclesiastic.

"God's word, an odd story!" he exclaimed. "Ay, so odd that the Queen must hear it this very morning. Surely you will speak of this matter to the Queen, friend?"

Roy touched the paper with his hand.

"The pledge, my lord—when the pledge be written"—

But the Chancellor thrust the paper from him.

"Not so," he cried; "bond or no bond, this story shall be told!"

And then, leaning across the table, and speaking with finger outstretched, he said—

"Hath the Queen, then, no way of making the unwilling speak?"

He had meant to say "The torture shall compel"; but the outlaw's merry humour was a blow upon his conceit.

"The very words, my lord, once spoken by the Sheriff of Nottingham! 'By my beard!' was his oath, 'this King of Calverton shall hang at Robin's Oak!' The sun had not set ere he lacked a beard to swear by!"

He laughed at the remembrance, and my lord, being won by the jest, must laugh too, despite his dignity.

"Nay, God be thanked, my own is in better security. These, Master Roy, be tidings which must come to Her Majesty's ear without delay. I go to her upon the instant. Perchance I may find her willing to write the pardon of him who was to hang at Robin's Oak!"

He called to one of his pages, and thus

would intimate that their talk was done. But Roy had yet a word to add.

"The pardon of Roy of Calverton, and for Barbara of Ollerton, security in her estate."

"She being of her husband's faith?"

"Ay, of the faith which teaches her to believe in the Queen's justice, my lord."

The Chancellor shook his head, and when Roy was gone, and others came in to tell him that the Queen had then returned from riding, he said to them—

"Assuredly, I have seen a man this day!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE ABBOT PARKENHAM

"There's no want of meat, sir."—MASSINGER.

BARBARA of Ollerton awaited her husband with all a woman's expectancy on that morning when he set out to win his pardon of the Chancellor and to seek, if it might be, the security of her estate. From her window in my Lord of Taunton's house, which lieth but a stone's-throw from the village of Charing, she watched the busy people passing: the gallants upon horseback, the bawling apprentices, the sober merchants, the multitude of priests, the women upon their pillions—all that merry scene which spoke of London's wealth and London's gaieties. A winning figure in her gown of violet, with sable furs about her pretty neck, and a jewel which found a coronal of gold in her abundant hair, none the less her prettiness could not cloak anxiety

or banish from her wistful eyes the story of that hour. As the day waxed older, and Roy did not come to her, and still she found new excuses for him, the shadow which had loomed upon her since she quitted Ollerton became a cloud of deep foreboding, an omen which no courage might turn.

Now there was none in my lord's household save the servants and a sleek steward they called the Abbot Parkenham; and he was a man who had been turned from the monasteries in Henry's day, and now had become philosopher, suffering himself to eat and drink right well at his master's expense, "because," he said, "the Lord so willed it." A cumbrous man, who shuffled in his step, and had eyes deep set in his head, and went star-gazing often —he was a doleful pessimist indeed, and no word of comfort could he speak for my lady's consolation.

"The house is open to you, mistress, as my lord commands. Here you shall do well in the flesh, if that be of any moment to you. Were I of the world, I would say that the wines are of France and the table well kept. But I care for none of these things, nor would I concern myself with earthly subtleties. As-

suredly, my child, we are as the sparks which fly upward—a little while in brightness, and then but ashes!"

Now, my Lady Barbara's laughter answered this doleful fellow with a philosophy very strange to him.

"These things may be nothing to you, Abbot," she said, "but I am no spark which flieth upward, nor will I seek the heavens when those dear to me are still the children of the earth. Is it aught to me that the wines are of France and the table well kept when he whom I love will imperil his life for the sake of that affection he bears me? Nay, all my heaven is at the palace this hour. What philosophy can speak for a young wife's anxiety? Indeed, you show me a withered parchment, while I would cry for roses, to wear them on my heart until love shall pluck them thence again!"

She spoke with a courage which surprised him, for he, dolorous always, could but shake his head upon this madness of her love.

"Nay," he said, "where shall one pluck roses in the winter of the year! You speak of things but little known to me, daughter. If your husband, indeed, be gone to the palace

to seek a favour, I wonder not at your impatience. I will not counsel hope, for what right have I? So the gods jest with us. We live in dangerous times, when he who prayed yesterday shall himself be prayed for tomorrow."

He went on, in ghostly words, to tell her of the times: how that a spirit of unrest was abroad in the city, men beginning to question each other for the faith's sake, and no man speaking freely of that which was in his heart.

"You, that are of the heretics—what seek you in London, my child? For myself, I care for none of these things—I am not of the world. If the heavens give me many gods, what are those of the priests to me! But you are young, your story is known; you will not pass without the question. For that, perchance, your husband lingers still at the palace. I speak of what may befall. You were wiser to leave the city, my lady, now, when the gate is open!"

My lady, who stood at the window while he spoke, clapped her hands joyfully for answer, and ran swiftly from the room.

"The gate indeed is open," she cried, "but it is my dear husband who rides in!"

It was a true word, for Roy of Calverton, as she said, had then returned from the palace. Accompanied by many of those who had followed him from Sherwood Forest—Meagre the dwarf, and René the page, John the hermit, and one they called the Knight of the Silver Bow, monks become archers, and archers who never would be monks—with these about him and their warm words of welcome in his ear, the outlaw crossed the threshold, and there heard the better greeting.

"Roy, dearest, is it thou! Nay, hadst thou delayed, I had died for very cruelty of waiting! Tell me 'tis well with thee, dear husband!"

She lifted a child's face to his, and, while he took her in his arms, he made haste to satisfy her curiosity.

"Thrice well. My tidings are of the best! Here is a Chancellor so curious that he must run to the Queen like a chicken to a hen! Could aught befall with better promise? Queen Mary honoured the father's name: she may yet receive the son. Let the next hour bring the summons: it shall not surprise me, dear wife. I tell them plainly that I have wares to sell, and no woman will long delay to

see my basket. This very night they shall write my freedom."

"Then it is not written now, dear Roy?"

He turned the question with a light word and a ready humour.

"A shrewd man, my Lord Gardiner, yet little acquainted with honesty. Plain speech affrights him. He is ever at war with the word, asking, 'How far does this man lie: with what deceit shall I answer him?' I played a merry staff, and down he went as any bumpkin! 'Twas all a fence of speech, dear heart, so that when I engaged he covered more closely. But I won him in the end, for I have left him curious; and when he hath the better of his surprise to find one that speaks the truth, he will come to us!"

"God grant it!" she said earnestly; "I cannot hide it from myself that this day must decide all things. Should my lord fail you, what is Ollerton to us then? Ye know that I am not a child of the cities; nor would I be. Your Chancellor will find me no ingrate if he says, 'Get hence from London, now, without delay.' Could ye have seen the Queen, dear Roy, I had heard your news more gladly. A woman will act if a man be the suppliant.

She would have written pardon—she has no 'nay' for such as you."

"Then I will so command her ere the morrow be done!" he answered, hiding from her that abiding doubt which he must feel. "Ye must look for 'perchance' and 'likely' in such a place, dear wife, for a court loves the words. I'll warrant you that my Lord Gardiner is at this very moment crying Heaven to witness what a fool he hath been. So shrewd a man will not sup ere he hath made good his oversight. 'Tis a little matter to them that I should be free or Ollerton be thine; but their very security may lie in the news I bring them. How then shall they be held back? This very night they will send for me."

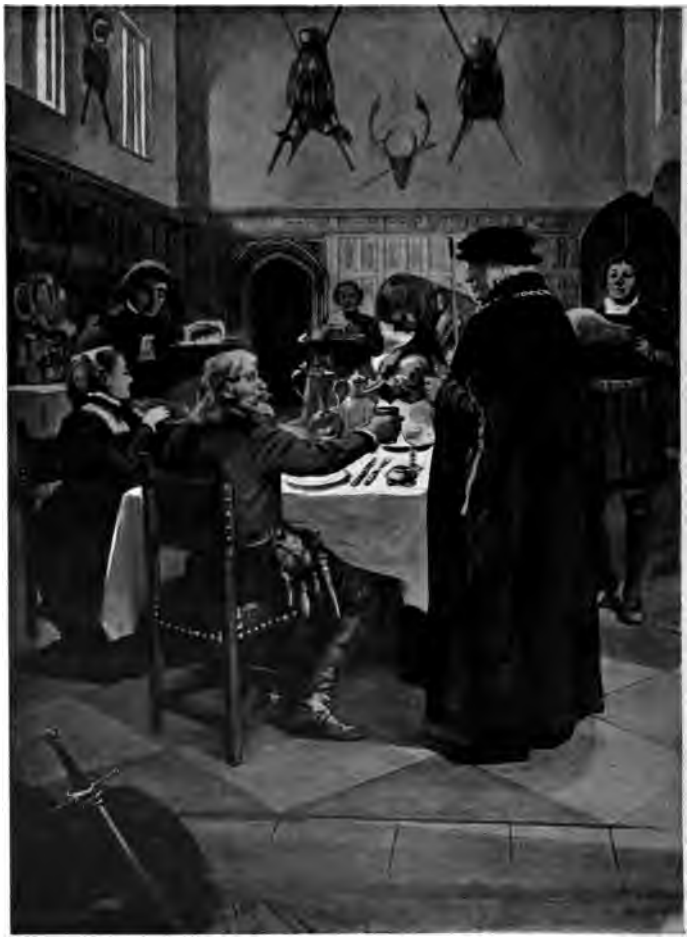
He saw that she was but half convinced, and would go on to tell her of the court and those he had seen there.

"A sorry moping troop, in doleful velvets and ruffs like to a bullock's yoke. They sit in dim windows, strangers to the sun. If any man laugh, it is like the drip of water in a cavern. These make the State and are the envy of the lesser folk. Silver and gold is upon their tables, yet each one goes heavily to meat, asking himself whether it will not be

but bread to-morrow. No monk at his theology could have worn so gloomy a face. I wonder not, little wife, that the Spaniard is brought here in a rope of doublons. But it shall need a cleverer man than my Lord Gardiner to make that bear dance in such a ring! For myself I have spoken a loud word, and all the palace hears it. Let them mock it, and they must pay the price; nor will the Chancellor's threat affright me. Nay, what says our good friend, the Abbot? Wert thou in my case, most reverend sir, would ye ride from town without a wench's fardel in your wallet? God's truth! thy sack would burst with trinkets for every pretty maid that danced in Sherwood Forest!"

He turned to the priest, that my lady should not question him more closely; but the Abbot Parkenham, who cared for none of these things, preferred to speak of the Chancellor.

"I count it no good omen," he said, "that you had not an answer from the Bishop. It may even befall that such tidings as you would bring to him were made known by others; in which case I would not hold it from you that you may find a changing welcome when next you go to St. James's. There is a tide of circumstance which we do well to take ship



"NAY, I WILL BEAR A STOUTER STAFF, MY FATHER"

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He was glad to provoke a doubt and reservation; but Roy, who had no kinship with prudence, turned a deaf ear to all that endeavour.

"Nay, I will bear a stouter staff, my father, and it shall crack many a good poll if the need arise! Speak, rather, of dinner; for your Chancellor hath given me a doughty appetite!"

