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HISTORICAL ROMANCES
OF
WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH
VOLUME XVI

TALBOT HARLAND

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Publ. by

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The Gaillarde on the Heath

No ballet ever offered a prettier tableau than the scene now presented. What with the two graceful central figures, the groups around them, the richly-gilt coach, the horses of the troopers, and the old oak-tree in the background, the picture was perfect.

Amid the applause of the beholders, the gaillarde came to an end.

HISTORICAL ROMANCES

OF

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

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*TALBOT HARLAND. IN ONE VOLUME. WITH PORTRAIT OF
CHARLES II., AFTER THE PAINTING BY SIR PETER
LELY, AND THREE ETCHINGS BY EUGÈNE-
ANDRÉ CHAMPOLLION, AFTER PAINT-
INGS BY HUGH W. DITZLER*

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TALBOT HARLAND

BOOK I

THE COURT AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS

CHAPTER I

SOMERHILL

No mansion in Kent is more charmingly situated, or commands fairer prospects, than stately Somerhill. From its terrace, the views are enchanting, comprising gentle hills clothed with timber, lovely valleys, broad meads, homesteads innumerable, orchards, hop-gardens, and, at no great distance, the picturesque old town of Tunbridge, with its ruinous castle, and the Medway flowing past it. Beyond, rise the heights of Sevenoaks, and the long line of the Surrey hills. Tunbridge Wells, which lies in a hollow on the left, is hidden; but its position is marked by the heathy common beyond it, and by the villas crowning the hills. At the rear of the mansion, the prospect is far more extensive, and ranges over a vast and fertile plain, in the midst of which may be descried Canterbury, with the chalk downs near Dover in the extreme distance.

In the days of the Merry Monarch, in which our story is laid, the views from the terrace of Somerhill were even finer than at present, because there was nothing to mar the beauty of the landscape. A delightful air of seclusion pervaded the whole scene. There were more heaths, more woods, and fewer hedges. The prospect was wilder, but more pleasing.

In 1670, the precise date of our story, Somerhill could not boast of antiquity. It is old now; but still in excellent preservation. Built in the reign of James I., on the site of an older mansion, which had belonged to the mirror of knighthood, Sir Philip Sidney, and afterwards to Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth's favorite, at the period of which we treat, it was the country residence of Lady Mus-

kerry, the famous " Babylonian Princess " of De Grammont, and had been bequeathed to her by her husband, the brave Lord Muskerry, who was killed by the side of the Duke of York, in the great naval conflict with the Dutch in 1665.

The widowed lady of Somerhill was not a beauty—far from it. Very plain, very vain, she dressed outrageously; and being crazed on the subject of dancing, rendered herself an object of ridicule to the whole court. Nevertheless, she was very good humored, and took even ridicule in good part—perhaps she did not perceive it; and being very rich and hospitable, her absurdities, though laughed at, were tolerated. Indeed, they afforded endless amusement to the Duke of Buckingham, Killebrew, Etherege, Sedley, and the other court wits.

Lady Muskerry was of an uncertain age, neither young nor old, short of stature, not particularly well made, but remarkably active; and she believed—and she had the king's word for it—that she dressed and danced better than any other dame at court—not excepting even the Duchess of Cleveland. Naturally, her wealth attracted many suitors, who were not deterred by her eccentricity; but as yet she had continued faithful to the memory of her valiant husband. Whenever Charles visited Tunbridge Wells with his court, Somerhill was the scene of constant festivities, and nothing could be more sumptuous or agreeable than these entertainments.

Lady Muskerry had latterly greatly increased her popularity at court by providing the queen with the loveliest maid of honor that had been seen at Whitehall since the time of the belle Stewart, now Duchess of Richmond.

Dorinda Neville, Lady Muskerry's niece and ward, was just nineteen when she was preferred to the enviable place by her majesty Queen Catherine; and it was universally allowed that for grace, symmetry of person, and regularity of feature, she eclipsed all her predecessors. The queen was delighted with her; for she had as much discretion as

beauty, and her head was not turned by the adulations of even the highest personages. The wittiest of the courtiers wrote sonnets in her praise; and those who were less witty, but quite as eager to win her favor, paid her a thousand compliments; but neither wits nor empty coxcombs touched her heart, though they afforded her amusement.

We must endeavor to give her portrait, though only Lely could do justice to her charms. Dorinda Neville, then, was a blonde, with a delicately fair complexion, eyes of a tender blue, arched over by exquisitely pencilled eyebrows, and shaded by long eyelashes, lovely features, marked by a charming expression, a profusion of light tresses, and a slender but faultless figure. All her movements were full of grace, and she danced to admiration. Lady Muskerrey told the king, confidentially, that she had been her niece's sole instructress in dancing, and had taken a vast deal of pains with her.

"Oddsfish! I thought so," replied Charles, smiling. "She does your ladyship a vast deal of credit."

The lovely Dorinda Neville had not been long at court—though quite long enough to cause innumerable heart-burnings and jealousies—when his majesty's youngest sister, Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans, arrived on a visit to her royal brother. Henrietta, it may be proper to state, was married to Philip, Duke of Orleans, sole brother to Louis XIV., and at this time was not more than twenty-five, and possessed of great personal attractions. Poor princess! she could not foresee her fate, which was to die by poison, administered by her husband, not many weeks afterwards. The duchess's visit, though apparently unexpected by Charles, had been preconcerted between them; in fact, she came on a secret mission from the French monarch. The Duchess of Orleans embarked at Dunquerque in the beginning of May, 1670, and was received by the king, in person, at Dover, and conducted by him to Whitehall, where a series of magnificent *fêtes* were

given in her honor. These *fêtes* derived additional attraction from the many French gentlemen and dames whom the duchess had brought in her train. Foremost among the latter, for beauty and grace, was the dazzling Louise de Quéroualle ; and if Louis had sent over the ambitious syren for the purpose of subjugating the amorous English monarch, he perfectly succeeded in his design. Charles at once fell into the snare. But Louise, though young, was an experienced coquette, and heightened the king's passion by feigned indifference to his suit.

CHAPTER II

THE COUNT DE BELLEGARDE

The gayest and handsomest of the gallants in attendance upon the Duchess of Orleans was Count Achille de Bellegarde. This was not the count's first visit to England. About three years previously, he was banished from the French court for a scandalous intrigue, followed by a duel, in which the injured husband was killed ; and he thereupon sought refuge at the English court, where, notwithstanding his reputation, he was extremely well received. His agreeable manners and dissipated habits recommended him to the Duke of Buckingham, with whom, for some time, he was on the most intimate terms. But a quarrel occurred between them, of which the Duchess of Cleveland was the cause, and they met in Hyde Park, where the count was wounded, though not dangerously.

Bellegarde's successes among the court dames were almost as great as those of the irresistible Jermyn ; and he had the credit of making both the king and the Duke of York jealous. But he was volatile as enterprising, and the loveliest woman

could not retain him long in her fetters. His addiction to pleasure led him into great extravagances ; and play being his sole resource, he was sometimes reduced to rather desperate straits. When driven to extremity, he resorted to the gaming-houses, and, associating himself with the rooks and sharpers, who seemed to regard him as one of their fraternity, soon managed to refill his purse. But these practices rather sullied his character, and made men of honor shy of playing with him. Luckily for himself, however, he was never detected in any trickery, though more than once charged by the exasperated losers with carrying loaded dice. But the rooks always sided with him—probably because they shared in his spoils. Bellegarde's admirable manners and address sustained him at many a critical juncture. No man had greater self-possession ; no man had greater powers of fascination. The Duchess of Cleveland openly avowed her partiality for him, and would have pensioned him but for his inconstancy.

During his visits to the gaming-houses and the cock-pit, at Westminster, Bellegarde made acquaintance with the noted Colonel Blood, of Sarney, in the county of Meath—a desperado who had been exiled by the Duke of Ormond from Ireland for a rebellious attempt to surprise the Castle of Dublin. Several of the conspirators were hanged by Ormond, and their fierce leader vowed to avenge them by hanging the duke at Tyburn. Hitherto, he had not found an opportunity of executing his threat. A man of great resolution, crafty as audacious, Blood not only possessed extraordinary effrontery, but great powers of persuasion, when he chose to exercise them. All his Irish property being confiscated, he was driven to the gaming-tables, where he encountered Bellegarde, to whom he took an amazing fancy ; and having saved the count's life, when the latter was set upon in Lincoln's Inn Fields, a strong friendship was cemented between them.

Colonel Blood was a widower, but he had a daughter, Sabine, who was then seventeen. After the adventure just

referred to, he took the count to his lodgings in a small street near Covent Garden, and the gay Frenchman, then, for the first time, beheld the charming Irish girl. She was a sweet, unsophisticated creature, and being quite unaccustomed to compliments, blushed deeply at those paid her by the count. Clearly he was smitten ; for he called next day, and again saw Sabine.

Blood did not discourage his visits—though he had hitherto kept a careful watch over his daughter, and had suffered no gallants to approach her ;—for he had secretly resolved that she should become Countess de Bellegarde. At length, thinking the affair had gone quite far enough, perceiving that the fascinating Frenchman had gained her heart, he put on his most determined air, and told the count that he expected him to marry his daughter. Bellegarde laughed, and replied that he had no idea of marriage. Blood looked as if he would have stabbed him on the spot ; but said that if he did not make up his mind within three days to marry Sabine, he was a dead man.

Bellegarde easily extricated himself from this dilemma. When Blood called for his decision, he found he had gone to Paris. Luckily for the volatile Frenchman, his cousin, Louise de Quéroualle, had obtained his pardon from Louis XIV. ; and being now at liberty to return to the Court of Versailles, he took leave of his friends at Whitehall, kissed the king's hand, and departed for Paris. He did not trouble himself much about Blood, but he could not banish Sabine's image. Now that he had lost her, he discovered that the fair Irish girl had a hold upon his heart that no other had ever obtained. However, his regrets, though bitter, did not prevent him from engaging in fresh affairs of gallantry, and he continued to play as deeply as ever ; hoping, perhaps, to purchase forgetfulness by constant dissipation. In this he was mistaken, for Sabine's image never ceased to haunt him.

Two years passed by, when an opportunity of revisiting the

scene of his former conquests and gaieties presented itself, and he eagerly embraced it. He hoped to see Sabine again, and felt sure she had remained constant to him. His cousin, Louise de Quéroualle, who was in great favor both with Louis XIV. and the Duchess of Orleans, had procured him the post of gentleman-usher at the Palace of Saint Cloud ; and when the duchess was sent by the French king on the secret mission to Charles, Bellegarde accompanied her.

On the journey, he thought of nothing but Sabine, and pictured the raptures of a meeting with her ; but sometimes a painful idea would intrude. What if she had died of grief at his desertion ? On his arrival at Whitehall, his misgivings, if any remained, were quickly dispelled. In the courtyard, to his infinite surprise, he perceived Colonel Blood, apparently waiting for him. Mustering up all his assurance, he hurried up to the colonel, who greeted him as if nothing untoward had happened. Blood looked in better case than formerly, and accounted for the improvement by saying he had lately gained a prize in the Royal Oak Lottery. Bellegarde congratulated him heartily, and then ventured to inquire after Sabine.

“She is looking better than ever,” replied Blood.

“That I can easily believe,” replied the count. “But I trust she has not forgotten me ?”

“Do you think my daughter would break an engagement ?” rejoined Blood. “No. But you have taken two years, instead of three days, for consideration. Have you made up your mind ?”

“I have come back expressly to marry her,” replied Bellegarde.

It would take up too much time just now to describe the rapturous meeting between the gay fugitive and the deserted damsel. Suffice it, then, to say, that grief had not impaired Sabine’s beauty. On the contrary, her charms had ripened during her lover’s long absence.

Transported with delight, the count threw himself at her feet, and after a few tears and gentle reproaches, was forgiven.

At the end of a week, the Duchess of Orleans was completely wearied with the pleasures and diversions offered her at Whitehall; but not having accomplished the object of her mission, even with the aid of her confidante, Louise de Quéroualle, she could not return to St. Cloud, and so proposed a visit to Tunbridge Wells, of which she had heard such enchanting descriptions; and her wishes being seconded by Louise, Charles readily assented, and, on the very next day, the whole court proceeded to the Wells.

The Duchess of Orleans and Mademoiselle de Quéroualle were lodged at Somerhill. Lady Muskerry had not much time to prepare for her distinguished guests; but she exerted herself to the utmost to give them a suitable reception. Magnificent rooms were assigned them, and accommodation was found in the large mansion for all the duchess's ladies. The king was charmed with an arrangement that suited him exactly, and thanked her ladyship most heartily for her attentions to his sister.

CHAPTER III

THE COURT BALL AT SOMERHILL

On the evening after the duchess's arrival at Somerhill, a grand ball took place, at which Charles and the whole court assisted. Mademoiselle de Quéroualle had never appeared so charming as at this entertainment; but though she dazzled all eyes by her sparkling attractions, there was one fair nymph who surpassed her in grace and beauty. Need we say that this was Dorinda Neville?

A court ball in the days of the Merry Monarch was a splendid and picturesque sight. We will not institute invidious comparisons ; we will not say that lords and ladies danced better then than now—but they *did* dance, with spirit as well as with grace. Their souls were in the performance ; languor and listlessness were unknown, and there was no such thing as walking through a figure.

A prettier picture than that presented by the ball at Somerhill cannot be conceived. Dancing took place in a large old-fashioned room—old-fashioned even then. The costumes of the company, all of which were distinguished for richness as well as variety of color, materially added to the effect. Velvets and silks of all hues were blended together, and formed one harmonious whole. Never, sure, were descried costumes more becoming, either for man or woman. Never was seen such a galaxy of beauty. To say nothing of the charming Dorinda Neville—of the bewitching Louise de Quéroualle—of the sprightly, dark-eyed, dark-complexioned Duchess of Orleans,—there was the superb Duchess of Cleveland—the lovely Duchess of Richmond, who had proved so obdurate to Charles—Lady Bellasyse, Lady Denham, and fifty other beauties. The neglected queen cannot be placed on this list—for, alas ! she had few personal attractions ; but she chatted good-humoredly with the lively Duchess of Orleans, and manifested no jealousy of the king's new favorite. In this self-command, her majesty offered a marked contrast to the Duchess of Cleveland, who could not hide her rage, but glanced daggers at her rival.

Among the crowd of gallants congregated at the ball, the most conspicuous was the Duke of Buckingham. As usual, the duke, who was the finest gentleman at court, was distinguished by the magnificence of his apparel. His noble figure could be everywhere discerned, for he was taller almost by the head than anyone in the room ; and though he did not dance, he was perpetually moving about ; now talking in a

strain of refined gallantry to the Duchess of Orleans, anon inflaming the angry Cleveland's jealousy ; now jesting with Rochester, Sedley, and Etherege, not even sparing Old Rowley himself in his sarcasms ; then infuriating Sir John Denham by making love to his wife ; now narrating some piquant court scandal to the Earl of Falmouth, and Killegrew, who acted as master of the revels ; now discussing a point of etiquette with Lords Brounker and Bath, and lastly addressing himself in the courtliest and most friendly manner to the Duke of Ormond, whom he hated, and whose removal from the government of Ireland he had caused by his intrigues.

Devoting himself exclusively to Louise de Quéroualle, the king had eyes for no other beauty. He danced the bransle with her. His good-humored majesty had a real enjoyment in a brisk and animated dance ; and though he went through a minuet and a couranto with inimitable grace, he greatly preferred the bransle, the paspey, or a country-dance. So nimbly did he foot it on the present occasion, and so long did the bransle last—for Killegrew ordered the musicians to go on—that he fairly tired out his charming partner.

Of course the Count de Bellegarde was present at the ball, though we have not hitherto mentioned him. Even in that brilliant assemblage, he was noticeable. His light and graceful figure was displayed to the greatest advantage by rich habiliments of the latest French mode. Until this evening, he had not seen the new maid of honor, and he wondered how so charming a creature could have escaped his observation. He begged Lady Muskerry to present him to her charming niece, and he was presented accordingly. To his great mortification, Dorinda received him very haughtily, and declined to give him her hand for the bransle. The thing might have passed off, for the count could have easily concealed his chagrin ; but Lady Muskerry made matters worse by sharply reprimanding her niece, in tones loud enough to be heard by all around, telling her she ought to esteem it an

honor to be selected as a partner by the Count de Bellegarde, the best dancer in Europe. To make him amends for the affront, she offered him her own hand, and the count, amidst the titters of the bystanders, was forced to accept it.

Scarcely were they gone, when the handsome Talbot Harland, who was dying with love for Dorinda, though he had not ventured to breathe a word of his passion to her, came up and said, "I am very glad you refused to dance with that vain French coxcomb, Miss Neville; but may I ask your reason? No one else in the ball-room, I believe, would have refused him."

"Since you ask me, I will tell you," replied Dorinda, smiling. "I have conceived a positive aversion to him. He seems to think himself irresistible, and I was determined to mortify him."

"You have succeeded," said Talbot, laughing. "But mortify him still further by dancing with me."

"That may cause a quarrel," she objected.

"Never mind. I will cure his presumption."

Dorinda hesitated; but she gave him her hand, and they joined the couples that were whisking round the room.

Already sufficiently annoyed by being made ridiculous by Lady Muskerry, Bellegarde was enraged beyond measure by Talbot's mocking glances as he swept past with Dorinda. But the count promised himself speedy revenge.

Mademoiselle de Quéroualle had noticed the little incident just related, and she also saw the glances exchanged between her cousin and Talbot; and fearing a quarrel might ensue, she begged the king to interfere.

When the brawl was over, Charles called the count to him, and, in a significant tone, forbade him to leave the ball-room. Bellegarde bowed profoundly, and retired from the presence.

Charles was still conversing with Louise when the Duchess of Orleans approached them. As she drew near, all the sur-

rounding company moved away to a respectful distance, except Louise, who was detained by the king. The discourse that ensued was conducted in French.

"I have news for your majesty," observed the duchess. "A courier has arrived this evening from St. Cloud."

"I hope the duke, your husband, is in good health," remarked Charles, with a smile.

"The letter I have received is not from the duke, but from his most Christian majesty," replied the duchess. "He peremptorily enjoins my immediate return, unless you consent to sign the treaty."

"We will talk about that to-morrow," replied the king, carelessly.

"To-morrow will be too late. The courier must depart at midnight. Instead of three millions of livres, Louis now offers you five millions a year, if you will join him in the war he is about to declare against the Dutch States."

"Surely, your majesty will not hesitate?" observed Louise.

"If that was the only article in the treaty, I should not hesitate for a moment," replied Charles. "But there are other conditions, that would render me little better than a vassal of France. I might as well sell myself to the Prince of darkness."

"His most Christian majesty would feel highly flattered, if he knew that you compared him to the Prince of Darkness," said the duchess. "You do him wrong. He only desires a cordial alliance with England and to unite inseparably the interests of the two crowns. Knowing that Parliament will not grant you fresh subsidies, he is disposed to make an immense sacrifice to help you."

"Would you have me become a pensioner of France?" cried Charles, impatiently.

"I would have you independent of Parliament," replied the duchess. "Recollect this is a secret treaty."

“Odds-fish! the secret will come out, when I cease to ask for money,” laughed the king.

“Then I am to understand that you decline?” said the duchess. “Louise, you will prepare for departure to-morrow.”

“I cannot allow you to take her with you,” said Charles.

“Pardon me, your majesty,” said Louise; “I must return with her highness.”

“Rather than lose you, I will sign twenty treaties!” exclaimed Charles, passionately.

The duchess glanced at her favorite, as much as to say, “Our point is gained.” And she added, to the king, “I now know what to write to Louis.”

The duchess then inquired for the Count de Bellegarde, and Louise looked around for him. He was nowhere to be seen, and Talbot Harland had likewise disappeared. She mentioned the circumstance to the king, and his majesty immediately signed to the Earl of Feversham, Captain of the Guard, and the Duke of Buckingham, who formed part of the circle around, and bade them go in search of the truants, and prevent mischief.

The duchess then quitted the king, with the intention of sending off her despatch; and Charles proceeded with Louise to an adjoining room, where tables were set for ombre and basset.

Here a large company was assembled. The Duchess of Cleveland, who was immoderately fond of play, was seated at the basset-table, and the presence of her rival seemed to bring her ill-luck, for she lost a large sum of money. Charles counselled her to stop, but she persisted.

At last, her grace got up in a rage, and asked the king to lend her two thousand pistoles. Charles shook his head, and the duchess flung away from him with a look of disdain, and addressed herself to Lady Muskerry, who chanced to come into the card-room at the moment, accompanied by Dorinda.

An interruption, however, was offered by the entrance of the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Feversham, followed by Bellegarde.

Dorinda turned very pale on beholding the latter.

“Where is Talbot Harland?” demanded Charles.

“We have been obliged to leave him behind,” replied Buckingham.

“What has happened?—he is not hurt?” cried Dorinda, unable to repress her emotion.

“You are the cause of the rencounter, Miss Neville,” said Buckingham, regardless of her feelings.

“Methought I forbade you to leave the ball-room, count?” said Charles to Bellegarde. “Is it thus that you obey me?”

“Let me intercede for him with your majesty?” whispered Louise.

“I crave your majesty’s forgiveness,” replied the count; “but the doors being open, and the night magnificent, I could not resist strolling forth into the garden. I never supposed I should be missed.”

“Did you stroll forth alone?” demanded the king.

“No, sire; Talbot Harland went with me.”

“By your invitation?”

“By my invitation, sire. I will not attempt to deny it.”

“We were too late to prevent the conflict,” interposed the Duke of Buckingham. “They were at it when we went out into the garden. We hurried to the spot; but before we could get up, the affair was ended. Talbot had dropped his sword.”

“Then he *is* hurt?” cried Dorinda.

“Not much,” replied Lord Feversham. “A slight wound—a mere scratch.”

“Out of consideration for Miss Neville, I touched him as slightly as possible,” said the count.

A half-stifled cry was heard. Dorinda had fainted.

Lord Feversham caught her before she fell, and bore her out

of the room, assisted by Lady Muskerry, who was lavish in her attentions to her niece.

“Oddsfish! the secret’s out!” exclaimed Charles. “Talbot is a lucky fellow. You have done him a great service, count.”

“I hope he will duly appreciate it,” replied Bellegarde.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Muskerry reappeared, with the satisfactory intelligence that her niece was better, but had withdrawn to her own room.

“I am amazed at what has happened,” said her ladyship. “I had no idea she took so much interest in young Harland.”

She then went to the Duchess of Cleveland, who had resumed her seat at the basset-table, and was still losing heavily to Lord Buckhurst.

“Your grace shall have the two thousand pistoles,” she said, in a low tone.

“I want four thousand now,” replied the duchess.

Lady Muskerry was rather disconcerted; but she replied, “Anything to oblige your grace.”

“You are the best and kindest creature on earth,” cried the duchess; “and will lay me under eternal obligations. I shall be at home at six o’clock to-morrow. You know my little farm on Rusthall Common?”

“Perfectly. I will call on you about five o’clock, and bring the money with me.”

This colloquy, though conducted in a low tone, did not escape the quick ears of the Count de Bellegarde.

Just then, an usher with a white wand presented himself, and announced to his majesty that supper was served.

CHAPTER IV

*INTRODUCES CAPTAIN CLOTWORTHY AND MONSIEUR
CLAUDE DUVAL, WITH THEIR COMRADES, MONTALT,
MANDEVILLE, AND FLODOARD*

In a deep hollow at the northern extremity of Rusthall Common is a large group of rocks, several of which rise to a great height, and are so fantastic in shape, that it would seem that Dame Nature must have fashioned them in her wildest and most capricious mood.

The strangest of these huge stony masses, from its extraordinary form and position, placed as it is upon the apex of another rock, has been likened to an enormous toad, and certainly a resemblance to the reptile in question may be discovered. Indeed, it requires no great stretch of imagination to convert the whole group into a collection of antediluvian monsters.

In this rocky glen, which at that time had some of the savage features that Salvator Rosa loved to paint, on the afternoon of the day succeeding the court ball at Somerhill, four well-mounted horsemen were concealed. Two of them, who were evidently the leaders of the little troop, wore louns, or black velvet masks, barbed with silk, which completely disguised their features.

Both were equally well dressed, and wore scarlet riding dresses embroidered with gold, boots fringed with lace, flowing perukes, and large low-crowned hats, surrounded with white feathers.

But they differed materially in personal appearance. One of them was square-built and athletic, and looked double the age of his companion, who was slender and gracefully pro-

portioned. He was reclining indolently in his saddle, and beguiled the tedium of waiting by some snatches of a French romance, which he sang with infinite taste, to the accompaniment of a mandolin, with which one of the troop was provided. His accent and manner left no doubt that the language in which he sang was his own. No Englishman could have so pronounced the words, or given them such charming effect.

On the high ground above the rugged sides of the hollow, and half-hidden by the furze and briars which grew there thickly, was a fifth horseman, who evidently acted as sentinel to those below.

What was the object of this ambushade? The place chosen by the troop was favorable to concealment; but they could scarcely issue forth without discovery, for it was still early in the evening, and many persons were moving about the common,—a portion of which, about half a mile off, resembled an encampment, being covered by tents, occupied by the nobles and gentlemen belonging to the court, who could not find accommodation in the thinly-scattered houses near the Wells. Here the Duke of York had pitched his tent. Here, also, the great Duke of Buckingham and Lord Arlington slept under canvas. Close to the encampment was a bowling-green, much resorted to by the Merry Monarch and his courtiers, and a large structure that served as an assembly-room. The Duchess of Cleveland had hired a farm-house in a more secluded part of the common, on the road to Langton. The king himself had a house, with a bowling-green attached to it, on Mount Sion.

Such being the state of Rusthall Common, which was then the gayest and most frequented spot near the Wells, it seemed extremely unlikely that the horsemen could be robbers. Most probably they were court gallants, engaged on a frolic. We shall see.

The gay-looking young Frenchman, who it appears, bore

the name of Claude Duval, had just finished his song, and received the plaudits of his stalwart companion.

“Bravo, Monsieur Claude!” cried this personage. “You have a charming voice, and sing as well as the Count de Bellegarde. I would cry *encore* to your madrigal, if I did not think we might be interrupted.”

“You flatter me immensely,” replied Claude Duval, who spoke with a slight—very slight—French accent. “I cannot pretend to sing like my master, the Count de Bellegarde; but I can personate him pretty fairly, with the help of his wardrobe, with which I own I have made free on the present occasion. I have often passed for him, even in the best society; and sometimes, I blush to say, have got him into scrapes. I hope I shall not do so now; but when he told me last night that the fair Dorinda Neville had refused to dance with him at Miladi Muskerry’s ball, I swore by my patron, Saint Barnabé, that the haughty beauty should dance with *me*. How to manage this was the question. My master had informed me that Miladi Muskerry meant to call on the Duchess of Cleveland, at her farm on Rusthall Common, at a certain hour. I next ascertained that miladi would take her lovely niece with her in the carriage. That was enough. I had my plan in an instant. Nothing more easy than to stop the carriage in a convenient spot. But I could not do this alone; so I applied to my staunch friend, Captain Clotworthy, who luckily chanced to be at Tunbridge Wells, with his honorable associates, Montalt”—bowing to the galliard with the mandolin, who gracefully acknowledged the salute,—“Mandeville”—bowing to the other,—“and Flodoard”—glancing at the horseman stationed on the heights above. “They readily promised me assistance, and here we are.”

“We are delighted to aid Monsieur Claude Duval,” observed Montalt. “Besides, the affair is one exactly after our own hearts. There is just hazard enough about it to render it agreeable.”

“And four thousand pistoles to be gained,” added Mandeville.

“My master informed me that Miladi Muskerry will have that sum with her,” said Claude Duval. “She has promised to lend it to the Duchess of Cleveland, who was unlucky at basset last night, and has lost the amount to Lord Buckhurst. It is a debt of honor, gentlemen, and must be discharged without delay.”

“Then her grace must apply to Old Rowley,” observed Clotworthy.

“Old Rowley’s cassette is well-nigh empty ; so my master says,” observed Claude Duval.

A laugh from all around followed this remark.

“Apropos of the count—where is he at this moment?” asked Clotworthy.

“He ought to be in attendance on her highness the Duchess of Orleans,” replied Claude. “But Heaven knows where he is. Hark ! there is the signal !”

A whistle was heard, and the next instant Flodoard shouted from above, “Get ready, gentlemen ; the carriage is in sight.”

“Where is it ?” demanded Clotworthy.

“Making its way across the common—on this side the tents,” rejoined Flodoard.