Right readily, says the record, did the worthy Abbot bestir the servants upon such a pleasant errand. He, who cared for none of these things, sat, when the half of an hour had passed, cup in hand, above a board so generous that even his heaven of stars had twinkled merrily beholding it. For there were rounds of beef and carcases of mutton, salt fishes and sturgeon, swans and capons, peacocks and mallards, widgeons and teal. And there were great flagons of wine and vast loaves and cups of frothing ale, and dishes of silver and chalices of gold, and such a splendour of serving-men and pages that the Queen's palace itself had not been disgraced by that display. For the first time now, perchance,

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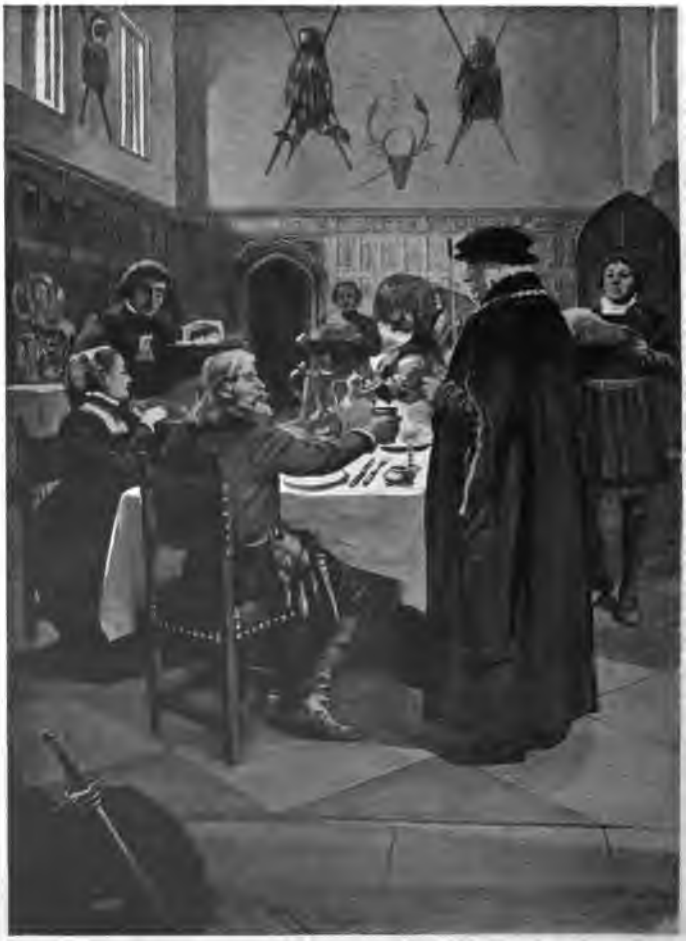

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the Lady Barbara began to temper her dread of this great city, and of all the murmur of life which came up to her from its streets. Great friends she had: so much was not to be disputed. In the friendship of great names, in the kinship of the nobles of the North, but chief above these in the love and fidelity of the courageous heart so near to her own, in the love of a man whose laughter wrestled with every peril, whose jest capped every threat—in these a new truth of confidence was born. Feasted there, in that great hall, with Roy of Calverton to anticipate every unspoken wish, with a glitter of riches about her, the pomp and circumstance of a noble's house at her command, she might well have believed herself beyond the reach even of those enemies who had driven her from her home and followed her to this city. In the old time at Ollerton, Master Eleazar the minister had preached a goodly discourse upon the text, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

My lady, nestling close to Roy of Calverton, asked who should harm that stout heart, or war upon the freedom of the forest's king!

* * * * *

There were many strangers in London in the first year of Mary's reign; for such of the old nobles as Cranmer had driven out flocked in again upon her accession, and opening their houses, they sought in rare display to make good the darker years of banishment. Priests, too, had come from Rome, and there were many religious from the Spanish court. The prisons being opened, and the old ecclesiastics set free, the city wore the air almost of a foreign capital. "You pass," says the chronicle, "as many Spaniards as Englishmen, when you walk from Temple Bar to Paul's; while westward at St. James's, and in the Minster precincts, you may well think yourself a subject of the Emperor Charles." Thus it befell that the city wore an air of gaiety sometime foreign to her, and never was the feast more splendid nor the display of wealth more ostentatious. Imitating the fashions of France, newly built coaches began to roll and flounder in the muddy streets by Westminster. There were soldiers not a few, both of that army which had been raised against Northumberland's rebellion, and of others necessary to be employed against the new conspiracies and the unabated mood of treason. Bishops, too,

desired to renew a style strange to them since Henry's reign; and much pomp and ceremony atoned for Lutheran neglect. In the places of public disputation, on 'Change, by the Cross at Paul's, about the city's gates, fanatics spoke in unmeasured words of the changes which must come and of the new edicts against the heretics. Dangerous days, which no lover of the older order might escape. Demagogues denounced the Queen as no true daughter of Henry, and sought a ferment of that brooding unrest. None knew from day to day what to-morrow might call upon him to answer.

Now, Roy of Calverton had little understanding of the people's spirit, nor of those subtler influences then working in the city. Blunt in his northern honesty, he cared as little for the fine arguments of the theologians as for the disputations of the demagogues. Mary was his lawful Queen: he would hear of no other. If a more selfish impulse had sent him to London, to win his own security, none the less the desire to serve the throne was strong within him, and not the least welcome of his ambitions. Let him but gain Mary's ear, he said, and all the rest were sure. For the

others, the sycophants, the mercenaries, the faint-hearts, who were the sentinels of her palace, he had a freeman's good contempt. "Let her but hearken to me," he declared to the Abbot Parkenham, "and I will raise so good a troop that, be it duke or devil, no harm shall come to her!" To such a man, the paths of statesmanship were so many dark alleys leading from the high-road of honesty and right judgment to the slough of subtlety and deceit. "I come to serve as it is given to me. To your Chancellors in petticoats, carry broidery and pillion. Is this London ruled by women? Let the Queen seek men, and all shall be well with her!"

The Abbot Parkenham liked the argument, but had little faith in it.

"You will be a clever man," he said, "if you gain the Queen's ear. Believe me, sir, candour is an ill-prized gift when you lay it at the foot of a throne. Let the need exist, and the Church will begin to think of the men you name. She has much to do at present, and will guard her royal mistress surely, while she makes her coffers ready for the restitution she looks for. If these things were aught to me, I would say that Mary is a woman of good habit

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"Then it is not written now, dear Roy?"

He turned the question with a light word and a ready humour.

"A shrewd man, my Lord Gardiner, yet little acquainted with honesty. Plain speech affrights him. He is ever at war with the word, asking, 'How far does this man lie: with what deceit shall I answer him?' I played a merry staff, and down he went as any bumpkin! 'Twas all a fence of speech, dear heart, so that when I engaged he covered more closely. But I won him in the end, for I have left him curious; and when he hath the better of his surprise to find one that speaks the truth, he will come to us!"

"God grant it!" she said earnestly; "I cannot hide it from myself that this day must decide all things. Should my lord fail you, what is Ollerton to us then? Ye know that I am not a child of the cities; nor would I be. Your Chancellor will find me no ingrate if he says, 'Get hence from London, now, without delay.' Could ye have seen the Queen, dear Roy, I had heard your news more gladly. A woman will act if a man be the suppliant.

She would have written pardon—she has no 'nay' for such as you."

"Then I will so command her ere the morrow be done!" he answered, hiding from her that abiding doubt which he must feel. "Ye must look for 'perchance' and 'likely' in such a place, dear wife, for a court loves the words. I'll warrant you that my Lord Gardiner is at this very moment crying Heaven to witness what a fool he hath been. So shrewd a man will not sup ere he hath made good his oversight. 'Tis a little matter to them that I should be free or Ollerton be thine; but their very security may lie in the news I bring them. How then shall they be held back? This very night they will send for me."

He saw that she was but half convinced, and would go on to tell her of the court and those he had seen there.

"A sorry moping troop, in doleful velvets and ruffs like to a bullock's yoke. They sit in dim windows, strangers to the sun. If any man laugh, it is like the drip of water in a cavern. These make the State and are the envy of the lesser folk. Silver and gold is upon their tables, yet each one goes heavily to meat, asking himself whether it will not be

but bread to-morrow. No monk at his theology could have worn so gloomy a face. I wonder not, little wife, that the Spaniard is brought here in a rope of doublons. But it shall need a cleverer man than my Lord Gardiner to make that bear dance in such a ring! For myself I have spoken a loud word, and all the palace hears it. Let them mock it, and they must pay the price; nor will the Chancellor's threat affright me. Nay, what says our good friend, the Abbot? Wert thou in my case, most reverend sir, would ye ride from town without a wench's fardel in your wallet? God's truth! thy sack would burst with trinkets for every pretty maid that danced in Sherwood Forest!"

He turned to the priest, that my lady should not question him more closely; but the Abbot Parkenham, who cared for none of these things, preferred to speak of the Chancellor.

"I count it no good omen," he said, "that you had not an answer from the Bishop. It may even befall that such tidings as you would bring to him were made known by others; in which case I would not hold it from you that you may find a changing welcome when next you go to St. James's. There is a tide of circumstance which we do well to take ship

or forest, or the palaces of kings. And thou shalt come to London, sweet wife, I promise thee; and many shall say 'She is the queen of Ollerton,' and many shall know that thy love is precious to me, and that I will close my heart about it until my life's end. Willest thou that, sweet?—nay, I know that thou willest it, for art thou not life itself to me!"

He spoke the promise, and impatient, perchance, to learn if there were any tidings at the big house for him, he pressed on swiftly to my Lord of Taunton's gate; but being come there, he found a great company of men in the courtyard, and the Abbot Parkenham, very pale and distressed, answering the men and denying their acquaintance. But Roy, thrusting in his horse among the pikemen, asked them boldly if he were the man they sought. Whereupon one of them, stepping forward, said—

"Master, if you be he they name Roy of Calverton, we are come from the sheriff to carry you to the Tower Gate, as my lord the Chancellor hath commanded."

upon. The gratitude of statesmen is but a poor staff, my friend! Trust not to it when next you seek the Chancellor's ear."

He was glad to provoke a doubt and reservation; but Roy, who had no kinship with prudence, turned a deaf ear to all that endeavour.

"Nay, I will bear a stouter staff, my father, and it shall crack many a good poll if the need arise! Speak, rather, of dinner; for your Chancellor hath given me a doughty appetite!"

Right readily, says the record, did the worthy Abbot bestir the servants upon such a pleasant errand. He, who cared for none of these things, sat, when the half of an hour had passed, cup in hand, above a board so generous that even his heaven of stars had twinkled merrily beholding it. For there were rounds of beef and carcases of mutton, salt fishes and sturgeon, swans and capons, peacocks and mallards, widgeons and teal. And there were great flagons of wine and vast loaves and cups of frothing ale, and dishes of silver and chalices of gold, and such a splendour of serving-men and pages that the Queen's palace itself had not been disgraced by that display. For the first time now, perchance,

priests of the neighbouring churches, brawlers from the taverns, came crowding about my lord's gate to tell each other that the Northman was taken, and would be crowned to-morrow in the dungeons of the Tower. Not yet were they so schooled in the spectacles of captivity that they might pass by the sheriff's burden as though it were a common sight. The outlaw's story had gone abroad through the city as some pretty tale of romance and chivalry which children might dwell upon and women applaud; but the Chancellor had capped it with a heavy hand. "Let the King of Calverton free himself, and we will believe," men said.

Now the Chancellor's men pressed close about Roy, fearing that he would yet strike a good blow for liberty; but in this they were over-ready with the alarms, and, as soon as he knew their purpose, he changed a merry word with them, and declared that, for any "nay" of his, they might carry him wheresoever they willed.

"Palace or prison, wear no long faces for me, sirs," was his exhortation; "whichever it be, you will carry me thence gladly ere the month be run. In the Queen's name you come —ay, that is a name I know right well! Lead

on, friends, that I may learn what kindness Her Majesty would put upon me!"

He turned his horse to ride out with them as he had entered, and, bending in his saddle to my Lady Barbara, who sat very white and fearful in the torchlight, he bade her farewell like one who feared not to go because he knew in how short a time he would return.

"Fear nothing, sweet wife," he said in that moment of her grief; "there is no prison in England that shall cage Roy of Calverton when he hath the mind to go forth again. Yet if this matter should come to the Queen's ears, I doubt not that it might serve me. Act as your love of me shall dictate. There will be strange tidings in London ere many days have passed: but the strangest, surely, shall be those which make mention of this night. God guard thee, dear heart, and give thee courage!"

He doffed his cap and kissed her upon both cheeks; and she, clinging to him a little while with great tenderness, promised that she would see the Queen that very night.

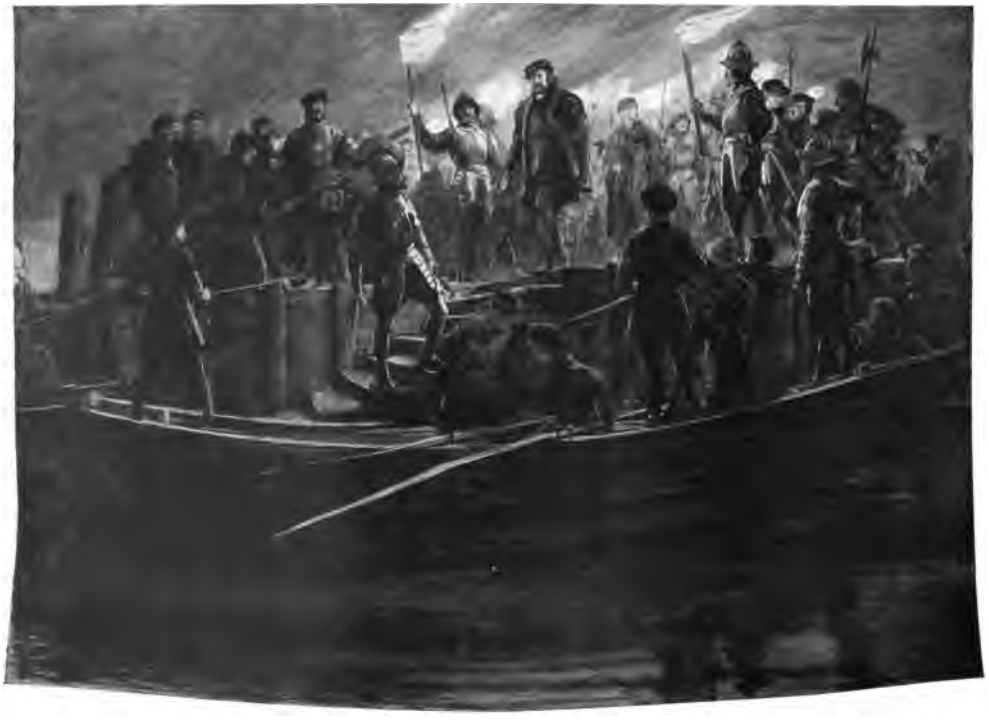
"Or if I fail," she said, "then will I come to thee, dear Roy. Oh, God be my witness, I will come to thee!"