“*Allons, messieurs !*” cried Claude Duval, gaily. “Take care not to frighten the ladies.”

The troop then quitted the rocky glen by an outlet at the rear ; and after tracking a narrow road, between high banks, turned off on the left, and galloped along the skirts of a thicket that bordered the common on the west.

CHAPTER V

LADY MUSKERRY

Never, sure, save at the Lord Mayor's show in the olden time, was seen grander or more richly-gilt chariot than that containing Lady Muskerry and her lovely niece. The windows were so large, and the gorgeous vehicle was hung so low, that the ladies inside it could be distinctly seen. The horses were magnificently harnessed ; a fat coachman occupied the box ; and two tall footmen, powdered and bedizened with lace, hung on behind.

Lady Muskerry was preposterously dressed in crimson satin, which, however, paled before the pink on her cheeks, and wore her hair, or rather peruke, *en négligé*. The collar, which fell over her shoulders, was of richest point, and her short sleeves were likewise adorned with deep falls of lace. Of course, she carried a fan—no lady of that day was ever without one—and *her* fan was prodigiously fine—the handle being of silver, with a small looking-glass set in it. On her lap rested a small spaniel—a present from the king—whose long, silken ears, and large, soft eyes, proclaimed his perfect breeding. At her feet was deposited a heavy bag, the contents of which will be readily surmised.

Dorinda was just as becomingly dressed as her aunt was the reverse. Everything she wore seemed to suit her charming figure ; and nothing could suit her better than the little coquettish hat, with a red plume in it, that crowned her luxuriant blonde tresses.

The lovely girl was in high spirits, and her blooming features bore no traces of fatigue. The afternoon was exquisite,

and she had immensely enjoyed the ride from Somerhill to the Wells. The charming views had enraptured her.

At the Wells they had alighted, and walked along the parade, where a tolerably large company was assembled—some drinking the waters, but the majority promenading to and fro, and listening to the strains proceeding from an orchestra.

Very different, it is needless to say, was the appearance of the place from that which it now presents. A few sheds, temporarily converted into shops, ran along one side of the promenade. On the other side, benches were placed under the trees. Still the scene was extremely gay and amusing—especially at morn, when the king, with all the gallants and ladies of the court, resorted thither to drink the waters.

Scarcely had Lady Muskerry and her niece set foot on the parade, than they were joined by Talbot Harland. The young man had his right arm in a sling, but did not otherwise seem much the worse for his rencontre overnight with Bellegarde. Dorinda blushed deeply on beholding him, and her confusion was heightened by Lady Muskerry, who chided him for the anxiety he had caused her niece. Talbot expressed his concern, but his looks showed that he was far from sorry.

“My defeat has made me the subject of a hundred jests,” he said; “and the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Feversham tell me I ought never to have provoked so expert a swordsman as the count; but I rejoice that I did so, since it has procured me——”

He was proceeding in this strain, when Dorinda interrupted him by saying, “But the count might have killed you.”

“In that case, tears from your bright eyes would have been shed for me,” said the young man.

“I am afraid some one’s heart would have been broken,” remarked Lady Muskerry. “Well, I hope this absurd affair won’t proceed further.”

“Yes; if I have any influence with Mr. Talbot Harland, he won't provoke the count again,” said Dorinda, with a tender glance at her lover.

“You are of the same opinion, I find, as the Duke of Buckingham, and think that I should infallibly be worsted,” laughed Talbot. “Rest easy. I met the count not two hours ago, and he expressed so many regrets at having hurt me, and behaved altogether so handsomely, that——In a word, we became friends.”

“The count is a most charming man, and dances inimitably,” cried Lady Muskerry.

“Perhaps so,” said Dorinda; “but he shall never dance with me—on that I am fully resolved.”

“I should think he will not presume to ask you again,” remarked Talbot. “That, indeed, might furnish a new ground of quarrel.”

“You silly child, you will cause more mischief!” cried Lady Muskerry, tapping her niece playfully with her fan. “But we must not stay here longer. 'Tis time to go to the Duchess of Cleveland.”

“Her grace, I hear, lost a large sum last night to Lord Buckhurst, and made the king very angry,” remarked Talbot, with a laugh. “Buckhurst, however, thinks he will never be paid.”

“Yes, he will; I will promise him that,” said Lady Muskerry. “I mean to lend her grace the money.”

“Then your ladyship will be the loser, and not Buckhurst.”

Talbot attended them to the carriage; and as he offered his uninjured arm to Dorinda, he whispered, “I shall ride up to Rusthall Common presently, and hope to catch a glimpse of you as you come back.”

*CHAPTER VI**HOW CLAUDE DUVAL DANCED A GAILLARDE WITH
DORINDA NEVILLE*

The heath adjoining Tunbridge Wells, which is now traversed by numerous roads, was then very wild and picturesque—clothed with gorse, and with only two or three shepherds' huts upon it.

Lady Muskerry's stout horses managed to drag the heavy carriage up the toilsome ascent, along a road that was little better than a sheep-track ; and at last landed it safely on the brow of the hill, near Bishop's Down, at the back of which, among the woods, stood a large mansion, which the king had occupied during his former visits to the Wells, but he had now transferred himself to Mount Sion. Thence the road to Rusthall Common—which, in fact, was merely a continuation of the heath—was tolerably level, and offered no difficulties.

Dorinda was lost in admiration of the magnificent prospect that was here spread out before her ; and was still contemplating it, when the wide common opened upon them. There was nothing dreary about the waste. On the contrary, it presented as charming a picture as can well be conceived.

About half a mile off was the encampment, and the flags of the numerous tents were fluttering in the soft evening breeze. On the left was Rusthall Church—an ancient structure, with a few cottages near it. On the green, in front of the church, rustic sports were going on ; and the shouts and uproarious laughter of the crowd collected on the spot could be distinctly heard. Mingled with these shouts arose a con-

fused hum of voices from the tents, and numbers of persons could be seen moving about in their vicinity.

Lady Muskerry promised her niece that she would pass through the encampment on her way back. In the meantime, the coachman turned off on the right; and the road being execrable, he kept as much as he could on the turf.

Presently, the scene became solitary enough. The clumps of gorse grew thicker and more frequent. The tinkling of a sheep-bell was the only sound heard. The encampment was lost to view, and the square tower of Rusthall Church alone marked the site of the village.

However, the prospect improved as they went on; and shortly after they entered the wood, the prettiest sylvan scene imaginable greeted them.

It was a patch of greensward, smooth as velvet, and level as a bowling-green; in the midst grew a noble oak-tree, with wide arms flung abroad. An air of complete seclusion was given to this lovely spot by the thickets that surrounded it.

The picture was completed by a little troop of horsemen gathered beneath the patriarchal oak. The disposition of these figures was charming, and might have been studied for effect, so well did they harmonize with the scene.

The attention of the ladies was naturally attracted to the party, while sounds of music caught their ears. One of the horsemen had dismounted, and was playing a mandolin, while leaning against the gnarled trunk of the tree. Both ladies were enchanted with the picture thus unexpectedly presented to their view. Nor were they in the least surprised or alarmed, when two of the horsemen, whose attire seemed superior to that of the others, detached themselves from the group, and rode towards the carriage.

Both these personages were masked. Still, that circumstance did not cause uneasiness.

At a sign from the foremost horseman, who was the most stalwart of the two, the coachman stopped; and the next mo-

ment, this individual, presenting himself at the open window of the carriage, bowed most respectfully to its occupants, but did not remove his vizard.

“You do not mean to molest us, I hope, gentlemen?” said Lady Muskerry.

“Molest you! not for worlds!” rejoined the stalwart personage. “I recognized your carriage the very instant it appeared, and could not neglect the opportunity of paying my respects to your ladyship and your lovely niece.”

“Your voice does not seem familiar to me,” replied Lady Muskerry; “but perhaps if you unmasked——”

“Your ladyship would not know me, for I have not had the honor of being presented to you. You must have heard Lord Muskerry speak of Captain Clotworthy. I am the captain, and your ladyship’s most humble servant. Without boasting, I may say that his lordship was extremely partial to me. In his good-natured, familiar way, he always called me Jack. ‘Jack,’ he said to me one day, when we were crushing a flask of Rhenish together in the Mulberry Garden,—‘Jack, I am proud of my wife—excessively proud of her.’ ‘No wonder, my lord,’ I replied. ‘Her ladyship is the handsomest and best-dressed woman at court.’ ‘So she is, Jack,’ he said; ‘but that’s not the reason I’m proud of her. Her ladyship dances better than any other woman in England. You ought to see her dance the gavotte. You’d never forget it.’”

“Did the poor, dear fellow say that?” cried Lady Muskerry, unable to conceal her delight.

“On my honor,” replied the captain. “But he said something more; and I hope I shan’t offend your ladyship by repeating it. Just before he sailed in that glorious expedition against the Dutch in ’65, he shook hands with me at parting, and made me this farewell promise, which I feel sure he would have kept, if he could. ‘Jack,’ said he, ‘if I come back safe and sound, you shall dance a gavotte with my lady.’”

“I declare, captain, you quite affect me,” said her ladyship, taking out her handkerchief. “Since my husband made you this promise, I am bound to fulfil it. You shall dance the gavotte with me whenever you please.”

“No time like the present,” cried Clotworthy. “Here is a piece of turf that a fairy might trip on, and it will just suit your ladyship, who is as lightfooted as a fairy.”

“A charming spot, indeed,” said Lady Muskerry, in a tone that implied assent.

“Surely, my dear aunt, you won’t do anything so absurd?” remonstrated Dorinda, in a low voice.

“My love, I owe it to your uncle’s memory,” replied her ladyship.

“Take the carriage somewhat nearer to yonder oak, coachman,” cried Clotworthy. “The ladies are about to alight.”

The order was obeyed. Clotworthy and Claude Duval rode on either side of the carriage till it reached the spot indicated. They then dismounted, and gave their horses to Mandeville and Flodoard.

“By your leave,” said the captain, pushing the footmen aside, and assisting her ladyship to alight.

“Allow me to present Monsieur Claude Duval,” continued Clotworthy, as the young Frenchman, whose graceful deportment had already attracted the attention of both ladies, came towards them. “He does not speak our language very well; but he can make himself understood.”

“Have you been long in England, Monsieur Duval?” said Lady Muskerry, as the young Frenchman bowed to her.

“More than a year, miladi,” he replied; “and I mean to remain. I prefer London to Paris—*les dames Anglaises sont si belles, si gracieuses, si aimables.*”

“You have found them so, eh, Monsieur Duval? But you have lovely women in France. There is a charming specimen now at court—Mademoiselle de Quérroualle.”

“She is not to be compared to your ladyship’s lovely

niece," replied Duval, gallantly. "Will not Mademoiselle Neville alight?"

"Pray do, my love!" cried Lady Muskerry.

Duval flew to the carriage-door; and not wishing to disoblige her aunt, Dorinda alighted, though with evident reluctance. The little spaniel was confided to the care of one of the tall footmen.

Meanwhile, Clotworthy conducted her ladyship to a spot where the turf was smoothest, and called out to Montalt, who remained near the tree, to play a gavotte—"The quickest you can," added the captain.

Lively notes from the mandolin were heard in immediate response to the order. Lady Muskerry summoned up all her airs and graces, and determined to astonish her partner.

"May I have the honor of dancing with mademoiselle?" said Duval, bowing respectfully. "It is a mere frolic, in which she can join without the slightest impropriety."

Dorinda did not feel quite sure of that.

"Mademoiselle cannot hesitate to follow the example of her aunt, who is a model of discretion," continued Duval.

"Well, I don't think there can be any great harm in a dance," said Dorinda.

So she gave him her hand. With what secret triumph he took it!

Seeing that all was arranged to his comrade's satisfaction, Clotworthy clapped his hands, and the dance commenced.

Rarely has such a dance been witnessed. Lady Muskerry surpassed all her previous performances in extravagance and absurdity. How she skipped and bounded!—displaying an agility perfectly marvellous in a person of her years and figure. The captain found he had undertaken no light task; but he was obliged to go through with it.

Montalt, who entered into the fun of the scene, played as fast as he could. His companions were ready to split their sides with laughter. The two tall footmen had enough to do

to contain their merriment, and the fat coachman chuckled internally.

Dorinda spread her fan before her face. Claude Duval's mask effectually concealed his laughter. Her ladyship would have gone on forever, but the captain gave in at last.

"Lord Muskerry was right!" he cried, panting with the exertion. "I challenge all England to produce such another dancer as your ladyship."

"You may challenge all France as well, *mon cher!*" added Claude Duval. "But let us finish with a pavane and gaillarde."

Lady Muskerry was quite ready—quite eager, indeed, to recommence; but the captain did not feel equal to further effort.

The field was, therefore, left to Duval and his fair partner. Dorinda required little persuasion to go on; she excelled in the pavane.

Montalt changed the measure, and the slow and stately dance began. Laughter was now changed to admiration. Dorinda never looked so well—never danced so gracefully. How proudly she advanced towards her partner; and, with a courtly air, he received her. It was a charming sight to watch them. Lady Muskerry was a little mortified at being left out, but she could not withhold her tribute of admiration.

Again the measure changed, and the movements of the dancers became brisk and rapid. The gaillarde was Duval's triumph. The spectators were in ecstasies as the lively dance proceeded.

No ballet ever offered a prettier *tableau* than the scene now presented. What with the two graceful central figures, the groups around them, the richly-gilt coach, the horses of the troopers, and the old oak tree in the background, the picture was perfect.

Amid the applause of the beholders, the gaillarde came to an end.

Thanking her ladyship for the honor she had done him, Captain Clotworthy ceremoniously conducted her to her carriage.

Lady Muskerry would fain have remained a little longer to dance a couranto with Monsieur Duval, with whom she was charmed ; but the captain, who had other business in hand, as the reader is aware, and feared interruption, gave her no encouragement.

Most assiduous was the captain in seeing that her ladyship was comfortably seated ; he arranged her dress, and placed the little spaniel on her lap. On Dorinda's approach, he made way for her, of course ; and Duval noticed that his left arm was carefully covered by his mantle.

Dorinda's curiosity was aroused to know something more of her partner. There was a mystery about him that perplexed her. Throughout the dance he had kept on his mask, and even now he did not seem inclined to remove it.

"Do you always wear a mask, Monsieur Duval?" she inquired, gaily.

"Always, mademoiselle," he replied. "I have the misfortune to be very ugly, so I hide my countenance as much as possible."

"Perhaps you do yourself an injustice. At least, allow us to judge."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle ; I would not shock you."

"Then I shall not know you, if we meet again."

"We are not likely to meet again," he rejoined, with a sigh.

"I do not belong to the court ; but I never shall forget this occurrence. It is the most agreeable event of my life !"

He handed her to the carriage, bade her adieu, bowed gracefully to Lady Muskerry, and hastened to rejoin his companions, who were all mounted and ready for departure.

Springing into his saddle, he again took off his feathered cap, and waved it to those within the carriage.

In another instant the whole troop had disappeared, as if by magic.

CHAPTER VII

THE DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND'S FARM

“What an amusing incident!—quite like a scene in a play!” exclaimed Lady Muskerry. “It will divert his majesty prodigiously, though he will think I have invented it, for it does seem highly improbable that we should have met with such a charming dancer as this Monsieur Duval. What spirit he threw into the gaillarde! Never did I see a pirouette turned so prettily. He rivals, if he does not surpass, the Count de Bellegarde.”

“Since you have mentioned him, aunt, I must tell you that a suspicion once crossed me that it might be the count himself.”

“Ridiculous! Had he been the Count de Bellegarde, I should have recognized him immediately.”

“But the mask, aunt?”

“Bah! his voice would have betrayed him.”

They had emerged from the wood, and were approaching the Duchess of Cleveland's farm which was beautifully situated on the slope of a hill.

Suddenly, Lady Muskerry made a discovery, and called out to the coachman to stop.

“What's the matter, aunt?” asked Dorinda.

“I have been robbed!” rejoined her ladyship, in distraction. “The bag of money is gone!”

“Heavens! I hope not,” cried Dorinda.

Just then, one of the footmen appeared at the door, to learn her ladyship's commands.

“I have been robbed, Kynaston—robbed of four thousand pistoles.”

“Is it possible, my lady?” cried Kynaston, aghast. “Who would have believed that such fine gentlemen could be robbers?”

“Bid the coachman turn back. I shall never be able to face the duchess. She won't credit the story.”

“Begging your ladyship's pardon, don't you think we had better go on to the farm, and send some of the duchess's men in pursuit of the robbers?”

Lady Muskerry agreed, and the carriage went on.

The Duchess of Cleveland was in the garden when they arrived, and on hearing what had occurred, gave instant orders that several of her servants should mount as quickly as they could, and scour the country round. Though naturally much disappointed, her grace was consoled by Lady Muskerry's promise that she should have the money, whether the robbers were captured or not. She laughed heartily at the adventure, and said it was almost worth while to be robbed by such a gallant as Claude Duval.

“He had quite the air of a gentleman, I can assure your grace,” said Lady Muskerry. “And his dancing of the gail-larde was inimitable.”

“In my opinion, it will turn out a mere piece of pleasantry,” remarked the duchess. “We shall hear something more of the beau Duval, ere long.”

Lady Muskerry and Dorinda had been about half an hour with the duchess, when Lord Buckhurst and Talbot Harland rode up to the gate. Who should be with them but the Count de Bellegarde!

The three gentlemen tied their horses to the rails, and joined the ladies in the garden.

Any suspicions that Dorinda might still entertain as to the count's identity with Claude Duval were now dissipated.

They were both about the same height, certainly, and both slightly but gracefully proportioned; but Bellegarde's costume was totally different from that of the gallant robber. He wore

a green velvet riding-dress, richly embroidered with silver lace, while Claude Duval was attired in scarlet. Duval's peruke was black—the count's, on the contrary, light and powdered. Lastly, and most convincing of all, his voice, when he addressed the duchess, who received him graciously, was totally unlike Duval's. The robber had a marked peculiarity of accent, that proclaimed him a Gascon.

“Your grace will be surprised to see me,” said Bellegarde, in his airy manner, to the duchess; “but Lord Dorset would bring me on with him. He picked me up at the bowling-green on Rusthall Common, where I had been playing for some time, with very bad luck. *Je suis très mauvais joueur à la boule.* On our way to your grace's farm—which I have never seen before, and which I find charming—*une campagne délicieuse dans un pays ravissant*—we overtook Mr. Talbot Harland, who, I rejoice to say, has quite forgotten our little quarrel of last night. We are now the best friends possible. Is it not so?”

Talbot bowed in assent.

“You could not have come more *à propos*, count,” rejoined the duchess. “Possibly, you can give us some information respecting a countryman of yours—a certain Claude Duval.”

“Claude Duval!” exclaimed the count. “I regret that I cannot help your grace. I never heard of him. What has he done?”

“Robbed Lady Muskerry of four thousand pistoles in the wood, close to this place, not an hour ago.”

“Is it possible, miladi?” cried Bellegarde, turning to Lady Muskerry.

And she hastened to recount the adventure, describing it in a manner that provoked the merriment of all her hearers, except Talbot Harland, who felt excessively annoyed that Dorinda should have danced with a robber.

“*Parbleu!* a most extraordinary affair!” exclaimed the

count, when her ladyship had finished. "This Duval is a reproach to my country."

"The thing has been so cleverly executed, that I almost hope the rascal may escape," laughed Lord Buckhurst.

"He must not be allowed to escape!" cried Talbot. "Success will embolden him to attempt further audacious exploits of a like character."

"He will rob all the court ladies," said the duchess.

"And dance with them afterwards," added Lord Dorset.

"*Diantre ! s'il fait ça il doit payer bien les violons,*" said Bellegarde.

"One would almost think you are jealous of his success, count," observed the duchess.

"Can I be otherwise, after what has happened?" he rejoined. "Miss Neville refused to dance with me, but has honored the *drôle* with her hand."

"It was monstrous presumption on the rascal's part to ask her!" cried Talbot. "And I almost wonder Miss Neville condescended——"

"My niece danced with him to oblige me," interrupted Lady Muskerry, sharply.

"Well, it appears that he acquitted himself very satisfactorily," said Lord Buckhurst, laughing.

"He acquitted himself admirably," rejoined her ladyship. "He was politeness itself."

"Ha ! ha ! charming !" exclaimed Lord Buckhurst.

"As to taking him for a robber," pursued Lady Muskerry, "I should as soon take the Count de Bellegarde for one."

"I appreciate the compliment," said the count, bowing.

At this juncture, the duchess's servants were seen returning from their ineffectual quest.

Presently, one of them came to inform the duchess that they could discover no traces whatever of the robbers. Apparently, no one had seen them.

“This is very strange!” remarked Lord Buckhurst. “How the deuce can they have got off?”

“That remains to be explained,” said Talbot.

Lady Muskerry now took leave of the duchess, and observed in an undertone, “As I have said, your grace shall be no loser by this occurrence. I will send you the money.”

“Pray don’t trouble yourself to do that,” rejoined the duchess. “I shall be at your second ball to-morrow night. If your ladyship will oblige me with it then, I can bring it away with me.”

“It shall be ready for your grace; but you may be robbed.”

“No fear of that,” laughed the duchess. “No one will think I have so much money with me.”

“That’s what puzzles me!” said her ladyship. “How did Monsieur Claude Duval, or his associate, Captain Clotworthy, know that I had four thousand pistoles in the carriage?”

“Perhaps one of your footmen is in league with them,” replied the duchess.

We almost fancy that this brief colloquy—though conducted, as we have said, in a low tone—was overheard by Bellegarde.

Lady Muskerry and her niece then re-entered the carriage, and the three gentlemen escorted them through the wood.

A short halt took place on the scene of the recent adventure, and her ladyship again described some of the principal incidents.

“I would give worlds to have seen it,” laughed Lord Buckhurst.

“And I would give worlds for the chance of shooting the impudent rascal!” cried Talbot.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KING TAKES AN EARLY WALK, AND MEETS WITH A PLEASANT ADVENTURE

Charles the Second was fond of all kinds of exercise, and all sorts of country sports. He did not hunt so much as his brother, the Duke of York ; but he liked coursing, hawking, and angling. His favorite games were tennis and bowls. At Whitehall, he had a splendid bowling-green and a large tennis-court. His majesty preferred walking to riding, because he thought foot exercise kept him in health ; and he walked so fast that few of his courtiers could keep up with him. When he was staying at Tunbridge Wells, he always rose very early, and rambled for miles over the heaths and commons in that pleasant region, wholly unattended, returning to drink the waters at the salubrious spring.

On the second morning after his arrival at the Wells, he was astir at his usual early hour, and awoke Chiffinch, his confidential valet, who slept in the ante-chamber. Having assisted his royal master to make his toilet, Chiffinch went to bed again.

According to his wont, Charles, who did not desire to be recognized in his walks, had put on very plain apparel, such as might become a very plain country gentleman. Sometimes he took with him three or four little spaniels ; but on this occasion they were left behind.

With no other protection than the gold-headed cane in his hand, he set off at a brisk pace from his mansion on Mount Zion. To look at him in his cloth doublet, trunk hose of the same material, and hat without feathers, as he strode vigor-

ously along with anything but a regal deportment, no one would have taken him for England's king.

Remonstrances were often addressed to his majesty on the danger he ran in taking these walks unattended ; but he heeded them not. He had no fears, and liked, occasionally, to be alone.

Descending Mount Sion, on the brow of which stood the mansion he had just quitted, amidst a grove of rook-haunted trees, he passed the little collection of huts near the Wells, and climbed the heath in the direction of Mount Ephraim.

It was a delightful morning, and as the king inhaled the fresh breeze, he rejoiced that he had come forth. Already he had shaken off the fatigues of the night, which had been devoted to a concert given in the rooms near the encampment.

When he gained the summit of the hill, he met several cherry-cheeked country lasses with baskets of eggs, butter and poultry, proceeding to the tents on Rusthall Common ; and none of these damsels passed without a good-humored jest from his majesty, which sent them laughing on their way. For everyone he encountered in his walk he had a cheery greeting.

Still keeping on the top of the hill, he pursued the road leading to Southborough for some half-mile, when, being tempted by a pleasant-looking lane on the left, he turned into it.

He had not gone far when he descried two persons advancing along the lane, and the unexpected appearance of one of them in such a spot, caused him to stop. The person he beheld was the Count de Bellegarde. With him was a maiden, whose beauty surprised the king. Her attire was simple and becoming, but gave no indication whatever of her rank. How could the count have discovered this lovely creature? That he had won her regard, was evident from her manner towards him.

So engrossed were the pair with each other that they did not notice the king, who sprang up a bank and concealed himself among the bushes. The pair came slowly on, and passed the spot where he was hidden, but he could not hear what they said. The accents of the damsel were indescribably sweet.

She did not accompany her lover much farther; but after bidding him a tender adieu, turned back, and repassed the king with quick footsteps.

Charles, whose curiosity as to this mysterious fair one was greatly excited, was determined to follow her, but when he came forth from his retreat, she had disappeared. However, he felt certain she could not be far off, and hurried on.

Presently he came in sight of a farmhouse, with a barn and hop-kiln attached to it, and at the porch of this habitation he perceived the fair object of his search.

She seemed surprised and almost alarmed by the appearance of a stranger, and would have retired if he had not addressed her. The blush that suffused her cheek made her look more charming than ever.

Charles had had some experience in beauty, but he confessed to himself that he had never beheld a lovelier creature. She had by no means a rustic air; her features were delicately moulded, and her figure slight and graceful; her complexion was clear, but embrowned by the sun. She had the largest black eyes imaginable, and raven tresses that threw those of Louise de Quéroualle into the shade.

"Give you good-morrow, fair damsel," said the king, saluting her. "You look as if you would not refuse me a bowl of milk and a crust of bread wherewith to break my fast. I have walked thus far from the Wells, and feel somewhat exhausted."

"Step in, I pray you, sir," she rejoined, displaying a casket of pearls as she spoke. "You shall have what you desire."

On this invitation, Charles went in, and found himself in a large, plainly-furnished room, with a low roof and latticed windows. Doffing his hat, he sat down on a settle placed near a ponderous oak table on one side of the room.

Spreading a snow-white napkin on the board, the damsel brought him the simple refreshments he had asked for, serving them with much grace.

"I seldom drink milk," said the king, raising the bowl to his lips; "but proffered by hands so fair, I prefer it to wine."

"You asked for milk, sir, or I would have brought you wine," she rejoined. "Will it please you to drink a cup of sack now? Or if a flagon of ale will suit you better, you can have it."

"Oddsfish! this is a hospitable house," exclaimed Charles. "One has only to ask and have. But neither ale nor sack for me, fair damsel. Surely, you do not dwell here alone?"

"No, sir," she replied with a smile. "My father lives with me."

"Then you are not yet married?"

"Married? Oh, no, sir."

"But you soon will be; for I met a handsome young gallant just now in the lane, and I'll swear he came from this house."

The remark threw her into such confusion, that Charles hastened to reassure her.

"Nay, be not alarmed," he said. "Your secret is safe with me. Where is your father, if I may venture to put the question?"

"He went to Maidstone last night," she replied.

"To Maidstone? Ha!" cried the king.

"Yes; but I expect him back early this morning."

"In time for breakfast?" remarked Charles, laughing.

"But you have not yet told me your father's name."

"It is Reuben Oldacre."

“Reuben Oldacre—ha! And your own?”

“Violet.”

“Violet! A charming name, and suits you exactly. And now, fair Mistress Violet, cannot you tell me something more about yourself? How do you pass your time? I warrant me you have been to the Wells since the court arrived there, to see the fine ladies drink the waters? Have you seen the king?”

“I have no desire to see him,” she replied. “I am told he is as swarthy as a gipsy. I crave your pardon, sir; I did not notice that you are so dark.”

Charles laughed good-humoredly.

“Dark-complexioned men sometimes find favor with your sex,” he remarked. “Swarthy as I am, I have no reason to complain. But if you don’t admire the king, I’ll stake my life that he would admire you.”

“I don’t want his admiration,” she rejoined. “They say he has fallen in love with the new French beauty, Louise de Quéroualle.”

“This comes from Bellegarde,” thought Charles. “So you have heard of Mademoiselle de Quéroualle? Well, I have seen her, and can judge, and I affirm that she is not to be compared to you. Perhaps you have heard of Sir Peter Lely, the famous court painter?”

“Yes; I have not only heard of him, but have seen his portraits of the Duchess of Cleveland and the beautiful Miss Stewart, and lovely pictures they are.”