He did not answer her, fearing to provoke

her tears; and going out with the men, he rode contented in their midst toward the river and the barge which there awaited him. And, as he went, my lady watched him from the gate, and neither the Abbot's craven consolation nor any hope which he had spoken could lift that heavy weight of sadness; for it was in her mind that this was the eternal farewell, and that never again would Roy of Calverton claim love of her or service.

Now, the Abbot Parkenham had taken leave of his guest with unseemly pleasure; nor would he endeavour, when Roy was gone, to hide his satisfaction. Eloquent from the first in weary protestation of faith and loyalty, he went on to declare himself a true son of Holy Church, for he feared the Chancellor greatly; and when his word was mocked by the troopers, he ran from room to room distractedly, here cloaking the witness to his magic, there cursing those very stars whose signs and wonders might yet hang him at the city's gates. No sooner were the Queen's men out of hearing than he closed the gates and barred the doors, and entreated my Lady Barbara in fervent supplication that she would quit London that very night.

"They will charge this against thy husband,



THE BARGE AWAITED HIM

and he will surely die. Shall it profit that two perish where one will suffice? I speak as a son of God's Church who cannot wish well to heretics! Would ye have me burn at the stake? Nay, woman, go forth while ye may. I will not have it said that treason was preached in my benefactor's house! This very night I will justify myself to the Chancellor!"

His words fell on deaf ears, for my lady did not so much as listen to him. Brought to silence in this peril which had been so swift to come, and fearing greatly for her husband's safety, the daughter of Bernard of Ollerton began to put on that courage which was her birthright. She would save Roy of Calverton —she, whom Roy of Calverton had saved in the hour of her distress. This very night she would see the Queen.

"The woman, truly, goes forth," she said to the Abbot, "but not from London city. Nay, my father, how if she ride to St. James's to tell them of your magic—how if she speak of signs and wonders in the heavens, of a worthy priest who cares for none of these things! Indeed, you shall not twice affront me! Let your gate be opened, that I may do your bidding!"

He answered her with threats and curses, calling upon some of the serving-men to prevent her, and demanding of them witness that he was a true son of Holy Church. But these, who cared little for the Abbot, and less for Holy Church, and had been already won by my lady's grace and courtesy, cried together—

"Magician, work a wonder!"

And opening the gate, they let Barbara of Ollerton go forth.

The night had fallen dark and starless. There were few in the Strand, and these were, for the most part, idle apprentices out for merry brawls, or belated horsemen, or priests upon a mission of charity, or footpads lurking in the alleys. Barbara knew little of London, nor was she sure in which direction the palace of St. James's lay. Fear of her loneliness, her solitary condition weighing heavily upon a mind over-burdened, nevertheless a brave resolution sent her out as an ambassador of despair. She would see the Queen. A woman's heart should answer a woman's supplication.

She was alone, she said; and yet a voice of the night could tell her that she was not

alone. How it was she knew not; yet scarce was my Lord of Taunton's house lost to her view than the mystery began to plague her, the doubt to be made good surety. In the shadows by which she passed, the shadow of pillar and gable, and wall and archway, she thought to see men riding wistfully. Saying that foolish eyes deceived her, denying her senses, comforting herself with brave words, she sought to put the apparition away or to mock it in her courage. But every step now made it more sure; the number of the figures multiplied. She knew that she was watched: knew it as ghostly shapes, cloaked riders, voiceless cavaliers, came out of the darkness to ride with her; yet not so closely that she might see their faces or change a word with them.

They were my Lord of Taunton's men, she made believe first; but anon she came to say that they were some of those who had carried Roy to his imprisonment. With a woman's hope, she uttered a silent prayer for help, and pressed on into the night. It was a horrid fear of things unreal, of dreaded apparitions, which all her self-will could not master. If they would but speak, would but declare themselves! The very mystery provoked her

dread to the ultimate point. What business had any man so to follow or to plague her? She thought at one time that she would have sunk to the very ground for fear; nor could she utter any cry for help, or speak a word of her apprehension.

She said that it was an apparition; but, anon, denied herself. A harder road gave music of hoofs; her own horse cantering set others to the gallop. She heard men breathing, the clank of arms, a whisper of voices. Nay more, she heard her own name spoken, and so gently that all her fear was vanquished in a moment; and, drawing rein, she confronted her pursuers and challenged them.

"Who are ye? What do ye seek of me?"

A little man upon an ambling horse doffed his cap, and bowing to the saddle-bow, he cried—

"To serve you, lady, as ever we have served!"

And from others came that good appeal—

"Ay, to serve—to serve! Ye will not forbid us, lady?"

My lady sat a little while in wonder and astonishment. These were no enemies, no strangers of the night assuredly. Well she

knew that greeting and its meaning, and gladly —oh, so gladly!—she recognised the voices; and naming the archers who had followed Roy from Ollerton, and with them René the page and Meagre the dwarf, she cried in her pleasure—

"Oh, God be thanked that He has sent my friends to me this night!"

And so, with this good company of stout hearts about her, she rode on to the Queen.

* * * * *

There was bustle that night in the palace of St. James's, a going to and fro of mounted men, with messengers from remote places, who whispered tidings of events momentous and unlooked for. So unwonted were the stir and curiosity that my lady and her archers rode in unmolested; and finding a page who listened readily to so pretty an intruder, word was carried swiftly to the Chancellor, who was then with the Queen, and so to Her Majesty.

"The wife of Roy the Outlaw seeks audience of Her Majesty upon a matter of urgency."

Now, this was the second time in a few hours that the Chancellor had heard the word "urgency," and the omen plagued his curiosity.

"Comes she to threaten us too?" he asked

jestingly of the page who carried the tidings. "Nay, we must wear a coat of mail presently lest urgency go faster than your Majesty's justice!"

But the Queen said in her wisdom—

"Let us hear her, my lord; for, truly, if the man hath a secret, the woman shall tell it."

She gave the command, and the Lady Barbara, passing through the ante-rooms, where wits exclaimed upon her, and the women stared, and gallants recounted her history, she came at length to Mary's presence, and kneeling there, a vision beautiful of the palace, she pleaded for her husband—

"I am the wife of Roy of Calverton, who was arrested in your Majesty's name this night. For thirty hours we have ridden without drawing rein to do your Majesty a service, and thus it is requited. How shall we speak, then, of your peril and of that which is contrived against you? Let the Queen ask if it be a good counsel which turns a deaf ear to those who would befriend her. Nay, your Majesty, all England hath not a more faithful heart nor one more ready than he your Ministers have silenced. Will you not hear me for the love he bears you?"

There were tears in her eyes when she uttered the name of Roy of Calverton; but Queen Mary, who remembered little but that she was of the new faith, answered her coldly—

"You are Barbara of Ollerton, who teach sedition to my people in the North. Hath sedition, then, turned upon its masters that you confess these things?"

"Nay, your Majesty, sedition and my husband's name were ever strangers. I beseech you prove him that the truth may be known ere it is too late!"

It was a plea of her love and confidence, uttered so winningly that even the Queen was half won by it.

"Your 'urgency' speaks an enigma, my lord," she said to Gardiner; "has it come to this, then, that we must grant friendship to every outlaw who claims it of us?"

She turned to him as one upon whom despair sat heavily; nor had he any good answer for her.

"I know not whose friendship your Majesty may refuse," he said, "if these tidings from Rochester be true."

For a little while the Queen mused upon it, and then, turning to my lady, she asked—

"What do you seek of me, child—what boon do you crave?"

"That those who carried my dear husband from me to-night may carry me to his side again."

"For love of him you barter freedom"—

"Having nothing but my hope of love."

"Knowing that he must answer that which justice would charge against him?"

"Ay, your Majesty, knowing that he can answer all the world!"

Now, the matter troubled the Queen not a little, and she would have gone on to question my lady more closely; but, while she was yet seeking pretext, a messenger, all splashed with mud and disordered by his haste, burst in upon them unceremoniously, to cry that the bridge at Rochester had been thrown down by Wyat and his fellows, and that the ships then lying in the river were already burned.

"And, my lord," said he, "an' you do not act expeditiously they will even ride into London with to-morrow's sun!"

He spoke a surprising word, which, uttered already in the ante-rooms of the palace, had been as a tocsin sounded there to send horsemen at the gallop from the gates and to call the

sleeping guard from its bed. The same alarm would wake a sleeping city presently. To the Queen and the man who stood with her it came as the dread summons to an encounter which should win all or lose all in that great cause they served. Mary knew the moment of it, indeed, yet she was ever the mistress of a ready courage; and now, that my lord might witness her example, she chose to speak first to my lady before she bade the messenger repeat his tidings—

"Let it be as you will, child," she said. "Go to this faithful heart who claims friendship of us. We may even need the help of such as he to-night."

She never spake a greater truth, says the record. Had she but known what must befall, she would have sent my lady out upon a pillion of gold. For Roy of Calverton must save her throne ere many hours had passed.

CHAPTER XVI

MASTER BARE

"Condition, circumstance is not the thing."—POPE.

THE news which the messenger had carried to the palace of St. James's was quickly spread abroad through the city, many riding out to warn their friends, others making haste to inform the Constable and those who kept the Tower. Momentous as the tidings were, they were heard with less surprise than authority might have desired. The Spanish marriage, the gathering plots against the Protestants, and the spirit of discontent which new laws fermented, had taught men to await some counter-stroke that would answer for their liberties. And now, when the day had come, when the storm burst, and it behoved each man to think of his own security, few were brave enough to declare themselves, or to avow a loyalty which none might question. These

men of Kent, who marched on Southwark in their thousands, might they not be the masters of the city ere many days had passed? The will that brought them from village and hamlet to denounce the Spaniard and his Ambassador, might it not be the cause of all the kingdom, should victory attend the rebel arms? England had no braver man than Thomas Wyat, the poet's son; no stouter heart; no scholar more winning nor wit so well-beloved. And to these natural gifts he added victory. The tidings said that every gate was open to him, that every town welcomed him, that even the cripples came out to cry him "God-speed!" The peril in the North, and the trouble which Northumberland had sown, weakened the city both in the number of her troops and in their disposition. Let Wyat pass London Bridge, said every gossip, and all were lost indeed!

Such fears, expressed in sleepy oaths and fragments of excited talk, followed upon the horsemen as they rode swiftly to the Tower. Inns, barred for the night, opened the doors again to half-dressed troopers; there were lights in every window; galleys danced at the river steps; lattices swung as the mounted men rode

by; my Lord Mayor's house opened wide doors, the trained bands were summoned, the bells were rung. In the Tower itself, Sir John Brydges, the Deputy-Lieutenant, already mustered the guard and prepared the cannon on the ramparts. Lanterns flashing in the wards, the cry of man to man, the whinnying of horses, the tolling bells, gave tongue to that alarm and stirred the pulses even of the cowards. But one in that place, they said, listened to the uproar without concern. For Roy of Calverton the bells had no message.

They had delivered him at the Tower Gate about an hour after sunset; and having, in the words of the old chronicle, "gotten a receipt for him" from the Constable, it had been full another hour before he was lodged upon the second storey of the White Tower, and there made known to Matthew Bare, the Keeper of the Dungeons. An ill-visaged fellow enough, sparing of words and a stranger to any kindly humour, the Keeper spread a bed of rushes for his prisoner, and told him sourly that he would do well to use it while he could.

"For," said he, "they will set your head on the gate ere the week be run; and that shall sharpen your dreams, my friend!"

To whom Roy answered—

"Not so, for I will dream of you, friend, that, knowing I must come to liberty soon, you found me a dish of meat and a stoup of wine! What! shall it be said that Roy of Calverton mistook your gentle face for that of a scurvy fellow, and a knave? Bring in the wine, and I will make such a report of you that the Queen herself shall pin a jewel on your breast!"

Master Bare, the Keeper, was very "mindful of his circumstance," as he was wont to tell everyone, going with great pomp and dignity, a stranger to laughter and the humours of men. But Roy of Calverton had such a merry manner, and was so quick to win the favour even of the sullen and the unwilling, that he had not been in the cell but the half of an hour ere Master Bare was pledging him in a cup, and Master Gyll, the Keeper of the Beasts, was open-mouthed at all the wonders of Sherwood and its hunting, which the outlaw remembered for his wondering ears. Anon came Bartholomew Fail, the Chief Warder, and clerks from the chapel, and cooks from the kitchens, and women from the palace ward; and more wine being brought, and lanterns

hung up, and the outlaw set in a great oak chair, such a joyous hour was passed as had not been known in that place since Henry's day. For who could withstand that droll humour or long resist that habit of command which were the outlaw's birthright? Even Master Bare had a wench upon his knee ere the clock struck again.

"The Lord be good to me, and hush the story of this night's work!" said he.

"The very thing," was Roy's retort, "that the Prior of Belton said when he bussed Jack Allison, the archer, and believed him to be a maid! A holy man was he, sirs; yet not always mindful of his circumstance. He had sworn to hang every freebooter for ten miles round, and that very night comes Jack in a maid's farthingale to play the Mistress Merry while we are in the cellar and the vent-pegs flying. Not a monk was sober next morning nor a holy priest to be found. We laid them in the marsh dike and sent the Prior to Belton on an ass's tail; whereby we were not hanged, but lived to tell the story. Ay, and what of the Abbot of Staveley, that took Dene Bollard red-handed from the flayed deer and would have swung him as high as Haman. Did the

lad need requiem? Not so, I warrant you! 'Twas a fine story, as I live! For what should befall but that ten of mine, breaking the Abbot's cell that very night, bade him prepare for death. They made believe to mistake him for Dene Bollard who had killed the Abbot's stags. 'Sirs,' said he, 'I do perceive that ye be drunk with wine; for I am the Abbot Richard, and the man ye seek lies in the dungeon-tower.' 'Wouldst thou tell us a child's tale!' cried they. 'Assuredly thou art Dene Bollard, and this night thou must die!' There were forty monks, dressed as archers at dawn, and forty archers capering as monks; but the Lord Abbot they roped to a tree; and never were the blessed Psalms so misused. Ay, sirs, of these men I speak, and ye shall know more of them when ye set foot in Nottingham. Does a sheriff's man prove short of ears, you shall find him a pair at Rawmarsh Pump. Nay, cover your own discreetly, I beseech you. We deal in such commodities, and the law goes bare and the maid goes free when Lincoln's bells are heard."

Thus were the forest legends told, for Roy counted that odd audience as the merriest jest that London yet had given him. He was

still the master of the wonder-struck when the first of the horsemen rode to the Bulwark Gate and brought the news which awakened the city and sent the riders out. As in a flash, the gay masquerade was ended, and those who had just capped the jest, now, in all seriousness, went hurrying to their houses; the women, in affright, to the palace ward; the Keeper of the Cages to his beasts; the Master of the Jewels to the bauble-house; and Master Bare—mindful of his circumstance—to the Lieutenant's lodging, that he might learn if there was need of him. But, ere he went, he had changed a word with Roy, lest his forbearance were charged against him.

"For the kindness that I show thee, thou wilt be mindful of my circumstance. They are like to deal harshly with thee since this has befallen. Give no word of friendship for me, or this night's work may cost us dear!"

And then he added, as though sententiously—

"As I live, thou wouldst laugh an acorn off an oak!"

To whom Roy answered with a patron's wisdom—

"Fear nothing, Master Bare. The men of Kent are up, but assuredly they shall be down

again when I go forth. I speak with some confidence, but the night will justify me. If a prophecy shall help thee, go to the Constable and say that my Lord Gardiner sups with Roy of Calverton ere midnight come. For his sake, since he seemeth a pleasant man and fairly spoken, I will even sup a second time and drink another pot of thy sack! Nay, bid the Lieutenant wait upon me, for I would not name him a scurvy fellow. Wilt say that, Master Bare—that I command him to come hither?"

But Master Bare shook his head.

"Thou wonder!" he cried, "this very day thou hast made me forget my circumstance!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE QUEEN'S NAME

"And now I will unclasp a secret book."—*Henry IV.*

NOW, Master Bare quitted the White Tower, and Bartholomew Fail was mustering his warders, and Master Gyll, the Keeper of the Beasts, went hurrying out upon his business; but all quickly forgot Roy of Calverton and the merry hour they had passed with him. Even the Constable had returned to the Tower by this time, and, what with the going and coming of horsemen, the mounting of cannon, and all the hasty counter-plot, none had leisure to think of aught but his own safety and the means whereby he might secure it. From his chamber, now dimly lighted by a single lantern, Roy listened to the loud cries of command, the jangling tocsins, the thunder of hoofs, the babbling tongues, content to know that the crisis of his day had come.

None the less a pregnant anxiety of it remained, and would not be quieted. Shrewd as he was, he would not hide from himself that he had staked all upon a single throw. The hazard of the night might yet betray him, he said. Every hour which passed and found him without compact quickened the peril and warred upon his secret. That which he had ridden to London to tell might already have been told by others. He had come to say, "I carry a secret to this city, and will barter it for the freedom ye can give me." But if his secret were first told by another's lips, what right of ransom remained to him? An unbridled horde marched upon the city and might yet march upon the palace. Wit and courage, readiness and resource, were needed to save Mary's throne that night. He remembered those he had seen at the palace, and asked himself where such wit might be looked for, such resource discovered. From Gardiner — that woman in petticoats who paled at a loud word and dawdled to discuss a woman's faith when the honour of a kingdom was in peril? From Bonner, the gloomy fanatic, who dreamed already of fire and burning? From my Lord Howard, who

whimpered for lack of the troop he could not raise? From all the sycophants and faint-hearts who clamoured for a legate and would kneel to their own shadows if place were to be got thereby? A sorry crew indeed! And yet not sorrier than the men who followed them — the unwilling mercenaries, the new-gotten bands which served Mary for her army! "Set me in Sherwood with a hundred of mine, and I would scatter them as chaff!" the outlaw said. The clamour from without answered the taunt. He remembered how far he stood from Sherwood and his home.

An hour passed, and upon that an hour, and still none came to him; and still he heard the tolling bells, the murmur of the voices. None might charge him with foreboding if, at such a time, he said that the night was lost, the hazard misthrown. All had been ventured, all staked vainly. Wyat would enter London at dawn, and that would be the end of it. You shall judge his mood when, in such circumstance and impatience, his brooding thought was turned as at an unspoken summons, and, the door of his chamber being thrown wide open, he beheld, not Master Bare, whom he had looked for, nor the Lieutenant he had commanded to

come to him, nor any of those who recently had kept the masquerade, but my Lady Barbara herself, heralded by two who carried torches, and followed by others who swung lanterns in the gloom. So flushed she was, so quick to run to him, so full of joy, that in his perplexity he could but cry, "Thou!" and, pressing her close to him, believe indeed that the new day had dawned.

"Thou—thou, in this place! Nay, dear heart, it is not thou, for assuredly I dream"—

He put the question all wonderingly; but she, though she had a thousand words of love to utter, spake none of them, and drawing back from his embrace, she said—

"I come, dear Roy, but not alone. Dost thou not see whom I bring with me?"

It was a confession of her great content that she should thus reward him with that surprise; but so bright was the light of torches in the chamber, the flame of them so dazzling to the eyes, that he must look twice before he discerned the cloaked figure of a woman treading close upon my lady's steps. Nor until a little while had passed, and he had peered again into the gloom, was he able to say that the Queen stood there and waited for her servant's

recognition. Then was my lady justified, in truth, when she heard his joyful confession—

"Your Majesty—if I forget all else, let this night remain unforgotten!"

He knelt at Mary's feet, it is written; and she, in turn, dismissing her attendants, was not unwilling to grant him confidence.

"You are he they call Roy, the outlaw of Calverton?"

"A truth, your Majesty; but at Sherwood they name me King."

"Being lord of the forest by right of felony"—

"Nay, your Majesty, by right of the love the people bear me."

"Setting up a dominion which knows neither law nor authority."

"The forest law, your Majesty, the authority of nature's justice."

He did not cringe before her, nor defend himself as one who would seek grace; and his mood pleasing her, she went on to remember why she had come to him.

"You spake an enigma to my Lord Gardiner this morning, and asked a promise."

"I asked that I might see my Queen."

"Who comes to hear you, and, if the occasion arise, to prove her gratitude."

She drew a stool to the bare wooden table, and, throwing back the cloak about her head, she showed him the stern face of a woman harassed by perplexities, and seeking counsel of wisdom which heretofore she had not found. The outlaw himself paced the room slowly as though to control the freshet of his thoughts which streamed so abundantly. My lady herself stood in the shadows; every word that her husband spoke was as a jewel of her content. He would save the Queen that night; she who loved him was all confident.

"Madam," he said, "the woman shall give me gratitude; the Queen justice. To you I speak freely without any bond or deed of my security. Here, in my wallet, are the papers I took from the dead body of my Lord of Stow. He claimed the inheritance of a woman's heart, which no law can give. Him I killed in fair encounter. That he deserved to die, this paper shall tell you truly. It is an account, with every circumstance, of those in the forest countries who, an' you do not act expeditiously, will join these malcontents that knock at your gates. Madam, here is all their

story: the names of those that plan conspiracy, the places of their meeting, their harbourage in wood and town, the full proposal of that which they would do. Here and now I say that, if this kingdom is to be saved, you shall act without any delay. Command me, and I will send messengers to Sherwood Forest who will nip this treason in the bud as any flower the frost has bitten. If I am King of Calverton in truth, let my kingship find stout hearts to serve the throne whence my dominion comes. Give me the right to send my messengers forth upon the instant, and that which the Duke of Suffolk does at Leicester shall be blotted from your thoughts. Nay, madam, I conjure you to speak. This is no season when an 'ay' is gotten of a Chancellor's labour. Command me, and I obey. It shall be yours to reap the fruit of that obedience."

He was warmed to great eloquence of pleading; his ringing voice awakened new courage in the Queen's heart. The craven counsel she had carried from the palace, the procrastination, the doubt of the faint-hearts, the whimperings of courtiers, were driven from her mind while she listened to this goodly promise. Nevertheless, the habit of her state remained;

she must dally with it even at the eleventh hour.

"Your messengers shall go to Nottingham willingly; yet who will shut the gate of this city to those who burn the ships and drive the people out? Is it aught to me that Leicester be kept and London lost? God knows I suffer greatly to see how ill these tidings are received by those who should befriend me! Let your counsel speak of London, and I will lend a ready ear."

She looked at him as one who would say: "I seek to trust: help the endeavour!" and he, understanding this desire, was quick to meet it.

"Madam, let the shame be to those who delay in this defence. Is London, then, so bare a town that it hath no gates, no cannon, no horsemen for your service? Four thousand ride to Southwark, they say. If the bridge be drawn up and the culverins planted, how shall even four pass over? I speak a thing which any child might hear impatiently. This Wyat has sworn to touch the City gate. If he pass not in by London Bridge, then will he seek another way, which you shall make for him—an open way upon which he may stumble

blindly. Draw him to your gate as to a net, which shall close about him presently. If I have any wisdom in this affair, I say to you, give me leave to form a troop that shall ride out at my discretion, and when next you hear of me it will be of one who says—'The net is drawn: the bird is caged!' But I am a prisoner for the news that I bear to you. 'Twere odd if distress must call upon your jails for freedom!"

A discord of his irony was manifest in that complaint, and he, who had spoken with such fervour of her safety, now stood reluctant, as though the work were for others, and not for him. But the Queen, for whom the word was as a message of her salvation, rose at the appeal, and, taking both his hands, she said—

"You whom they call the King of Calverton, save my city to-night!"

He bent and kissed her hands. My lady, in the shadows, hid the tears upon her cheek.