“You would make a lovelier picture than either of them, my sweet Violet. Sir Peter Lely is coming down to the Wells to paint Mademoiselle de Quéroualle for the king. He shall paint you.”

Violet did not seem displeased by the proposition, extravagant as it sounded. Her vanity was roused.

“Ah, it would, indeed, be delightful to be painted by Sir Peter Lely!” she exclaimed, her dark eyes flashing as she

spoke. "But you are only jesting with me, sir. It is easy to make fine promises, but difficult to keep them."

"Not difficult on my part, sweetheart," rejoined the king. "Lely shall paint you, just as you are now. I will send him here as soon as he arrives."

"Not for worlds, sir!" she exclaimed.

At this moment, sounds were heard without, as if horsemen were entering the farm-yard.

"Ah, there is my father!" she cried.

"Plague take him! why should he arrive just now?" muttered the king.

"He has brought some friends with him—hop-merchants, from Maidstone," cried Violet. "Do, please, go, sir! He is hot-tempered, and may not like to find you here."

"What, ho!" shouted a voice, without.

"He is calling for me, as you hear, sir. Pray go; indeed, you must."

The king put on his hat, but showed no symptoms of quitting his seat.

"We have not yet settled about Sir Peter Lely, and several other important matters," he remarked, quietly.

"There he is!—he sees you!" she cried, as a stout-built personage appeared at the lattice window, looking into the yard.

"Don't be alarmed, sweetheart," said the king. "Were he as rugged as the Hyrcanian boar, I'd soon tame him."

CHAPTER IX

FARMER OLDACRE

Heavy footsteps were heard approaching the back door, and in another moment the burly farmer came in; booted, spurred, and having a riding-whip in his hand. His flushed features showed he was angry.

"What's this?" he cried, to his daughter. "A stranger here!"

But before any explanation could be offered him by Violet, and without a word from the king, whose countenance was turned towards him, his manner instantly changed. Taking off his hat, he bowed respectfully to his guest.

"Proud that my humble abode should be so highly honored," he stammered out.

"Tut, tut, man; there is nothing to be proud of," cried Charles, stopping him. "Your fair daughter, as you see, has taken good care of me in your absence."

"Sorry she has played the hostess so indifferently," rejoined the farmer.

"She has given me all I want," rejoined Charles. "But don't mind me. Look to your friends—the Maidstone hop-merchants."

Here Violet made a slight sign to her father, which did not escape the king.

"Time enough for them—they are busy with their horses," said Oldacre. "But my character for hospitality will suffer, if your——"

"Rather than that, I'll take a cup of sack," interrupted the king. "It will do me as much good as the Tunbridge waters."

“More, I’ll be bound,” rejoined the farmer, with a jovial air, that pleased the king. “I have little faith in the waters; though his most gracious majesty—whom heaven preserve!—seems to benefit by them.”

“Ay; he drinks them daily,” observed Charles. “His physicians recommend them.”

“Were I his physician, he should drink sack,” said the farmer. “’Tis more wholesome of a morning than cold water. Bring a bottle of sack,” he added to Violet. “And see that we are not interrupted,” he added, as he passed him.

“Sit down, Master Oldacre, sit down!” said the king. “Nearer, man, nearer,” he added, as the farmer seated himself at the extremity of the bench. “You have a very fair daughter, Oldacre. More fit for a palace than a cottage. How have you brought her up? How comes she with such a manner?”

“Her mother was of better condition than myself,” replied the farmer. “My wife was of gentle blood.”

“Ah! that explains it. I have told your daughter I must have her portrait painted by Sir Peter Lely.”

“To place it beside that of Madam Nelly? No; that won’t do,” rejoined the farmer.

“Pshaw! I must find a way to remove your foolish objections. You are standing in your own light, my honest friend. But here she comes.”

As he spoke, Violet reappeared, with a flask of wine and drinking-cups. She filled one of the flagons for the king, and the other for her father.

“To your speedy appearance at court, sweetheart!” cried Charles, as he emptied the cup.

“Put no such notions into her head, I pray you, sir,” said Oldacre. “She is far better here.”

“But does she think so herself—that is the question?” laughed the king. “Nay; let her answer.”

"I confess I should like to see the court," observed Violet.

"And you would like to be seen there, too," cried Charles. "With such beauty as yours, you might wed a noble. All the court gallants would be at your feet."

"Why, as I live, there is one at the door even now!" cried Violet, who was standing near the window.

"A court gallant!" exclaimed Oldacre, starting up. "Who is he?"

"Nay; how should I know, father?" she rejoined. "I have never seen him before."

"What is he like?" cried Charles. "Young and handsome—ha?"

"Yes," she replied. "But he has got his arm in a sling."

"Then it must be Talbot Harland," said Charles. "What brings him here?"

"He is tying his horse to a tree, father!" cried Violet. "Shall I admit him? Have I your permission, sir?"

Charles nodded assent; and the next moment the door was opened, and Talbot came in.

Great was his surprise on beholding the king; and he would have made a befitting reverence, but a slight gesture from Charles checked him.

In the fair young damsel standing before him, Talbot fancied he discerned the motive of his majesty's presence in the farm-house.

"What brings Mr. Talbot Harland out so early?" cried Charles.

"I am endeavoring to discover some traces of the villains who robbed Lady Muskerry," replied Talbot; "and passing this farm-house, have stopped to make inquiries."

"I have heard of no robbery," said Oldacre. "When did it occur?"

"Last evening, in a wood near Rusthall Common," said Talbot.

“Ah, I was at Maidstone at the time,” replied the farmer. “I have only just returned. But you amaze me by what you say, sir. Robbers were never before heard of in this neighborhood.”

“It is a most incomprehensible affair,” observed the king. “A very diverting description of the occurrence was given me by the Count de Bellegarde, not two hours after it happened. The robbers were six in number, and their leader appears to be a gay young Frenchman, who styles himself Claude Duval. The rascal seems to have a great taste for dancing. Not only did he rob Lady Muskerry of four thousand pistoles, but he danced with her niece, Miss Neville, one of the queen’s maids of honor.”

“I have sworn to capture him or shoot him!” cried Talbot.

“Shoot him!” exclaimed Violet, turning pale.

“Ay, shoot him!” repeated Talbot.

“Mr. Talbot Harland has constituted himself Miss Neville’s champion,” said the king. “That is why he means to slay Duval for his impertinence in dancing with her.”

“I am sorry I cannot help you, sir,” remarked Oldacre to Talbot. “But were I you, I would give up the chase. With your injured arm, you scarcely seem in a condition to engage with a desperate robber.”

“Shall I tell you how Mr. Harland came by his hurt?” said the king to Violet. “Miss Neville is the heroine of this story, as of the other. The other night, at Lady Muskerry’s ball, the Count de Bellegarde was greatly struck by her beauty, and asked her to dance. She refused him. He was naturally vexed, but was further incensed by Mr. Harland’s laughter. Who gave the provocation, I know not, but an immediate meeting took place in the garden, despite the king’s express prohibition. Miss Neville’s unlucky champion got run through the arm, as you perceive.”

There was something so arch in the king’s manner of tell-

ing this story, that neither Violet nor her father could help laughing. Talbot did not venture to manifest his annoyance.

“Ah, the Count de Bellegarde is a dangerous rival,” cried Charles. “He boasts that he has never been unsuccessful. Have nothing to say to him, should you ever meet him,” he added to Violet. “He is fascinating, but faithless, as fifty of your sex have discovered.”

“You give him a dreadful character, sir,” she cried.

“Not worse than he deserves,” said Talbot. “I am sorry he has returned to plague us, but we shall soon be rid of him. He must go back with the Duchess of Orleans to St. Cloud.”

Thinking he had remained long enough, Charles now arose. While taking leave of Violet, he said, in a low tone, “You may soon expect a visit from Sir Peter Lely, sweetheart.”

Talbot followed him, and, unfastening his horse, took the bridle in his hand, and walked by the king's side up the steep lane.

Charles had not gone far when he looked back, and perceiving Violet at the door watching him, kissed his hand gallantly to her.

CHAPTER X

A HAWKING PARTY AND WHAT HAPPENED AT IT

The day was spent gaily, as were all the days while the court was at the Wells, in a variety of out-door amusements.

After the waters had been duly quaffed by the crowd of fair dames and handsome gallants who flocked to the health-giving spring to flirt and chatter, as much as for any other purpose—after a promenade on the pantiles, or a short stroll on the heath, the company dispersed—only to meet again a

few hours afterwards, either at the bowling-green on Rusthall Common, where the king, and the Duke of York, and the chief members of the court, were sure to be found ; or at some other general rendezvous.

On that day, a hawking-party was made up by the king for the Duchess of Orleans, and, of course, Mademoiselle de Quéroualle was present at it. Such a party, when composed chiefly of ladies, as on the present occasion, forms one of the most charming and picturesque sights possible. And as the day was everything that could be desired for the sport, and as everybody looked well and in good spirits, there was no drawback to the enjoyment.

His fickle majesty, we fear, must have forgotten the fair girl whom he had seen early in the morning, for he now seemed engrossed by Louise. The graceful figure of the brilliant Frenchwoman was displayed to perfection in her blue velvet riding-dress, and she managed her horse extremely well. Two falconers were in attendance upon the Duchess of Orleans, but Louise was invited to fly the first hawk. The quarry was a wild dove, and was instantly killed. Shortly afterwards, a heron, which had been roused from a pool in the hollow, afforded far better sport, and, with its long, sharp bill, transfixed its antagonist in mid-air.

But, as both birds dropped to the ground together, they had well-nigh caused an accident to Miss Neville. They fell within a short distance of her horse, and the startled animal dashed off madly across the plain.

Dorinda was in some danger, for she could not check her horse, and there were deep pits in the common, into which he might plunge headlong.

Where was Talbot Harland all this while? Speeding after her, we may be sure. But the honor of rescuing her was reserved for another—for one whom Talbot hated. The young man was outstripped by the Count de Bellegarde, who was mounted on a far fleeter horse than his own, and who for-

tunately came up with Dorinda when she was within a few yards of one of the abysses we have mentioned. The count seized her bridle, and, by a powerful effort, succeeded in stopping the infuriated animal.

Next moment, Talbot joined them, and had the mortification of hearing the thanks she offered her preserver.

“You have saved my life, count,” she said, with a look of unspeakable gratitude.

Dorinda soon recovered from her fright, and looked more charming than ever as she rode back to the royal party, and received the warm congratulations of the duchess and Louise on her narrow escape.

Seeing how much Talbot was chagrined, the king said to him, “Bellegarde has had the luck this time. But I promise you your revenge.”

The young man had need of consolation, for Dorinda was now all smiles to the fortunate count.

After they had had hawking enough, the royal party proceeded to the encampment, and sat down to a sumptuous collation, prepared for them in the Duke of York’s tent.

CHAPTER XI

SIR PETER LELY

The repast over, the Duchess of Orleans and Louise returned to Somerhill.

The king and most of the courtiers adjourned to the bowling-green, which adjoined the duke’s tent. Charles, who was in a very merry humor, challenged the Count de Bellegarde to a game, and the count could not do otherwise than accept.

His majesty being an admirable bowler, everybody, except

the Duke of Buckingham, betted on him. The duke backed Bellegarde, and won a large sum. Clearly, the count was in luck that day.

Charles was still on the bowling-green, when Sir Peter Lely, who had just arrived at the Wells, made his appearance, and was most graciously received.

The renowned painter, who has given us a gallery of such beauties as were never before portrayed, and who caught, as Horace Walpole truly said, the reigning character of the period, and

“—On the animated canvas stole
The sleepy eye, that spoke the melting soul,”—

this incomparable painter was then in the zenith of his fame. Lely was not handsome, but his features were mobile, and his eyes fine and observant. In person he was somewhat portly, easy and refined in manner, and as perfect a courtier as was ever bred.

Charles regretted that Sir Peter had come too late to see Mademoiselle de Quéroualle; but promised to present him to her at Lady Muskerry's ball in the evening.

The king went on talking for a few minutes, when noticing that both the Count de Bellegarde and Talbot Harland were standing near him, he said to the painter, “I have another commission for you, Sir Peter.”

“Your majesty honors me,” rejoined Lely, bowing.

“During my ramble this morning,” pursued the king, taking care that Bellegarde should hear him, “I chanced upon the sweetest creature I ever beheld—a farmer's daughter; but no wood-nymph could be more exquisite. Luckily, I discovered her retreat,” he added, glancing at Bellegarde, and perceiving that he was listening, “and enjoyed an hour's converse with her.”

“Your majesty appears enraptured with this rustic beauty,” observed Lely, smiling.

“Enraptured! Ay, and so will you be, when you see her. But there is no rusticity about her. She is simple, but charming. You shall paint her for me, Lely.”

“It will delight me to obey your majesty,” replied Sir Peter.

“Talbot Harland shall take you to her dwelling to-morrow,” said Charles. “He has seen her, and will tell you that I have not exaggerated her charms.”

“She is, indeed, a most lovely creature,” said Talbot, “and well worthy of Sir Peter Lely’s pencil.”

“I am curious to behold her,” said the painter.

“Again, I say, don’t expect a rustic beauty!” cried Charles.

“I expect an Egeria,” replied Lely. “And I doubt not I shall find one.”

“Your majesty has been fortunate, it appears,” remarked Bellegarde, endeavoring to maintain an unperturbed demeanor.

“Tolerably so,” replied Charles, carelessly. “But let us play another game at bowls. You owe me my revenge.”

The bets were now in Bellegarde’s favor. All backed him but Talbot.

But the luck had turned. The count’s hand was not so steady as heretofore. His majesty won the game.

CHAPTER XII

THE SECOND BALL AT SOMERHILL

Lady Muskerry’s second ball was quite as magnificent as the first, and graced by the same brilliant company.

The queen was present, with all her ladies.

The Duchess of Orleans was there, with Mademoiselle

de Quéroualle, and the king was constantly by the side of the fascinating Frenchwoman. Naturally, therefore, this was the central point of attraction to all the courtiers.

According to his promise, Charles presented Sir Peter Lely to Louise, and the flattering painter professed to be quite dazzled by her beauty, and paid her a thousand extravagant compliments, all of which were echoed by the courtiers.

Talbot Harland was almost superseded by the Count de Bellegarde. After the service he had rendered her, Dorinda could not refuse to dance with the count, and found him so agreeable, that she danced with him a second time.

Ombre and basset went on as before in the smaller room, and the Duchess of Cleveland was again among the players.

Lady Muskerry came in with the Count de Bellegarde, whom she had secured for the couranto, and hoped her grace was winning. The duchess shook her head.

Lady Muskerry whispered a word in her ear, and the duchess replied, "I have ordered my carriage at midnight."

"It shall be ready for you then," said her ladyship, with a significant look.

While the ball was at its height, a troop of five well-mounted horsemen, one of whom led a sixth horse, entered Somerhill Park, covertly, and proceeded with the utmost caution towards an eminence crowned by a couple of large trees, in the vicinity of the mansion.

The night was dark and cloudy, and the wide-spread branches completely screened them. From the hill on which the horsemen were stationed, the stately mansion could be discerned through the groves that surrounded it, with its windows brilliantly illuminated, while lively strains resounded from within.

The large quadrangular court was, of course, concealed from view, but the ruddy glow reflected on the darkling sky above it, and the shouts and other sounds continually arising

from it, showed that it was filled with a host of servants, who were partaking of Lady Muskerry's hospitality. Some few torch-bearers could be seen on the terrace in front of the mansion.

After taking up the commanding position we have described, the leader of the troop, who was no other than the redoubted Captain Clotworthy, gazed for some minutes at the illuminated mansion, and listened to the music proceeding from it. He then remarked to the trooper nearest him, who was humming the air that reached them, "You are longing to be among the dancers, Montalt."

"You are right, captain," rejoined the other. "I should like to be at the ball prodigiously; but her ladyship has forgotten to invite us. Hark! they have changed the measure, and are playing a couranto."

And he again began to hum the tune.

"Not so loud," cried Clotworthy. "You will betray us."

Then turning to another trooper, he said, "Have you got all ready for Captain Duval, Mandeville?"

"Yes, captain," replied the other. "Hat, cloak, black peruke and mask, are all here."

"And his pistols are in his holsters," added Flodoard, who had charge of the led horse.

"Good!" cried Clotworthy. "Be prepared for instant action."

"The sooner the better!" cried the troopers.

"Look, captain; there's a carriage on the terrace now!" exclaimed Montalt.

After a few minutes' breathless suspense, the carriage was seen moving along the road at the foot of the hill.

"It's not the duchess, or Duval would have been with us ere this," cried Clotworthy.

"Why not attack it?" cried Montalt, unable to curb his impatience.

“’Sdeath ! would you spoil all ? Let no man stir,” cried the captain, in an authoritative voice. “What’s the hour ?”

“Midnight,” responded Mandeville, as a clock belonging to the mansion was heard striking.

“Another carriage on the terrace !” exclaimed Montalt.

“I see !” cried Clotworthy, waxing impatient in his turn. “We shall soon learn whether it is the duchess’s. Be on the alert.”

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND WAS ROBBED BY CLAUDE DUVAL

We shall now return to the ball-room.

It was crowded as ever, for supper had not yet been served, and only one guest had departed. The king had been dancing with Mademoiselle de Quéroualle, and was making the tour of the room, accompanied by the Duchess of Orleans and her favorite.

Our business, however, is with the Count de Bellegarde, and we shall seek him in vain amid the dancers, or among the company around them.

After being dragged through the couranto by Lady Muskerri, the count proceeded to the room where play was going on ; and while feigning to watch the punters at basset, kept his eye on the Duchess of Cleveland.

At last, a valet approached her grace, who presently arose, smiled at the count as she passed him, and went out.

Bellegarde did not offer to attend her, but followed almost immediately, and saw that she was joined by Lady Muskerri. The two ladies then made their way through the brilliant throng towards the hall, and the count took the same course.

On reaching the entrance-hall, which was crowded with servants, he saw that the duchess was taking leave of her hostess, and that an usher was standing beside them. The duchess's looks proclaimed the gratitude she was expressing to her ladyship.

This was enough for the count. Mingling with the serving men, he passed out through a door at the rear, into the garden, without attracting observation.

Meanwhile, the duchess proceeded to her carriage, attended by the usher. Shortly after she had entered it, a porter came forth, carrying two bags of money, which he placed, with his own hands, in the carriage beside her grace. This done, the coachman was ordered to drive on.

No thought of danger disturbed the duchess, who was more occupied by her renewed losses at play than by any other reflection; and she was beginning to consider whether she would not altogether abjure cards and dice, when suddenly the carriage stopped.

This unlooked-for halt had been caused by an authoritative order from a masked horseman, who, with two others, likewise masked, and armed with pistols, barred the way.

The lamps showed these formidable figures distinctly. The coachman at once obeyed.

At the same instant, two other horsemen, similarly disguised, appeared from behind, and threatened to shoot the footmen if they attempted to stir, or give the slightest alarm.

As the duchess, who was much terrified, looked out of the window, she perceived another horseman advancing towards her.

The light of the lamp falling upon him showed that he was masked, and enveloped in a cloak. But his feathered hat and flowing black peruke proved that he had some pretension to taste.

"I beg a thousand pardons for thus stopping your grace," he said, with an unmistakable French accent.

“You are Monsieur Claude Duval, I presume?” cried the duchess, whose fright was, in a great measure, removed by this address.

“Exactly,” he replied. “And I hope I shall not discredit any good report your grace may have received of me from Miladi Muskerry and her fair niece. It would enchant me to prolong the interview, which I have thus fortunately obtained, and to tell the loveliest woman in England how much the most devoted of her servants admires her. But time presses. Your grace has a certain sum of money with you in the carriage.”

“You must be a sorcerer to know that, Monsieur Duval,” she cried. “Well, suppose I have?—you are too gallant to deprive me of it.”

“Perhaps your grace will make me a present of it,” he rejoined. “That will be the most agreeable way of putting it. Descend!” he cried to one of the footmen. “Her grace desires you to give the money to these gentlemen.”

The duchess did not contradict him, and the footman, not daring to disobey, got down, and opening the carriage door, delivered the bags of money to Clotworthy and Montalt, who pressed forward to take them, and then instantly drew back.

“Infinitely obliged,” cried Claude Duval, bowing to the duchess. “I am sorry I must detain your grace a little longer.”

“Detain me!” she exclaimed, uneasily.

“Only for ten minutes. You will then be at liberty to proceed, and I trust will meet with no further interruption. *Faites attention!*” he cried to the coachman and footman. “I caution you not to move from this spot until you are permitted. Three of these gentlemen will remain to see my orders obeyed. I have the honor to wish your grace a good night.”

He then took off his hat, and dashed up the hillside, followed by Clotworthy and Montalt. The others remained in guard of the carriage.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW HER GRACE OF CLEVELAND WENT BACK TO
THE BALL

The Duchess of Cleveland found her detention rather tedious, but was obliged to submit. Though vexed by the loss of the money, she could not help laughing at the adventure.

It was a relief to her when a voice called out to the coachman that he might go on ; and the three robbers disappeared in the gloom.

“What are we to do, your grace?” inquired the footman.

“Drive back to the house,” she rejoined.

Nothing could equal Lady Muskerry’s astonishment when she saw the Duchess of Cleveland re-enter the ball-room. But she quite understood from the expression of her grace’s countenance that something strange had happened, and flew to meet her.

“So delighted to see you back !” she hurriedly exclaimed. “But I hope no accident has occurred ?”

“More than an accident,” rejoined the duchess. “I have been robbed in the park—almost within a bowshot of the house—by Claude Duval and his band.”

“Amazement !” cried Lady Muskerry. “Then you have lost the money ?”

“Lost it ! unless the robbers are captured. I have despatched a dozen men in pursuit of them.”

Before the duchess could enter into further details, the king was seen advancing, with the Duchess of Orleans and Louise. Close behind them were Talbot and Dorinda.

“His majesty must hear what has happened,” cried the Duchess of Cleveland, rushing towards him.

“Oddsfish!” exclaimed Charles, after listening to the recital. “This is a droller occurrence than the first.”

And he made Louise laugh by the diverting description he gave her of it.

“It must be a frolic,” he continued. “Who can have played it? Where is the Count de Bellegarde?”

“He is there, among the *entourage*,” rejoined Louise.

At a sign from the king, the count stepped forward.

“Have you been absent from the ball-room just now, count?” demanded Charles.

Bellegarde appeared surprised at the question.

“I have just had the honor of dancing the gavotte with Lady Muskerry,” he replied. “And though your majesty was not likely to notice me, I am surprised you did not remark her ladyship.”

“I recollect,” said the king, smiling. “Should you recognize this Claude Duval if you beheld him?” he added to the Duchess of Cleveland.

“How is that possible, when he was masked?” she rejoined. “But he speaks with a very peculiar accent. Miss Neville will confirm what I say. She has conversed with him.”

Dorinda blushed when thus appealed to, but immediately replied, “Yes, his accent is most marked and peculiar.”

“At all like mine?” asked the Count de Bellegarde, with consummate self-possession.

“Not in the least!” replied both ladies.

“I am glad to hear that,” cried the king. “Still, I am convinced it is a wild prank.”

“The trick may be practised on your majesty, and then you won’t laugh at it,” cried the Duchess of Cleveland, enraged by Louise’s merriment.

“Proper measures must be taken to capture the robbers,

or jesters—which you please,” said the king, whose good humor was not to be disturbed.

“I will engage that your majesty shall have some tidings of them by to-morrow,” said Talbot.

“Several of the serving-men have been already sent in pursuit,” cried the duchess.

“Go, and make all possible inquiries,” said the king to Talbot, who bowed, and quitted the ball-room.

“And now let us to supper, with what appetite we may,” continued the Merry Monarch, as a gentleman usher advanced towards him. “If your grace will but remain an hour longer,” he added to the Duchess of Cleveland, “you will have plenty of company to escort you to Rusthall Common.”

“Yes, I must now insist upon your grace staying to supper,” said Lady Muskerry.

“I hope you have had nothing to do with this trick, Achille,” remarked Louise, aside to the Count de Bellegarde.

“I! Can you entertain such a suspicion?”

“Well, I hope Claude Duval won’t rob his majesty,” she said. “That would be carrying the jest too far.”

The ball broke up about two hours later, but no further mischance befell any of the company on their return.

CHAPTER XV

THE KING TAKES ANOTHER EARLY WALK

Notwithstanding the late hour at which he retired to rest, Charles was astir as usual, and his valet, Chiffinch, ventured to observe that he thought his majesty had better not go to bed at all.

Habited in his customary morning attire, the king sallied forth, and was soon shaping his rapid course across the heath, in the same direction as on the previous day, and with the full intention of paying another visit to the farm-house; when, on gaining the summit of the hill, he perceived a damsel, whom he felt certain could be no other than the fair object of his search. That she was looking out for him, seemed equally clear; for, on beholding him, she hastened to meet him.

How fresh and beautiful she looked on that bright morning! How sylph-like was her figure as she tripped along! And how charmingly her dark tresses sported in the breeze!

“Would Lely were with me now,” thought Charles, as he gazed at her rapturously. “He would be ravished by her appearance.”

“May I flatter myself that you are looking out for me, sweetheart?” he said, as he bade her good-morrow. “I hope so; but you will guess that I was on my way to your dwelling. I bring you good news. I have seen Sir Peter Lely, and have easily prevailed on him to paint your picture. He will pay you a visit to-day.”

“It must not be,” she replied. “My father will not permit it.”

“Your father is an obstinate churl,” cried the king. “He knows not what he refuses. I will soon bring him to reason.”

“You must not come to our cottage again, sir; indeed, you must not,” she rejoined. “I have been on the watch since daybreak to tell you this. My father was very angry with me when you left, and will not allow me to see you again.”

“How amiable of you to meet me thus!” he cried. “But I must have your picture painted, in spite of him. If Lely is not to be allowed to come to you, you must go to him. The description I have given him of you has made him all eager-

ness to place you in his gallery. He is lodged with the king at Mount Sion, and, of course, has his own painting-room, where he will be at work at his easel during the greater part of the day. You will have nothing to do but ask for his majesty's valet, Chiffinch—you will remember the name, Chiffinch—and he will conduct you at once to Sir Peter Lely's room. Conceal your fair features with a hood, if you fear attracting too much notice. I will make all preparations for you. At what hour may Sir Peter expect your visit?"

"Much as I should like to have my portrait painted by him, I cannot, dare not come," she rejoined.

"Nay, I have promised Sir Peter that you will sit to him, and I should be grieved to disappoint him," said Charles, in his most persuasive accents.

"You tempt me strongly," she cried, "but I must resist."

"I will take no refusal," urged the king. "You are throwing away a chance that falls to the lot of few. Your beauty will bloom forever on Lely's canvas."

Her cheek colored, and her black eyes flashed with pride. Charles saw she was yielding, and again urged her.

"I will come at noon," she murmured.

"Chiffinch shall be in waiting for you. He is discretion itself. Make no change in your costume, I entreat—you cannot improve it."

"You think not?" she remarked, archly. "That is fortunate, for I could not make a change without exciting my father's suspicions. But I must not stay here a moment longer, or I shall be missed, and then it will be impossible for me to get out. Adieu!"

And she speeded away.

Charles gazed after her as long as she continued in sight, lost in admiration of her graceful movements, and then moved off in an opposite direction.

He had just reached Bishop's Down, and was about to pro-

ceed to the cold baths, then very much frequented, when he perceived Talbot Harland, mounting the side of the heath, and called to him. The young man immediately rode towards him.

“You promised me good news this evening,” cried the king. “Have you been successful? Have you captured the robbers? I fear not, from your looks.”

“I cannot discover any traces of them,” rejoined Talbot. “I have been all round the country, as the jaded state of my horse will prove to your majesty, but have learnt nothing. This Claude Duval must have dealings with the devil, I think, to disappear in this fashion. I am now on my way to Farmer Oldacre’s cottage, to see whether he can aid me in my quest.”

“Don’t go near him!” cried the king. “The fellow is an impracticable savage, and will not allow his fair daughter to have her portrait painted by Lely. But it shall be done in spite of him. She is coming secretly to Mount Sion at noon.”

“Then I have nothing further to do in the matter,” observed Talbot.

“Nothing. Chiffinch will manage it all. Go to your tent, and get an hour’s repose—you need it.”

Talbot thanked his majesty, and rode towards the encampment on Rusthall Common, while the king walked on to the baths, and thoroughly refreshed himself in the clearest and coldest water imaginable, collected in a rocky basin.