* * * * *

Now, although the Queen bore herself bravely upon that evil night, fortune seemed already to have declared for Wyat and his fellows. Successful beyond their desires in the Kentish country (but chiefly at Rochester, where they

had thrown down the bridge and possessed themselves of the castle), the rebels marched upon London with a newer courage. Every house was open to them now; and their cause proclaimed in every township. They thought surely that the end was won, and all their hardihood thus early rewarded, when my Lord of Norfolk, with five hundred of the train-bands, met them at Dartford, and Wyat, their leader, made bold to speak for them. Such a good wit he had, says the story, and so ready was he in the argument, that the very arquebusiers, come out to destroy them, must throw up their caps and cry "A Wyat! a Wyat!"

It has been written that they were an army of draggle-tails, already weary of their journey. Nevertheless, they burned with zeal, believing that the Spanish husband, whom the Queen had chosen, intended the undoing of the realm and a great hurt to the Protestant faith. What profit of success came to them they judged to be the gift of God and a sign of Divine countenance. In this spirit they prevailed with the sailors upon Her Majesty's ships then lying in the river; and when they had burned seven of the greatest vessels and manned others with right good seamen, none might gainsay

their exultation nor exclaim upon it. A day's march now would carry them to the goal of their desires. In London they might look for the support of great names and great houses. Thomas Grey, my Lord of Devon, my Lord of Suffolk—all these had abetted that conspiracy, and would presently acknowledge it. The very banners bore a noble escutcheon: the rebels had the joy of victory already in their hearts.

Now, all this had befallen upon the day which brought news of my Lord of Norfolk's dilemma to those who waited in St. James's; and thereafter the panic which fell upon London did not a little to justify the rebel boast. So near was the peril, in truth, that every house was barred and shuttered, while the river herself could show a thousand willing hands to throw down the bridge by which Wyat must enter in. Lacking a leader where many led, believing that the rebel hosts were messengers of God, the timorous citizens asked vainly for that wisdom of defence of which fear had robbed her counsellors. "What wit was that," men asked, "which left London Bridge for a rebel highway when every other gate was closed? Had Sir Henry Bedingfield and those

with him no culverins, then, that Wyat should mock him so? Who was this outlaw, this prisoner of the White Tower, set free to trounce his betters and do that which the Queen's captains had not done?" "He was Roy, the King of Calverton," the knowing ones answered. Like men clutching at a straw, the timorous prayed God that he might yet save the city.

They said that the outlaw was free, and this was a true saying. The Queen had spoken a promise, and neither complaint nor argument would turn her from it. She, too, had found a man that day: she, too, would stake all upon a woman's judgment. "I deliver one to whom you shall hearken," she had cried, when many protested that safety lay by here or there, and others cried, "Nay, your wits are lost, for there is the road." And now Roy of Calverton, who but an hour ago had been the servant of the jailors, went boldly before them all to mock their doleful hesitation, and to awake them from their lethargy.

"My lords," he cried, and few relished his irony, "my lords, it is plain that ye strike a good blow for your Queen this night. Do ye stand here long enough, I myself will crave

mercy of this rebel for you. Nay, sirs, seeing that he must come in, ye show right good wisdom to let down the bridge for him. Put away your culverins, I beseech you, lest they be an offence in his eyes! Ye have good pikemen here, and archers I see; let them cast their pikes into the river and break their calivers. Would ye have this Wyat find ye with arms in your hands? God forbid, if ye would keep heads on your shoulders! Let the bridge be lowered and the sackbuts made ready; ye will need a merry fanfare when Sir Thomas rides in!"

His scorn, says the old chronicle, was a just rebuke upon their lethargy. Those who erstwhile had dawdled with their "ifs" and "an's" now protested that they would obey him willingly if he would but show them the way. Sir Henry Bedingfield himself, exclaiming upon his folly, called halberdiers to him and commanded them to the work. Where there had been but muttered complaint and womanish foreboding, brave words were heard and bold resolution. Faithful servants of the Queen were there, but they had lacked a leader; and now one came to them out of the night. A noble figure in the torches' light,

this sturdy Northman, with his curly flaxen hair tumbling upon his splendid shoulders, with his doublet of Lincoln green and his high boots of leather, and the good sword they had returned to him—this man came out to them as he whom they sought: the master of their salvation. Timidly at first, in twos and threes, anon in larger groups, and ultimately as an army acclaiming a chief, they pressed about him in the inner room. Halberdiers, pikemen, sergeants of the guard, sturdy troopers in caps and corselets of steel, heralds with blazoned tabards, gallants whose velvets were glittering with gems, serving-men from the kitchens, even priests from the chapels, acclaimed his right, while pikes were uplifted and pennons fluttered in the wind, and the flambeaux cast their glamour on the scene. No voice dissented when the cry was raised: "Lead, and we follow!"

Now, it was nothing to Roy of Calverton that men should thus acclaim him, for he had ever won the obedience of his fellows when the need arose, and this sovereignty was no new thing to him. Perchance he could not wholly put off some gratification that my Lord Gardiner, who would have bartered with him

that day, must be the witness of his victory; and there was a man's pride in his remembrance that my lady watched him from her window —perchance, that the Queen stood with her. These things, nevertheless, he made haste to forget, while he answered the troopers as they wished.

"Men of London," he said, "be it not for me to tell ye how this Wyat is at your gates, and knocks that he may enter. Ye have heard the tidings of yester-eve and of this night; but never would I have ye forget that he who rides a rebel into London city shall lack a head when he would ride out again. Is there any among you so ignorant that he hath not heard the story of Jack Straw, and of how Wat Tyler, with one hundred thousand, came in to take the King at Smithfield? Went he home again, I ask you? Ay, with Walworth's dagger in his heart! Fared Jack Cade any better, whom Iden killed that his head might grin on yon bridge for your fathers' security? Was it well with my Lord Audley, who rode to Blackheath for Warbeck's sake? Ye know the legend: let it be for our example and content! Ye have cast down the bridges by which this man would pass. Name me fifty who will hold the

gate at Southwark, and your task shall be well begun. Thereafter I will pick my own for the work allotted to me. But if ye do not hold the bridge, sirs, then is this Wyat no vain boaster! Nay, press not on me so; I know how willingly ye serve."

He had asked for fifty, but five hundred would seek his "ay"; and being held back by his own archers who passed into the Tower with my lady, he cast a judge's eye upon them; and picking here and there a lusty fellow of rare promise, he numbered his fifty and sent them out with Bedingfield.

"Get you gone, sirs, to the gate; let none return to say 'The bridge is down!' In the Queen's name I bid you God-speed!"

They answered him, "God keep you, master;" and, passing out with the Lieutenant, they hurried to the bridge. Those that were not chosen, complaining of the choice, pressed closer still about the archers, and began to clamour for employment.

"Shall we, too, strike no blow in Mary's name?—would ye name us craven? Lead, and we follow: thou hast work for us!"

He answered them that he had the work, and never heard a man of willingness more

gladly. Set upon his horse, with those who had followed him from Sherwood about him like a bodyguard, he turned to my Lord of Pembroke and claimed a service.

"My lord," he said, "I go to the fields of St. James's with these ready fellows. If you would play a master-stroke this night, take such a troop as I shall leave to you and watch at Charing lest Wyat come in by any other road. Between you and me the anvil shall lie, and those my iron does not strike shall be driven to yours. You are willing, my lord?"

Now, my Lord of Pembroke had done little that night but protest that all was lost; but when he found a man whose wit gave him sure right of command, he found his own courage again, and answered very civilly that he was willing.

"Whence you come and by what right you speak I know not," he said; "but this is the first wise word I have heard since yester-eve. Let it be as you wish, and God save the right. I will go to Charing, sir, and there do your pleasure."

And so it befell that five hundred horsemen rode anon with my Lord of Pembroke for Charing village; but the outlaw himself, with

no more than two-score at his back, set out presently from the Bulwark Gate, and crying 'God save Queen Mary!" he pressed on at a gallop for St. James's Fields and the road by which the rebels must pass.

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In St. John's Chapel, before an altar upon which many tapers were burning, my lady knelt at the Queen's side to pray for Roy of Calverton, "and these two," says the chronicle, "were one in faith, because of the peril which environed them."

CHAPTER XVIII

TO THE GIBBET AND THE AXE

"One flaunts in rags, one flutters in brocade."—POPE.

THE day dawned with a drizzling rain and a sky so overcast that men pointed to it as an omen. London had kept a weary vigil, but with the light she began to look for tidings of the crisis. Her citizens, the women at the windows, the men in cowering groups, thought of anything but sleep or the labour of their calling. There was no gate which armed men did not hold; no rampart of the walls undefended. The city watched and waited for the last great scene which should cast the usurper out or reward him with a kingdom. And, to her at last the message came from Southwark, and men knew that the rebels were at the gate, and said that the hour was at hand.

"There be ten thousand, and Wyat rides

at their head upon a great white horse. They have burned the ships, and the sailors ride in with them. Go a little way toward the bridge and you shall hear the culverins and the cannon's bark. The Queen is fled, they say, and my Lord of Pembroke killed. Those that hold the Tower open the gates and make ready the treasure. We shall have a new Queen this night, and God save the old."

Thus from some of the gossips; but others said—

"Ye speak with a craven's tongue. The Queen is not fled nor is the gate open. If there be ten thousand, they are but ploughmen, with flails for lack of sword. What shall these do against the Queen's men? My Lord of Pembroke is there, and my Lord Howard goes out. They say that this man of Nottingham, that was taken yesterday, is ready with counsel and help. The Queen will do well to bring in such as he. Let the women get to the cellars, and the houses be barred. It is an evil day when John Ploughman rules in London city!"

The people heard agape, and those who were boldest among them began to flock toward London Bridge like men going timidly

upon a strange adventure. Such of the women as were at the lattices looked down into those crooked streets upon a play the like to which they would never see again while Mary reigned. No merchant thought of his wares to-day, no apprentice cried a bargain. In the dim light as of a morning of tragedies, armed men moved like spectres from the shadows; faces uplifted told the human story of fear and hope. The shuttered windows, the barred doors, the play of light upon cap and corselet, the whispered menaces, the rolling thunder beyond the river, contributed, each in its measure, to the awe and wonder. What thing, then, was befalling in that sleepy hamlet of Southwark? Who were these who had come to dethrone the Spaniard? Would they enter in as marauders for pillage and rapine; would they come as disciples of the old faith which lived unspoken in the people's hearts? Must blood be shed to-day where yesterday men jested for very joy of life? None could answer such a question. From time to time, a passing horseman would draw rein to cry, "The bridge is down: Wyat is in!" but, ere his words were twice repeated, another would follow him with reassurance—

"The day is ours: the bridge is held! God save Queen Mary!" And in the gloom the pair would be engulfed, both he that told of defeat and he that spoke of victory.

London, then, knew little of that which befell; nor was the pleasant hamlet of Southwark much wiser. Out of the night, with scarce a cry of warning, this ragged army had ridden. By many lanes and alleys, from the open fields, without order or discipline, a motley company, whose corselets were of mud, whose arms were yesterday in byre and stable, it pressed on at dawn in all the savage delight of that bloody pilgrimage. Dumb serfs who were but a week ago prisoners of the fallow, the peasants marched to-day as very valiants of war. Never in all their lives, perhaps, had the most part of them set eyes on any city or known other hamlet but that in which their poor fortunes lay. And now at some call beyond their reason, but appealing to a human necessity of which they were unconscious, they had cast the old habit of life behind them, and taken up this parrot-cry, "A Wyat! a Wyat!" "What food for philosophy!" the scholars said: "What a dirge of death!" the prophets cried. Yet each could welcome the dreary cavalcade with

smiling face and ready tribute. It were dangerous for a man to declare himself upon such a day.

Regard the tattered ranks more closely, and you shall see many types there. Yon fellow, who lifts a scythe so bravely, has he not since childhood husbanded a desire of the cities, a dream of war and pillage? Or this dwarfish minister of the sonorous voice and the nose-chaunt, eloquent in psalms, was it not Mary's Bishop who turned him to the fields, lacking altar and pulpit? Or look over the rabble again, and pick out yon giant of the forge, whose brawny arm and lusty step proclaim his honest calling, and ask of him what his daughter has suffered at my Lord of Eastwell's hands, and then say why he marches to London town. You shall hear a hundred stories, do you but listen to their eloquence. Now it will be of one that has tasted no bread since Michaelmas; again of a crazy fellow who has it in his head that the Spaniard will take his farm and give it to a stranger; by here you shall meet the true fanatic exclaiming upon the blasphemies of mass and sacrament; by there you shall find another who thinks a staff uplifted will save the Queen from a Spanish bed. For every

one that can give you a good account of it, there shall be five hundred who march because another marches; who go to the new way because the old was worn and familiar; who lift a scythe because a fork had wearied. A gabbling horde that has no desire to slay, and yet will slay if any bid it. Such were Wyat's men, such the army vain-glorious which marched through Southwark fields that it might knock at London's gate.