CHAPTER XVI

SIR PETER LELY'S STUDIO

Sir Peter Lely was in the room which had been hastily prepared for him as a studio. His canvas was upon the easel, and he was employed in mixing the colors on his palette. It was not yet noon, so he proceeded very deliberately with his task, laying in plenty of black, as he knew he should require a good deal of that color.

Suddenly, the door opened, and Chiffinch, having ushered in a damsel, whose features were concealed by a lloo mask, immediately retired. Lely quickly arose, and received his fair visitor with a courtier-like bow.

But a slight misgiving crossed him as he regarded her. He had been led by the king to expect a simple costume, but the attire of the new-comer was rich, and she wore a small black hat with a crimson plume, as was then the fashion with the queen's maids of honor. Besides, her tresses were blonde.

When she took off her mask, he found it was Dorinda Neville.

"You do not seem to expect me, Sir Peter," she said, noticing his embarrassment. "I understood from Mr. Talbot Harland that it is his majesty's wish that I should sit to you, and I have come accordingly."

"Nothing could gratify me more than to paint Miss Neville," replied Lely, bowing; "but I have not yet received his majesty's instructions to that effect. And I fancy there must be some mistake in regard to the hour."

"It will be unpardonable in Mr. Harland if he has led me into an error," cried Dorinda. "I entreat you to say nothing about it, Sir Peter, or I shall be laughed at."

“You may entirely depend upon me, Miss Neville,” replied Lely. “But I trust I shall still receive his majesty’s commands.”

At this moment Chiffinch opened the door, and said, “Another lady is without, Sir Peter.”

“Great heavens, if I am seen, there will be no end of ridicule!” cried Dorinda.

And she fled behind the screen.

Scarcely had she disappeared, when the second lady was ushered into the room, and was received by the painter with a low bow.

She, too, wore a luo mask, and, in one or two particulars, answered the king’s description better than the first comer. Clearly, she was a brunette. Her tresses were black, and the eyes that shone through the loopholes of her mask were of the same hue.

But her attire was even richer than that of Dorinda, and of the last French mode. The *tournure* could not be that of an Englishwoman, and Lely felt no surprise, though he experienced some uneasiness, when she disclosed the features of Louise de Quéroualle.

“Do not let me interrupt you, Sir Peter,” said Louise, addressing him in French. “Pray, proceed with your task. I know you have a charming model—she is behind that screen—pray, let her come forth.”

Lely in vain protested that no one was there.

“You cannot deceive me, Sir Peter,” continued Louise, whose accents and sparkling eyes betrayed her jealous rage. “I know you are going to paint a *jeune paysanne* for the king. She is there; I want to see her;—I *will* see her!”

“*Parole d’honneur*, mademoiselle; there is no *paysanne* behind the screen,” said Lely.

“Who is it, then? I insist on knowing,” cried Louise.

“Without the lady’s permission, I cannot satisfy you,” rejoined the painter.

“’Tis I,” cried Dorinda, stepping forth.

“Miss Neville!” exclaimed Louise, in astonishment.

“Yes. I have been brought here on a foolish errand, and am only anxious to make my escape.”

Any attempt of the kind was, however, frustrated by Chiffinch, who came in, looking grave and imperturbable as ever, and said, “A third lady is without, Sir Peter.”

“Ah! *la voilà!*” cried Louise.

“*Diable!* this no doubt is the right one!” muttered the painter.

Before the new-comer could be ushered in, both Lely’s visitors had disappeared behind the screen.

Chiffinch immediately retired, but did not quite close the door after him.

Sir Peter bowed profoundly as before, though feeling certain it was the fair peasant. As she threw back her hood, he was electrified by her beauty; while Louise, who was stealing a glance at her from the corner of the screen, was equally amazed.

Anxious to remove the lovely girl’s timidity, Sir Peter addressed a few encouraging words to her, and told her how delighted he was to have her for a model.

“I am afraid you can make nothing of me, Sir Peter,” she remarked, with a smile.

“If I do you justice, his majesty will have the best portrait I have yet painted,” replied Lely, gallantly.

“Then the portrait *is* to be for the king?” she cried.

“Certainly, I only paint for his majesty,” said Lely, hoping he had not committed an indiscretion.

He then led her towards the easel, and begged her to assume a simple and unconstrained attitude.

“I want to take you just as you are,” he said. “That will do admirably; if I can only catch that charming expression before it flits away, I shall have no further difficulty.”

And, sitting down, he seized his palette and brush, and set

to work with an ardor that showed how strongly he was excited.

So engrossed was he, that he entirely forgot there were other persons in the room except himself and his lovely model.

Louise remained quiet for a short time, hoping some observations would be made; but not a word being uttered, she did not like to move.

At last, she issued from her retreat, and Dorinda followed her. Violet was surprised, and not a little startled, by their sudden appearance.

“Upon my word, mademoiselle, you will make an extremely pretty picture!” cried Louise, regarding her with a very spiteful expression.

Quickly recovering herself, Violet looked at her, and said, “If I am not mistaken, you are Mademoiselle de Quéroualle?”

“Ah, you know me!” cried Louise. “You are not so simple as you pretend.”

“I have never seen you before, but I have heard of you,” rejoined Violet. Then, turning to Dorinda, she added, “You, I am sure, are Miss Neville. I have likewise heard of *you*.”

“Sir Peter must have whispered our names in your ear,” remarked Dorinda, smiling.

“I was really not thinking of you,” observed Lely, testily. “And you have robbed me of the most charming expression——”

“Oh! it will come again,” cried Louise. “This artless creature has always a simple look at command.”

Violet made no rejoinder, but her cheeks flushed with indignation, and Sir Peter called out to Louise, “Accept my thanks, mademoiselle. You have caused her to summon up the liveliest expression of scorn I ever beheld. Ah! if I could only paint you both as you are now! What a picture it would be! How it would enchant his majesty!”

"I would not be associated with her for worlds," exclaimed Louise. "Come, Miss Neville. We will no longer interrupt Sir Peter in his pleasing task."

They were moving towards the door, when their departure was arrested by the king.

No doubt, his majesty felt some little embarrassment at finding them in the room; but he was too much master of himself to show it.

"What means this invasion of Sir Peter's studio?" he cried.

"Mr. Talbot Harland must explain my presence here, sire," replied Dorinda.

"And mine can be explained by Bellegarde," added Louise.

"The explanations shall be given at once," cried the king. "Luckily, they are both in the ante-chamber. What, ho! Chiffinch! Bid the Count de Bellegarde and Mr. Harland come in."

"It will be impossible for me to proceed with the portrait, if we are to have a scene," groaned Lely.

At this moment, the two persons who had been summoned were ushered in by Chiffinch. Talbot looked somewhat confused, but Bellegarde appeared wholly free from embarrassment.

On the entrance of the latter, Charles noted that Violet cast down her eyes and avoided the count's regards.

"Harkye, gentlemen," cried the king. "Both of you must have known that Sir Peter Lely was particularly engaged at this hour, and yet each sends a lady to interrupt him. Is it a jest?"

"On my part, yes, sire," replied Talbot. "I avow the truth, and throw myself on your good-nature for forgiveness."

"But you will not readily obtain mine, even if his majesty forgives you," said Dorinda. "You have made me supremely ridiculous."

“What excuse have you to offer, count?” demanded Charles. “Your offence is the worst of the two.”

“My explanation might not appear satisfactory to your majesty, so I will not venture to offer it—especially in the presence of Mademoiselle de Quérroualle,” rejoined Bellegarde.

Before the king could make any reply, Violet had approached him.

“I beseech your majesty to let me go,” she said. “I cannot endure the situation in which I am placed.”

Charles might have detained her, but Louise approached on the other side, and whispered, “If her portrait is painted, I shall leave with the Duchess of Orleans.”

Forced by this threat to yield, the king called the Count de Bellegarde to him.

“You are the contriver of this mischief, count,” he said. “Set it right as far as you can.”

“What am I to do, in heaven’s name! sire?” inquired Bellegarde.

“Take me hence!” cried Violet. “That is all I ask!”

Bellegarde consulted the king by a look; and, receiving permission, offered her his hand, and conducted her out of the room.

Talbot would have paid a similar attention to Dorinda, as she followed, but she turned disdainfully from him.

“So, my day is lost!” exclaimed Lely, in despair.

“No; you shall have a *séance* from me,” rejoined Louise. “Use the same canvas. I would have every trace of that odious *paysanne* obliterated. You will not see her again? Promise me that!” she added, to the king.

Of course, Charles gave the promise.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DÉNOUEMENT TO THE DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND'S
ADVENTURE

Next day the king sent Chiffinch to the farmhouse to make inquiries, bidding him use the utmost caution. The discreet valet brought back the very unsatisfactory intelligence that the fair damsel had been taken away by her father—whither, could not be ascertained, as the house was left to the care of a deaf and stupid old countrywoman, who had evidently been instructed to answer no questions.

This was vexatious ; but Charles persuaded himself that he should easily discover Violet's retreat. Bellegarde, he felt sure, must be acquainted with it ; but the difficulty was, how to extract the information from him.

The count's movements were watched by Chiffinch ; but nothing was gained by the proceeding. Bellegarde seemed devoted to play. He left off dancing, and sat all night at the basset-table. During the day he played at hazard. Fortune favored him, and he won large sums from Sir Charles Lyttleton, the beau Sidney, Lord Taafe, and others.

At her royal brother's earnest entreaty, the Duchess of Orleans postponed her departure for three days. Charles was really grieved to part with her ; and a presentiment crossed him, which was unhappily realized, that they should meet no more.

The Count de Bellegarde attended her highness to Dover, but did not embark with her. Mademoiselle de Quéroualle was left behind, having been appointed maid of honor to the queen.

It may now be necessary to inquire whether Claude Duval,

or any of his band, had been captured. All search for them had been fruitless. The occurrences were treated as a jest, and formed the theme of some very diverting ballads, composed by the Duke of Buckingham and Sir Charles Sedley, which caused infinite amusement to the Merry Monarch and his court.

The Duchess of Cleveland did not relish the jests made at her expense. A most unexpected incident, however, occurred, which restored her grace to perfect good humor.

On the eve of the departure for France of the duchess, a farewell entertainment of extraordinary splendor was given at Somerhill. Though pressed to dance by Lady Muskerly, the Count de Bellegarde, who was in a famous run of good luck, would not quit the basset-table.

The Duchess of Cleveland envied his success; but not being able to participate in it, got up in disgust. When she entered her carriage, what was her surprise to find three bags of money on the seat!

None of her servants could tell who had placed them there. But to one of them was fastened a ticket, intimating that the eight thousand pistoles, which the bags contained, came from Monsieur Claude Duval.

Here was a charming *dénouement* to the adventure!

Her grace clapped her hands with delight; and having satisfied herself as to the contents of the bags, returned to the ball-room to proclaim what had happened.

Everybody laughed at the occurrence; but no one laughed more heartily than the Count de Bellegarde.

“Your majesty was perfectly right,” he observed to the king. “The robbery must have been a frolic. But who the deuce can have played it?”

Louise looked archly at her cousin, but made no remark.

“It is scarcely worth while to inquire now,” cried the Duchess of Cleveland, laughing. “Whoever Monsieur Claude Duval may be, he is exceedingly polite.”

“And dances the gaillarde better than anyone I ever saw,” cried Lady Muskerry.

“You ought to have invited him to your ball,” said Louise.

“Most likely he is here now,” observed the king.

Nothing else was talked of during the remainder of the evening; and the Duke of Buckingham improvised a few more couplets to his ballad, in which he had the impertinence to affirm that all the court dames were dying to dance with the gallant robber, Claude Duval.

For the three following days, the court was deprived of the agreeable society of the Count de Bellegarde, who, as we have mentioned, was called upon to attend the Duchess of Orleans to Dover.

CHAPTER XVIII

KNOLE

Meanwhile, the king had accepted an invitation from the Earl of Dorset, father of Lord Buckhurst, to pass a few days at his residence, Knole. All the principal personages in the court were included in the invitation. Preparations were made by the earl and his son on a magnificent scale for the reception of their numerous guests.

It was a delicious morning in June. The sweet-toned bells of Sevenoaks Church were ringing merry peals. The inhabitants of the pleasant little town, in their holiday attire, were all out of doors, and ranged along the street to see the king and his court pass by.

And a brave sight it was—braver than the oldest of the spectators had ever witnessed, though that time-honored indi-

vidual had seen bonnie King James ride through the village to Knole House.

“But there were no such lovely women in King Jamie’s days as now,” he said. “It was a pleasure to gaze at them. How bewitching they looked in their velvet riding-dresses and little plumed hats. How good-humored his majesty appeared. How he nodded to the men, and smiled at the lasses, and even went so far as to compliment some of them. Heaven bless his royal heart!

“Who could that be, who was riding beside his majesty? Not the queen. No, she was too young and too sprightly. It must be the French beauty, of whom he had heard speak. She might be charming, but she was not half so much to his taste as the fair-haired, blue-eyed nymph who rode behind. Ah! there was a complexion—there was a winning smile!” Need we say that these encomiums were bestowed on Dorinda?

Charles and his attendants having ridden by, amid the acclamations of the beholders, a long line of richly-gilt carriages followed, each drawn by four horses. In the foremost sat the queen, with three of her ladies; but though her majesty was regarded with much curiosity, she was not half so vociferously cheered as her consort. Charles was extraordinarily popular with all classes of his subjects, except the Puritans, of whom there were none in the loyal town of Sevenoaks.

Porters and mounted attendants were stationed at the gates to keep out the crowd; but as soon as the royal *cortège* had passed through, the townsfolk were allowed to enter the park, where they conducted themselves most decorously.

Between the gates and the mansion lies a deep dell, the slopes of which are covered by splendid beech-trees; and it was while ascending this acclivity, and shaping its course through the grove, that the procession was seen to the greatest advantage. Nothing could be prettier or more picturesque than the sight of that troop of glittering gallants and fair dames.

From the moment of her entrance into the park, Louise had been in ecstasies with the scene presented to her. Never before had she beheld trees of such enormous size—not even at Fontainebleau. And when at last the gray old monastic-looking pile, with its innumerable gables, its square transom windows, and great gate-house, burst upon her, she was lost in admiration. The immense sycamore in front of the gate-house charmed her as much as the same tree charmed Horace Walpole at a later period.

On the summit of the lofty embattled gate-house floated a broad banner, embroidered with the royal arms. Smaller flags were hung out from the windows, and as the royal *cortège* approached, flourishes of trumpets were blown by a band of trumpeters stationed near the archway, while small pieces of ordnance were discharged from the embattled towers, making the woods resound with their roar, and startling the deer in their coverts.