It had been a halting journey, but now the goal was in sight and the city of the rebels' dreams rose up like a phantom of the mists before them. Much they had suffered, much they must suffer yet; but no doubt of the issue, weighty as it might be, came yet to trouble them. For how should that cause be lost for which men were content to sleep as the beasts of the field, and to go unashamed in rags and nakedness? Had not Wyat promised them victory when London came to their view? Was their faith grown cold because the end appeared to be at hand? Ay, there was London, fair and goodly to see as it shaped for them in the morning lights. What a vision for the swineherd whose palace, ere that day, had been a priest's house, whose cathedral was a

village church! There, upon the river-bank, he gazed upon the noble fabric of Paul's, the goodly spires of the city's churches, the frowning ramparts of Baynard's Castle, the distant towers of Westminster, the white walls of the palaces, the forbidding bulwarks of the Tower; ay, upon these and upon the river herself, the gilded barges, the fluttering pennons, the dancing wherries, all appearing, at the touch of day's magic wand, to delight the eyes and captivate the senses. For this he has lived and suffered; for this he will yet lay down his life. Little wonder if he stand enthralled and voiceless, forgetting his watchword, worshipping at this altar of white walls. Little wonder if the cannon's voice call him as quickly to remembrance.

They had brought the news to Wyat while yet he rode some little way from the bridge; and he received it with that good countenance he bravely showed in all adversity. Endowed with the faculty of winning men's allegiance, the poet's son had that rare resource and ready wit which never failed to delight the multitude. For the jester a jest; for the curate a text; for the malcontent a promise of his vengeance; for the women a poet's grace of flattery—he played

upon the minds of his fellows as others upon an instrument. Let them despair, his merry laughter turned their fears to scorn; let any complain, he heard him patiently; let any charge him that he was a traitor, he answered, "I serve the Queen as no other in this realm." And he had, says the chronicle, all that brave appearance which men ask from him that leads them. Wearing still the mantle of youth, with fair curly hair and Saxon blue eyes, and a voice in which a note of music lingered, he was such a one as men loved for himself rather than for his teaching. Nor would he enjoy that which revolt denied to those who followed him.

"They close the bridge, you say?" he answered them who brought the news. "Then surely, my masters, we shall be quick to open it. What! has the night, then, brought a miracle, that a man must pass in Southwark's gate or lie for ever at the walls? Ye tell me a child's tale! Ride on but a league yet, and I will show you what a stratagem is this. In very truth ye shall sup at Mary's palace this night!"

They cried to him "A Wyat! a Wyat!" And, warmed now with wine, and fed by the bounty of the hamlet, many of them pressed

even to the river's bank, and boldly clamoured that Sir Thomas Brydges should open to them. The answering cry of "Traitors, get you gone!" provoked their merry laughter.

"We are no traitors," their tongues protested, "but honest men that come to save our Queen! Let her hearken, and all will be well."

The culverins replied to them, balls from the arquebuses, and the singing arrows of the archers. This message of death, swift and sudden, was the first reality of that week of wonders. Yonder on the muddy banks men lay groaning or crying to their God; there were crimson stains upon the dewy grass; pitiful cries were heard—the moans of those who were sinking down to darkness. Not for such an end as this had the shepherd left his flock, the swineherd his stable. In their agony and fright men fell from sheer imaginings.

"Lord God!" they cried, "must Thy people perish!"

Be it no surprise that the river-bank seemed to Wyat's fellows as the very mouth of hell itself. Let none marvel that they reeled back like men drunken with wine. Must victory be won at such a cost? All had been lost indeed, all undone, in that fierce assault, but for the

courage of him who led them, and the zeal of the few who, for zeal's sake, had played this master-stroke. Plain to be seen in the throng, upon a white horse, well caparisoned, Wyat, and by him Brett, that was the famous captain, rode to and fro among that affrighted company, and drove them from the peril.

"Go ye thus—like sheep to the butcher? Nay, would ye breach a river with your voices? Back, sirs, back! Let the houses give you shelter until a way be found! Would ye lose all at a cannon's bark? This night ye shall sup at Mary's palace—upon Christ's cross I swear it!"

To him they hearkened, the record says, and being drawn back from the peril, they pressed on in tumultuous disorder to villages remote and Kingston's bridge. The city itself was now but a forest of spires upon their horizon; the gates by which they would have passed in were closed and guarded. They were sore weary, laggards in hope, but still they cried "A Wyat! a Wyat!" and still there were those who believed that the night would make them masters of London and its citadel.

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Now, Roy of Calverton had ridden out of

the Tower on the dawn of the day to find Wyat's men repulsed at London Bridge; whence they were driven westward to the villages. Being assured that many hours yet must elapse before the rebels spanned the river, he lay the next night in the fields of St. James's; but upon the second morning at daybreak, a messenger having ridden in from Kingston to say that a multitude was passing there, he commanded his men to horse, and set out quickly by the western road.

There had been fifty with him when he quitted the Tower Gate, but London added to his numbers; and from the shuttered houses of the ghostly streets he had taken willing troopers who asked but honest employment, and others whom panic drove forth from the Tower. A goodly company, which the fearful citizens had armed right readily and given of their best in horse and caparison, Roy would yet count upon his own rather than these new allies; and bidding the men of Sherwood press close about him, he claimed their ancient service.

"Ye that have been brothers to me in fortune or adversity, will ye not be my right arm now?" he said. "Was it not my gift of the forest that won your allegiance and the right to serve

you? As ye stood with me before, so shall ye stand this day. Nay, ye shall give me the love you ever gave! God knows I would accomplish this thing for the sake of one all dear to me, and to you a mistress well beloved! For Sherwood and our home let the blow be struck! I count upon ye, comrades; I count upon the affection ye bear me!"

They heard him with acclamation, and such as had possessed themselves of pikes in the city waved pennons in the air and cried: "A Roy! a Roy of Calverton!" Never, it may be, did such a motley company ride out to befriend an English Queen, or to save her from the people. Look down upon it from the lattice window as it winds its way through London's narrow streets, and you shall see a sight so wonderful that even the sober chronicle may not pass it idly by! Stern men are there, and jesters to mock their sternness; the bells and caps of fools, the steel casques and corselets of the troopers; flambeaux to light the shrouded walls; Meagre the dwarf, upon a great black horse; René the page, to bear his master service; he they called the Knight of the Silver Bow, whom some would name Sir Percival; and, proud among them all, Roy

himself, who went cheek by jowl with his anxieties. For who would go all hopeful or with sure confidence upon that errand which sent him to the fields to find his quarry there? Devise it as he might, what sure thing should guide him to Wyat's camp, or indicate the bridge by which the rebels must come in? Any chance or circumstance, a bolder stroke than Roy had the wit to conceive, might yet send Wyat to the Tower to be the judge of those who were his judges now.

It has been written that panic fell early upon London and her citizens; and when the day dawned, which found the tidings in every house, there was no road leading out of the city that did not bear witness to the people's fears. Heavy waggons, loaded with such goods as haste had snatched from the deserted houses, ploughed their halting way to any place of harbourage that fortune might vouchsafe to them. Whole families, huddled together under the hedgerows or hurrying in their terror westward to distant towns, spake of the rebels' victory and its menace. By here you would meet a rider galloping as one possessed from the place of alarms to the villages of security; by there the wailing voice of women cried to

you the bitterness of the outcast's lot, the lament of the driven exile. Or pass on yet a league, and you shall see shepherds with their flocks and yeomen with their teams who knew not any word of Wyat's story, or had so much as heard his name. For thus oddly were the tidings carried; to these as a judgment, to those not at all; so that women's tears were shed before the indifferent, who knew not their meaning, and flying horsemen cried an alarm which neither set church bells ringing, nor drew one idler to the village green.

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Roy lay the night in the fields beyond St. James's, but very early upon the next day, the morning being sunny and the clouds lifted, he was waked by a messenger from my Lord of Pembroke, and made to know that Wyat was at hand.

"He hath four thousand with him, and the culverins gotten from the ships. His fellows burn and pillage wherever they pass. My lord says that all is lost, and ye will do well to strike a bargain with this fellow if delay may thereby be gained. He leaves it to your prudence to act as you shall think fitting. Ye would not ride out with such poor array against

Wyat's host, sir; ye would not do this madness?"

Roy sprang upon his horse, and calling to the fifty, he answered the messenger—

"Return as ye came, and say that all is lost indeed if so be his lordship's ears are reckoned in the category. Tell him that if he be not clever at the barter, this Wyat will nail them to Charing's pump ere the sun go down! Nay, sir, if all be lost shall I not go to look for it? Will ye not have me light a candle to search for the piece I lack? Go, say to my Lord of Pembroke that there be cellars at Whitehall wherein he and his men may find a haven. Ay, I would crave a petticoat of him, lest this Wyat mistake me for what I am!"

And then to his own he said—

"Heard ye that, comrades—will ye to the cellars with my Lord of Pembroke? This Wyat comes with four thousand. Like ye the tidings, or would ye fondle Dame Prudence, of whom my lord makes mention? Truly, ye shake in your shoes already—ye itch to bend the knee to Captain Maypole! I read it in your faces. Ye would not be thought men this day lest hurt come to ye thereby!"

They replied to him with oaths and laughter,

which drove the messenger ashamed from the camp; and some running for their horses, and some whetting their arms, and many crying "A Roy! a Roy!" they came to good order and set out for Richmond town. No gladder tidings had been heard that day. The hour of waiting was gone by. No man rode out of London in greater content than Roy of Calverton.

"Let me know that this thing is true, and I will give thanks to God for it," he said to one near him. "If Wyat pass by any other bridge, it shall need a holy angel to save my Lord of Pembroke's ears! See you not how fortune goes with us? Four thousand or forty, I care not which while I have these with me! Ay, if the news be true—if it be true!"

Now, Meagre the dwarf, capering near by on his great black horse, took up the words and drew rein to raise the piping cry—

"Fifty of Sherwood and fifty more upon one white horse; do you like the reckoning, master? Go fifty well to a bridle-rein? Ay, hark to the tale of it! I see fifty, and yet I see but one. To the saints be the glory for these eyes of mine!"

He was a merry fellow, who would have

said that the outlaw himself added the hearts of fifty to their company. His master liked the compliment.

"Fifty indeed if ye love me, as I think you do. I shall have need of your love this day; nay, comrades, we will not ask of our messenger again, for yonder is a better one!"

They had come at this time almost to the hill by Richmond; and when he commanded them to look up they began to perceive, in the distant fields and upon the high-road before them, an advancing host which Wyat led to London and the palace. Faintly, as the murmur of a city's voices, harsh music was to be heard, and rolling drums and the winding of horns, the rebel outcry and the answering shouts of the rabble multitude. In weary disorder, some dancing in the fields, some bearing odd devices on banners ill-blazoned, some capering on sorry horses, some crowned with straw, some wearing garlands of leaves, many drunken with ale, others blaspheming the Queen and the priests, the host advanced, greedy in hope and vainglorious in its victory. "London, London!" was ever its watchword. Little children, drawn from the houses, ran in wonder at the peasants' sides, to repeat, in

childish exultation, "London, London!" Old women at the house-doors crossed themselves and cried, "London, London!" Innkeepers, whose ale flowed in the very gutters, cried "London, for God's sake!" All the pitiful story of the days of excitement and fatigue was written in the staring eyes, the fever-flushed cheeks, of those who pressed onward to the city's gate. Through suffering they had come in, but in joy they would go out.

They cried for London, in truth; but, had they known it, the way lay to the gibbet and the axe.

CHAPTER XIX

FOR GOD AND QUEEN MARY

"The scum
That rises upmost when the nation boils."—DRYDEN.

IN a belt of the trees at the western extremity of St. James's Fields where they begin to border upon the manor of Hyde and its Park, Roy of Calverton waited with a hundred about him for the passing of the rebels. It was nine o'clock on a sunny morning; dulcet music of the bells called the citizens to the Abbey mass. All the content, all the sweetness of day seemed breathed in that good hour. The distant city, clear to be seen upon the horizon, lifted sunlit spires and flashing windows to a heaven of blue. By here and there, unconscious of that which was passing, travellers went northward, southward, to the river and the villages. Peace touched the scene, giving to the sparkling meadows a freshness of her

dews; to the trees the promise of the gentle springtime. Even cattle browsed within a hundred paces of that ambush.

The hundred lay concealed in the thicket, and so had their leader placed them that one passing on the high-road might not so much as espy a glimmer of the sunshine upon their helmets, a flash of the Lincoln green amid their leafy bower. Aware now of the issue, they spake but in whispers. The hour of truce wrought upon their nerves as an hour of waiting intolerable. Impatient horses champed and whinnied; impatient riders asked when they might, "Think ye that they come?" Roy of Calverton alone asked questions of no man.

"Ye will not discover until the word be spoken," he said, grown sure in that command which the night had given him. "I command your patience, comrades. We are but a hundred against four thousand, and naught but stratagem will save us this day. Let it be our business that Wyat shall pass in to my Lord of Pembroke with as few at his back as judgment and opportunity may permit. I would not have ye forget that these be poor people whom ignorance hath misled; they think to

strike a blow for England, but strike only at that which is our good security. Do so to them as ye would it were done to you if ye were in like case. God bear me witness, I will have no butcher's work this day!"

Many assented with a murmur of their praise. Had you pressed them for a reason, perchance they knew not why they were there at all, if it were not that Roy of Calverton had bidden them. And the humour of their employment was not to be forgotten by any man. Hear Meagre the dwarf, as he bandies the jest—

"God save law and order, and them that go to and fro in forests," said he; "I am all for the sheriff's men, whose ears your worship nailed to the pump at Nottingham. Ay, masters, would ye be as ravening wolves, hieing you to Sherwood again when the right royal nobility claps your honours on the back and says 'God-speed'? Put me in a page's doublet, and I will serve Sir Roy of Calverton! Ho-ho! there was one of his name that my Lord of Stow did call outlaw—a sorry word for him that will caper in a bishop's rochet when the day come!"

And then, remembering their need, he cried,

"Speak, comrades; will ye not hold your tongues when all the cry is 'tip-toes!'"

Roy, who loved the dwarf, suffered his humour patiently, as ever he did in Sherwood's stronghold.

"An' thou dost not fulfil the behest, law and order will put thee in yon brook presently!"

He tweaked the dwarf by the ear, and pointing to the tree above him he bade him climb it.

"Thou limb of Satan, get ye up upon yon branch and tell me what thou seest on the road. Ride any in, or must law and order tarry yet?"

Now the dwarf pulled himself up from his saddle, and, perched among the boughs, he began to tell them of that which befell.

"There is a road, sirs, and yon is the river. Blood of Paul! they stand where they stood an hour ago!"

"Thou devil's scarecrow, who rides upon the road?"

"The wind, your worship. God knows, I will cast a broomstick if thou hast the mind!"

A little while they waited, and then he spoke again—

"There be swine upon four legs and others

upon two; hide yourselves, my masters, lest they claim acquaintance!"

Someone lifted a halberd and made pretence to prick him as he sat; but his mock cry was hushed upon his lips, and he that held the halberd withdrew it.

"Thou seest something, spawn"—

"The road is there, the meadow is there—and, God reward ye, I bid you draw, masters! Ay, hearken—hearken! Like ye the music? Ye shall hear more presently, for yonder be those who would marry the Queen!"

It was no frolic or jest. Those who erstwhile had dared to laugh now fell to a grim silence. Swords leaped from their scabbards, calivers were uplifted, bows were strung, pikes slung up; the very horses seemed to stand as at some call of duty. In the fork of the bough Meagre the dwarf put on the wisdom of the sage.

"I see a man upon a white horse and a hundred that ride about him. There are pennons for the breeze, but they be of rags, masters. Would ye carry a hedge-pole less bravely for that? Yonder is the waggon in which Mary shall pass for Wyat's bride: they have gotten a husband for her, and stuffed his

belly with shavings! I like the man! Here comes a Lord Bishop whose paunch you shall drum upon! There be five hundred dancing in the fields; and a sheep makes psalms for them! Lord have mercy upon us this day! Saw one ever such muddy hoofs! Go, give them water for charity's sake! Now there be these three—faith, hope"—

They dragged him from the tree to silence him, and the discordant music coming on the breeze to tell them of Wyat's near approach, Roy himself pressed forward to the thicket's edge and watched that cavalcade go by. Never did man look upon spectacle so sorry. This horde which would have pressed on to the very throne, truly was charity its need. Worn and weary, armoured in mud, its horses drooping, its weaklings falling to dewy beds, madness alone still cried "Onward!" For let us look at the manner of it and the aspect it wears upon the threshold of London city. Here, you shall see a bevy of urchins to herald it. They wave boughs; boughs cover their nakedness. Or, look again, and number that regiment whose rags stream as banners, whose very faces are smeared with dirt! Will such win London for Wyat; will such drive the

Spaniard out? Hearken to the ribald priests as, masquerading in tattered alb and dirty maniple, they scoff the mass, deride the offices. Nor let the brighter trappings of ambition deceive you. A brave picture makes Wyat upon his good white horse, brave are his words, brave his bearing; but the shadow of the axe looms upon him and his fellows; the very voices are too weak to cry, "London, London!" The burden has bent the yeoman's back downward to the ground he sprang from. The breeze has torn the ribald banners and mocked their blazon; the road the people pass in by is black with the figures of them that fall.

Ay, London—London is so close to them now! Let the eye pass beyond these pleasant fields, and there stands Paul's and there the ramparts. They have but to knock and the gate shall be opened. Vanity is their watch-word. A fair city they see, the city of desire; but the tongue is one they do not know. No vigil has worn the battle-cry which bursts from yon thicket as a volley of thunder! No dirt besmears that Lincoln green, no laggards there fall impotent. With one great cry, "A Roy! a Roy of Calverton!" with swords uplifted and bows bent, with a roar as of a mighty

avalanche, the hundred ride out and burst the serried ranks. Where but a moment agone ye had seen a thousand limping eastward to the city's gate, ye shall see a thousand now turn headlong westward as from a pit of hell! Ay, what cries for mercy are uttered, what cries of anger and of pain! As grass before the scythe these would-be reapers go down to death. Strong men fall upon their knees and crave mercy; women drop for very fear. That roaring, surging multitude, riven by the horsemen as a tree by the axe, bends and breaks, sways and totters. The day is won, the end has come. Above all the clamour, you may hear the voice of Roy of Calverton crying to them to make his victory good—

"Ye have them—ye have them for God and Queen Mary this day!"

* * * * *

Five hundred, they say, passed in with Wyat and went on to Ludgate and the City when the cavalry in St. James's Fields cut the multitude asunder. Unaware of that deadly blow, and intent upon the scene to come, the rebel leader drew no rein nor waited for the messengers. The Tower was his journey's end. He knew not that a thousand had turned

from him at Hay Hill and the fields. He knew not that Roy of Calverton pressed close upon him, and spoke of victory in that pursuit.

"My Lord of Pembroke waits for them at Charing," the outlaw said, urging onward to the gate; "we shall not miss that play, comrades! Nay, my heart is heavy for these poor devils and their sorry masquerade. Such is the gulf that lies between the end and the ambition. Many pay when a traitor buys. God knows, they shall be charged a good account presently!"

He had sheathed his sword at this time, and none that rode with him remembered his arms. Those poor devils by the roadside, some trembling with their fears, some fallen for very weakness, were no quarry for Sherwood's men. Death would claim them soon enough—the prison and the gibbet. Let them cherish what grace the day should give them, Roy said; at Charing he should see a finer sight.

"If my Lord of Pembroke be yet out of petticoats, he hath this Wyat, surely! Nevertheless, I mistrust him, comrades. There is a man's work to do in London; perchance our hands shall be needed there!"

He pressed on at a canter upon the main

high-road, as though the echo of the distant clamour were some signal to him; and being come to Charing, he asked vainly for tidings of my lord's men. The din of riot was not here. Such rebels as lagged, hugged bloody wounds or lay moaning at the gates of the nobles' houses. The village waked itself with gossipers. You had counted a hundred about the cross who told in wonder their story of the march. To these ever and anon a single horseman, flying as from pursuit, gave assurance of Wyat's victory, or was named a boaster by one that followed him. Maids watched from the windows of the houses, or carried water to the wretched laggards who craved pity for God's sake. Bells were still tolling in the Minster church; cannon were heard from London Bridge. But go a hundred paces to the fields and all is of the common day again. Men work contentedly in pleasant gardens; waggons creak and rumble with their market burden; friend speaks to friend of sale and barter; the children run to the schoolhouse unfearingly.

Roy passed through Charing with a firm hand upon his bridle, and being assured that the need of him lay eastward, he set his men for Ludgate and the hill at Paul's.

"God knows what shall befall if fear of this Wyat hath opened the gates," he said. "I would as lief count upon yon old woman's prattle as upon my Lord of Pembroke's wisdom! Let Wyat pass in, and all may yet be undone! There is magic of a name which sheathes the stoutest sword. Press on, friends, lest the play be done ere we see the groundlings!"

He gave a ready example to them, and those who rode after him drew again and went on with naked swords in their hands. Every step now is toward the heart of the riot, to that discordant music they play by Paul's and the hill. Grooms and serving-men at the doors of the great houses in the Strand cry, "Hasten, hasten, for God's sake!" Men, showing their hurts, stumble and fall by wall and archway; they leave bloody tracks behind them. Apprentices who bawl, "The gate is down!" swarm about the horsemen and jeer their tardiness. As the scene is approached, the Bar by Temple, and thence to Fleet Street, the shouts became more discordant, and the riot is distinctly to be heard. For here is a great press of people, leaping and contending that they may not miss the spectacle. Every

lattice shows its array of anxious faces; the very roofs are given over to the doubting citizens. Above that brawling uproar the cry is heard—"A Wyat! a Wyat!" Battle rages horribly, the din of conflict, the ultimate encounter. Monstrous bludgeons beat upon the iron of the gate; every arquebuse belches its vomit of lingering smoke. There are arrows flying in the air, great stones hurled, scythes waved as banners, pikes shivered against the unyielding barriers. The chief rebel himself, beating at the portal, calls loudly—

"I am Wyat; the Queen has granted all my petitions!"

But none of those who serve the gate lays down his arms, none cries a welcome.

In a lull of the storm mark the voice of my Lord Howard, who answers to the rebel—

"Avaunt, traitor; thou shalt have no entrance here!"

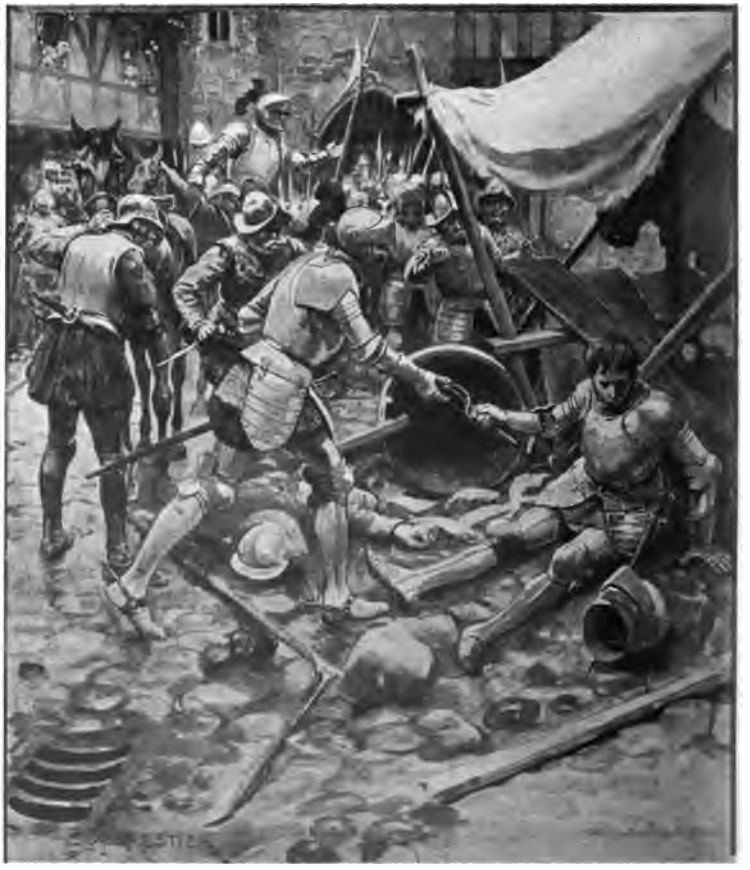
Thus the taunt which charges the arquebuses again, and again drives the archers to the ramparts. Counting no more than forty of his company, Wyat knew that the end was here. For this—the death about him, the iron barrier, the reproach "Traitor!" the mocking

citizens, the shadow of the gibbet—he had persuaded these men of Kent, who now cursed his name and the day his mother bore him. What availed now that giant courage which still could wear a smiling face and throw back at my lord the answering jest and challenge?

"Nay, thou shalt open willingly enough ere the hour be done, my lord—and we will see who is traitor then! Back, comrades, to find those who will compel this boaster!"

He turned his horse, and, crossing the bridge, would have beat up Fleet Street once more, and so returned to that multitude he imagined to be waiting for him at Charing. Perchance, even then, could his fellows but have come in to overawe the gaping citizens the day would have been his and all retrieved. But it befell that, as he forced a path westwards towards the Bar, there appeared in the narrow streets the men of Sherwood, and spurring, when they beheld the rebels, as at some joust or tournament, they came on with a thunderous shout, and in that fearful embrace the last word was spoken.

Down now, ay, down as trees the storm uproots—so fall the remnant; so is the flame of this conspiracy quenched. From the windows



WYAT SINKING IMPOTENT BEFORE LUDGATE

of any house, you may see rearing horses and cloven skulls; bleeding bodies and hearts laid bare; a worming, gasping mass. As the thud of one great sea upon another the forces meet; as the wave upon the shingle the foresters spread over their foes. For God and Queen Mary this day! Now at length the prayer is answered, for yonder is Wyat sinking impotent before Ludgate, and yonder is Sir Maurice Berkley, who shall carry him to St. James's and the scaffold.

"I have kept touch," he says.

Touch hath he kept indeed; but the hand is clammy as the fingers of death.

CHAPTER XX

A CHAIN OF GOLD

"The elements be kind to thee, and make
Thy spirits all of comfort."

Antony and Cleopatra.

THEY carried Wyat to St. James's, a thousand running about Sir Maurice Berkley's house, a thousand more heralding the affair in the purlieus of the palace. Bound hand and foot now, mocked by every tongue, spat upon, buffeted, the poet's son was lifted up like some mummy for the people's sport. None pitied him, none cried "God-speed." They had no grace for the vanquished. With destiny this man had wrestled; to destiny must he pay the price. Men said that his head would grin from London Bridge before the week had run. Those who had feared him greatly an hour ago would have torn him limb from limb if the archers had permitted. But the men from Sherwood closed about that pitiful figure; they

beat the people back; they befriended one whom all had deserted.

Now, it befell that the running heralds of the downfall came to St. James's ahead of the archers who buffeted the people; and as each one entered in, his tale was ever of Roy and the archers who had followed him to the fields. Making known to the gossips the deeds of that day, they spoke chiefly of the outlaw and the brave part he had played since liberty was given him. Which fair report, coming to my Lord Chancellor's ears, was by him very honestly carried to the Queen, and so received that he repented anon the generosity which bade him speak.

"Your Majesty," he said, "God and our Lady be thanked for this day's work! Your outlaw has taken Wyat, and rides even to the palace gate with him."

So greatly had the news wrought upon him, the record says, that he had but few words; and burst in upon Queen Mary like one who won fortune of an hour; but the Queen, whose courage was well remembered by them all, stood in no way surprised by him.

"You come, my lord, upon a pleasant errand. Is this the voice that counselled me

this day to ride to my father's palace at Hampton, and trust myself to God? Ay, ye wear a stout heart, but ye hide it well. There were those who would go forth upon the instant. Let them go now, I beseech you, that they come to some remembrance of their shame."

It is written that my lord knew not how to answer her; but, while he would have made excuse, she bethought herself of a command which had been in her mind from the first.

"For this Roy, the outlaw, whom some have known as the Count of Brives, I bid you write our pardon. Let the daughter of Bernard of Ollerton be confirmed in her estate and molested by none. Ye will bear this to the Count with your own hand. Ye owe him some honest apology. Nay, answer nothing, my lord—were it not for this man, your head, assuredly, had been the price."

My lord, they say, buttoned his velvet cape with nervous fingers, and went, unwillingly enough, to do Her Majesty's bidding. The palace by this time echoed the busy footsteps of those who came in and out with their loud-tongued news of victory. Like a storm-cloud which burst harmlessly, the tempest of fear passed from London and the outskirts. For

very joy strangers kissed in the street. The churches were filled with thankful women; the streets awoke to the old habit of sale and barter and the talk of common affairs. But of Roy the Outlaw many in the palace spoke; and it came anon to my Lord Gardiner that the Queen had summoned him, and that he had gone to her.

"She hath hung a chain of gold about his neck, and kissed him on the cheek. We are not heard to-day, my lord. Seek favour of him if ye would do wisely—he may yet crave one good head upon a charger."

Roy was with the Queen, as they said, in a little room of the palace that gave upon the chapel, and boasted the great arras which a Pope had sent to King Harry. Here, all dusted, his cloak torn, his boots green with the grass, his doublet stained by the hard bed he had slept upon, he found my lady and the Queen, and gave them his story. There were tears in Mary's eyes when she answered him.

"Roy of Calverton, how shall I say 'Leave me'? Need enough have I of brave hearts that this one should know me no more. Gratitude speaks ill of all that I would tell

thee. Thou wilt come again—to London, to my city?"

He answered her that, God helping him, he would come; and unclasping the gold badge which held his doublet at the throat, he knelt and proferred it.

"Send a messenger with this trinket, and Roy of Calverton will draw no rein until he be at your side again. Nay, your Majesty, I go where I shall best serve in all love and fidelity—to the forest that bred the stout hearts which this day wrought for your life and kingdom. Grant me sovereignty of these, that I may proclaim it in the city and no man gainsay me. Ye have not friends more sure than Sherwood's men, nor these that loved the play of Robin and his fellows. Let my Queen give me her God-speed. I ask no other recompense."

He proffered the jewel, and the Queen, pinning it to her breast, made haste to send for the Chancellor.

"My lord," she said, "ye have something to say to Roy of Calverton. Let it be said here and now, that your honour may not suffer by delay."

She waited for the Chancellor; but he, right shrewdly, would stumble no more, and all

humbly he put the paper into the outlaw's hand and craved his forgiveness.

"Three days gone I said that I had found a man. Ye will bear me no ill-will, sir, if I spoke a true prophecy."

And then to my lady he said—

"What shall I say of thee if it is not that thou art a worthy daughter of him who ruled at Ollerton? God send thee light, my daughter. Thou wilt yet be of our holy faith."

My lady would not make him any answer; but to Queen Mary she said very prettily—

"Of the faith which has served your Majesty this day."

* * * * *

At sunset the forty rode out of London to Sherwood and their home. The city lay behind them aflame in the golden lights. The shadow of peace was upon the fields; the heralds of the night winged in the silent woods. As some tragedy which twilight veiled, the story of the peril was blotted out in that gladness of victory, the day forgotten in the morrow's hope. They rode for Sherwood and the North—in mutual content, with mutual consolations. Outlaws no longer, the very law admitted their sovereignty. Henceforth no

man might question their dominion. They had staked all, won all in that fearsome throw. The feast alone remained—the beacons they would kindle, the cups they would pass, the bells they would ring in Sherwood's heart.

"The night and the morrow and Ollerton's lights shall give us welcome," said Roy, turning upon Finchley's Common to bid farewell to the lingering day and the city shining from the golden mists behind them; "we will ride in at nightfall, and Master Eleazar will be there. I see a great company of them that love thee at the gates, and mine own with them. Nay, sweet wife, what an hour that shall be! And thereafter to the gentle springtime of the woods, and the glade wherein thy love was won—wilt not ride there with him who jested, and say the jest is no more and he is King of Calverton indeed?"

He pressed his horse close to hers, and wondered not that his words should recall a day momentous to her fortunes.

"Hadst thou drawn rein but twenty hours in Sherwood, and this night I had been the wife of the Lord of Stow and Wyat had ruled in London city," she said half jestingly. "Nay, sir, be not so hasty to protest—what you have

never won you cannot lose. When first I beheld you at Ollerton's gate I said, 'Here is one who can command me.' Had it been my lord, perchance I had said, 'This man will obey when the day is come.' We women judge right shrewdly if judgment be called for. Yet little thought I that Roy of Calverton rode with me in the forest, or so soon would do what he liked with me. 'Twill never be 'obey' that I shall say to thee, Roy. I am Bernard's daughter, and now that thou hast me, I will be Bernard's daughter still—but to thee one that will say, 'Bid me serve.' Ye shall teach me gentleness. There are some at Ollerton who charge me that I have need of the lesson."

"Ay, the rogues thy servants' whips have driven forth—the cut-purses the forest harbours; those who begrudge the children bread, and honour no woman's name. Seek ye better tribute than their hostility? Nay, little wife, 'tis I should go fearing when I remember the tale they tell of thy anger against such, and the judgments thou hast spoken. In Sherwood, if I be king, let Barbara of Ollerton be queen indeed. She is all worthy, and the forest shall acclaim her. Before other deeds, will I ride out to show them what I have won of London

city. There shall be bells rung from Nottingham to Lincoln town when this news be known; and not a village which lacks its beacon or wine as water for its conduit. Wilt ride with me, sweet wife; wilt ride to the sheriff's house to bid him welcome?"

She must laugh at his humour, but could still think of serious things. "My Lord of Stow would have closed the gate and shut the forest out," she said, "it shall be opened again when the bells are heard. I look to see Master Eleazar first, and my people with him. Yet it shall be no disappointment to me if the tidings be not yet known and the house abed. Nay, Roy, the better surprise for them if they be waked to our coming and know not whether it be for good or ill. Cannot ye hear, in fancy, Master Eleazar as he cries, 'Who goes there, in God's name?' Oh, I have the picture before me, and it is all of my home and those I love therein. It shall be night when we ride in, and shuttered window and silent tower. Boris, my hound, must bay a greeting, and the horses whinny when I come. There are violets already in the woods, and we will carry the perfume as we ride. And then, heigho for bolt and bar and the face at the

wicket, and those that stand fearfully to cry 'Who goes?' Nay, Roy, Roy, I could cry for very joy of it, dear heart. And thou hast won it, thou who art all to me to my life's end"—

He bent and kissed her lips. Night began to engulf the little company, and lights to shine upon the hill where stood Barnet town. They would lie there until dawn, he said, and thereafter ride on with better courage. Now, for the first time since she had been a wife to him, could he take my lady in his arms and say, "She is mine by all right of her love and of the victory." Before them lay the peaceful days at Ollerton, Sherwood and her fair dominion, joust and tournament, the woodland masquerade. But all these had been naught to him but for the word my lady spoke, saying, "I love thee, Roy, I love thee before aught else in heaven or earth."

Nor would he tell her that horsemen had ridden before them into the night to wake Ollerton from its sleep, and that, ere twenty hours had passed, her people would be ready and the feast prepared.

Bernard's daughter, indeed, had come to her own again. In Sherwood she would crown the King of Calverton with the jewels of her love.

CHAPTER XXI

"REX"

"We figure to ourselves
The thing we like."—HENRY TAYLOR.

FROST and snow, whitened bough and jewelled leaf fade to my sight; I see the great house at Ollerton in my fancy, and Roy and my lady at the lattice there—and so the vision passes, the book is closed, the record of merry Master Miles has found its "Finis." No longer do I ride with Roy in Sherwood Forest, but awake to reality upon the sward at Fontainebleau; there to behold the summer ripeness and the glory of bud and blossom, and the sparkling burn which drones at my very feet. I am in France, and for me Sherwood is no more. The figures of my book vanish in the mists of waking. I have read the story to the last line—the story that Master Miles of Kirkby-in-Ashfield told so often to them that sought him out.

A legend some would say, yet history has told us that it is no legend. Roy, Count of Brives, sent by his father to Bolton Abbey, has left descendants who yet may be found in the country of his birth. How that he lived for thirty years, the master of Ollerton, is a written record in the annals of the house. By what skill of defence, by what help of the men of Sherwood, he held Ollerton, we now know, truly. To my lady he swore that her home should be his home—and so he made it. The first four years of Mary's reign find in Ollerton church the witness of his children's birth. He was at Ollerton when Elizabeth was crowned, and she has named him among the foremost of the Northmen. And while we know that some years of his married life were passed at his father's house in Vincennes, when he took upon him the duties of his estate, none the less his heart was ever in England, and thither he returned when duty permitted him, "all gladly and with sure affection," as his own word says.

In Ollerton House to this day there is a little picture hanging above a shelf of books in the library, which shows to us the splendid figure of this true Northman, with flaxen hair curling

upon his shoulders, and a doublet of blue velvet, and a hand upon his sword, and such a grace of carriage and beauty of face that we seem to understand why men have called him "King of Calverton," and how it came about that the forest knew no other lord.

And beneath the picture is the one word "Rex." There is no other tribute to the master of the house, nor to that brave page in the history of Sherwood which his eventful life has written.

THE END

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