Amid this joyous bruit the king alighted, and was received by the Earl of Dorset and his son, who were stationed in the outer court. But no one entered the mansion until the arrival of the queen, and by that time the inner quadrangle was almost filled. Never had such a brilliant company been assembled within that court before—not even in the days of good Queen Bess or King Jamie. The old walls resounded with light talk and laughter.

At last the queen's carriage came up, and while the Earl of Dorset was bending before her majesty, assisting her to alight, and ceremoniously conducting her into the house, Lord Buckhurst, like a true courtier, was paying assiduous attentions to Mademoiselle de Quéroualle, and telling her how much enchanted and honored he felt by her visit to Knole.

Ere long, the courts were emptied, and the brilliant company was wandering about those long corridors and galleries that form the charm of the ancient mansion.

Almost immediately after the arrival of the royal party, a splendid collation was served in the great banqueting-hall, and after partaking of it, the king, who was in high good-humor, repaired to the bowling-green, where he remained at play with the Duke of Buckingham, Lord Buckhurst, Sedley, Etherege, and several others, during the whole of that summer afternoon.

That bowling-green, with the gay groups upon it, and the antique mansion near it, formed a lovely picture. What jests were uttered by the merry crew! Etiquette was banished for the time. The king was merely a boon companion.

Some of the dames and gallants remained within the gardens, where plenty of delights were to be found, but others strayed forth into the park and sat down beneath the trees. Amongst the latter were Talbot and Dorinda. The young man had recovered the use of his arm, though his wound was not quite healed. He had not yet obtained Dorinda's entire forgiveness for the unlucky jest he had practised upon her; but his penitence being sincere, there seemed little doubt of his speedy restoration to favor. Indeed, it may be fairly assumed that she would not have strolled forth with him into the park if her displeasure had been very great.

"Am I forgiven?" he asked, as they sat down on the roots of an enormous oak.

"Not yet," she replied. "Unless you are severely punished, you may repeat the offence."

"Will no expression of regret satisfy you?"

"No; I still feel very angry. Sir Charles Sedley has made me the subject of some satirical verses. But I will not have you quarrel with him on that account. You made me ridiculous enough by your duel with Bellegarde. Do you know that I begin to like the count, and find him very amusing. I am quite sorry he is not here now. I hope we shall soon have him back."

“I shall be obliged to fight another duel with him if you praise him so much.”

“Then you will forever forfeit my regard. Apropos of the count, I have been longing to ask you a few questions about that lovely country damsel, whose portrait Sir Peter Lely ought to have painted.”

“The only information I can give you respecting her is that she has disappeared altogether.”

“You had seen her before that morning?”

“Certainly; at her father’s house. His majesty was there at the time.”

“The Count de Bellegarde seemed to be acquainted with her. I noticed a look that passed between them. I cannot divest myself of the idea that she is something better than a farmer’s daughter. Surely, you must have remarked the refinement of her manner? Have you ever spoken to the count about her?”

“I feel no interest in her, and am surprised you should take so much.”

“If you wish to oblige me—if you desire to regain my favor—you will find out who she is.”

“There is really no mystery in the matter,” rejoined Talbot. “You have endowed her with gifts she does not possess. Believe me, she is not a princess in disguise.”

“She is not a peasant—of that I am certain. Ah, what do I see? Look at those two persons coming towards us.”

Talbot sprang to his feet.

“One of them is Farmer Oldacre, undoubtedly,” he exclaimed; “and the other must be his daughter.”

“’Tis she!” cried Dorinda, rising in her turn.

We have said that a great number of the townspeople of Sevenoaks had been admitted to the park. They were now scattered about in groups under the trees, and some of the more curious amongst them had ventured to approach

the house, in order to stare at the great folks in the gardens and on the bowling-green.

There was nothing very surprising, therefore, in the appearance of Oldacre and his daughter. They were marching along rather quickly, and it was evident that their course would bring them near the tree beneath which the youthful pair had been sitting.

But when the farmer recognized Talbot, he stopped, and seemed about to turn back. But his daughter detained him, as she saw Dorinda tripping towards her.

"I am so glad to see you again," cried the latter, as she came up. "Perhaps you have forgotten me?"

"Oh, no! I have not," replied Violet, smiling. "I could not easily forget Miss Neville."

"I have just been speaking of you to Mr. Talbot Harland," said Dorinda. "Do not suppose that I am influenced by any idle curiosity if I inquire whether you are staying in Seven-oaks?"

Oldacre plucked his daughter's sleeve, to prevent her from answering.

"You need have no concealment from me," observed Dorinda, noticing the gesture.

"I am sure not," replied the other, disregarding her father's looks. "I have been here for a few days."

"But she won't remain here many hours longer," remarked Oldacre, gruffly.

"Wherefore not?" cried Dorinda. "I have just said that she has nothing to fear from me."

"Or from me," added Talbot, who had now come up. "But if your object is concealment," he observed to Violet, "is it prudent to walk abroad thus? Others may see you, and mention the circumstance. It happens that his majesty is on the bowling-green; but he might have been in the park."

"You hear what he says, Violet," remarked Oldacre.

“I thank you for your good counsel,” he added, to the young man.

“Stay; I have something more to say to you,” cried Dorinda, taking Violet aside.

As soon as they were out of hearing, she continued, “If you remain here, as I think you will, I hope you will find some means of communicating with me. I will not ask you to come to the house; but here, in the park, we might meet.”

“As you appear to take an interest in me, I will trust you with a secret. After what my father has just said, it will surprise you to learn that I shall be at the revel to-night.”

“Pray do nothing so rash,” cried Dorinda. “You are certain to be discovered.”

“Have no fear for me,” rejoined the other. “I have friends in the house. There is to be a character dance, and I shall figure in it. My disguise will protect me, and I know I can confide in you. Perhaps I may find an opportunity of speaking to you then. But I must now go. Adieu. My father is growing impatient. Besides, two court ladies are coming this way. To-night!”

“To-night!” echoed Dorinda. “Rely on me.”

Violet then rejoined her father, who had kept sullenly aloof from Talbot. Scarcely troubling himself to salute Dorinda, the cross-grained farmer hurried his daughter away in the direction of the park gates.

It was time he was gone; for the two court dames alluded to by Violet, proved to be the Duchess of Cleveland and Lady Muskerrey.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPANISH DANCER

A loud blowing of horns, that roused all the echoes of the ancient mansion, summoned the guests to a magnificent banquet, which was served in the great hall. Minstrels, placed in the music-gallery, enlivened the company with their strains.

With its richly-carved screen ; its long tables, covered with massive plate and glittering crystal ; its dais, at which sat their majesties and the most important of the guests ; with the crowd of attendants, in gorgeous liveries, ministering to the wants of the dames and gallants seated at the board,—the banqueting-hall presented a splendid sight.

The male portion of the guests sat long at table, and continued their carouse till it was almost time for the evening revelry to commence.

The company re-assembled in the Brown Gallery, which, from its great length, was admirably adapted for a country-dance. Here they danced the brawl, and the cushion-dance, and a jig, and we know not how many merry dances besides ; and the gallants being excited by the wine they had quaffed, footed it with unusual animation.

Somewhat fatigued by his exertions, the king sat down with Louise, when the major-domo approached, and informed him that a Spanish dance was about to be performed.

Charles expressed his satisfaction, and a space was immediately cleared in front of his majesty for the dancers.

The queen was in a large room opening out of the gallery, with the Earl of Dorset and the graver portion of the courtiers in attendance upon her. Lord Buckhurst devoted himself to Mademoiselle de Quéroualle.

Presently, the inspiriting rattle of castanets was heard, and three dancers in Spanish costume broke through the circle formed in front of the king, and made a reverence to his majesty. Two of them were handsome young men, of slight and graceful figure: but it was evident that their dark hue was the result of art.

All eyes, however, were fixed upon the donzella by whom they were accompanied. Her picturesque dress suited her admirably, and her short basquina displayed her finely turned limbs and small feet to perfection. Her features were concealed by an envious mask, but her throat was exquisitely moulded, and her tresses black as jet.

With what wonderful spirit she danced the bolero! How rapid were her movements! how charming her postures! With what captivating coquetry she managed her fan! Charles was enraptured.

The fandango followed; and this vivacious and characteristic dance was better calculated than the first to call forth all the remarkable graces of her figure. Irrepressible murmurs of delight burst from the admiring assemblage.

Sir Peter Lely, who was standing behind the king's chair, asked his majesty if he had ever seen her before.

"Never!" cried Charles, rapturously. "But I hope to see her often again. She is charming."

"Look at her closely, sire," said Sir Peter. "I am very much mistaken if it is not——"

Here a glance from Louise checked him.

The king's curiosity was aroused.

"Who is she?" he said, to Lord Buckhurst.

"She was engaged by my major-domo; that is all I know about her, sire," was the reply.

"A ballet-dancer, no doubt," observed Louise, contemptuously.

"We'll have a glimpse of her face anon," said Charles.

"Sorry to disappoint your majesty," replied Lord Buck-

hurst. "But she expressly stipulated that she should not be obliged to unmask."

"Oddsfish! that's strange," exclaimed the king.

In another moment the fandango ended, and amidst the plaudits of the assemblage, the dancers advanced to make their reverences to the king.

In spite of what had been said to him, Charles was on the point of bidding the donzella unmask, when Lady Muskerry stepped forward, and volunteered to dance the saraband with one of the Spaniards.

The absurd request could not be refused; and the donzella took advantage of her ladyship's interposition to retire.

As she passed the spot where Dorinda was standing, she inadvertently touched her while agitating her fan, and then apologized for her carelessness.

Dorinda smiled.

"I wish you would give me your fan in exchange for mine," she said.

"*De buena gana, senorita,*" replied the Spanish damsel, complying.

And with a graceful curtsy, she went on.

The king was forced to witness Lady Muskerry's performance, which appeared doubly absurd from its contrast with the charming dances that had preceded it. However, her ladyship swallowed all the ironical compliments paid her by his majesty.

Nothing more was seen of the fascinating Spanish dancer. She could not be prevailed upon to appear again—so the major-domo declared.

*CHAPTER XX**A MYSTERIOUS NOCTURNAL VISITOR*

After supper, the queen retired; but it was not until a later hour that Charles was conducted to his chamber by his noble host. Thanking the earl for his hospitality, the king graciously dismissed him, and placed himself in the hands of Chiffinch.

The bed-chamber assigned to his majesty had been fitted up for his grandsire, James the First. The superb state bed, with its hangings of gold and silver tissue, its fringed borders of the same material, and splendidly decorated canopy, surmounted with great plumes, cost an incredible sum. The walls were hung with priceless tapestry, representing the story of Nebuchadnezzar.

On the silver toilet-table was a magnificent Venetian mirror, with an appropriate service in silver. A velvet table, richly embroidered with gold, a few high-backed chairs, and a large arm-chair, placed near the bed, completed the furniture of the room.

While Chiffinch was disrobing the king, he informed his majesty that the room was said to be haunted by the ghost of the first monarch who had slept within it. Charles laughed, and said he didn't think his grandsire would trouble his repose.

A couch had been prepared for Chiffinch in the ante-chamber, and when he retired, the king bade him close the door of communication between the rooms.

Charles soon fell fast asleep, but was awakened by an oppressive sensation, like that caused by nightmare.

On opening his eyes, he became aware of a dark figure seated in the arm-chair, and looking towards the bed.

The figure was perfectly motionless, and its presence at first inspired the king with superstitious terror; but he soon became aware that a living being was beside him.

A light set upon a stand near the bed, and placed behind the mysterious intruder, threw his countenance into shade, and his features were further concealed by a flowing black peruke; but the king remarked that he was broad-shouldered and strongly built.

Charles was in the act of springing from his couch to summon Chiffinch, when a gesture from the unknown restrained him.

"I am armed, sire," said the audacious personage, in a low, deep voice. "'Twere best your majesty should remain quiet and listen to me."

There was something so determined in the man's manner and tone, that it enforced compliance.

"Who are you?" demanded the king. "And with what design have you come hither?"

"Your majesty asks who I am," replied the intruder. "I will tell you without disguise. I am the leader of a secret society, numbering several hundreds, which has been formed for the express purpose of putting you to death."

"I have to deal with an assassin, then?" cried Charles.

"Be silent, on your life, sire," rejoined the other. "The slightest indiscretion will be fatal to you. It must be evident, if I designed to injure you, that I possess the power. I have found means of penetrating to your chamber. I have stolen upon you during your slumbers, and could have slain you, as the murderous Thane slew the royal Duncan."

"And what hindered you?" demanded the king, very ill at his ease, though manifesting no fear.

"I was overpowered by the sacred majesty of your person," replied the other. "You were completely at my mercy—but I could not strike."

“I suppose I am bound to thank you for your extraordinary forbearance,” said Charles, beginning to feel reassured. “But why not depart, since you had so judiciously changed your mind?”

“Had I done so, your majesty would have been unaware of the service I have rendered you,” observed the unknown.

“That is quite true,” rejoined the king. “I suppose you expect to be rewarded?”

“I am entitled to a reward, sire—a great reward. Not only have I saved your life, but I will deliver you from a hundred secret enemies, by whom you are beset.”

“Why not denounce your accomplices?” said the king.

“Were I base enough to do so,” rejoined the unknown, disdainfully, “I should ensure your destruction and my own. Any treachery would be promptly and terribly avenged. The rack would extort no confession from me. Trust to me, sire, and I will protect you. Hereafter I will ask for my reward. And now a word of caution at parting. Your safety depends upon your silence. Speak not of our interview. Make no inquiries concerning me. You will learn nothing. My precautions are too well taken. You may sleep soundly, for I promise that you shall not be again disturbed.”

As the words were uttered, he extinguished the light, and the chamber was instantly buried in gloom.

Charles listened intently, but could hear no sound of his departure.

After a while he summoned Chiffinch, but had to call twice before the sleepy *valet-de-chambre* responded.

“How’s this?—the light gone out!” cried Chiffinch, as he opened the door.

He quickly relighted the taper, and Charles then perceived that the mysterious intruder had disappeared.

The king addressed no questions to the valet, nor did he explain why he had summoned him; but Chiffinch ventured to inquire if his majesty had seen the ghost.

“ I have had an unpleasant dream,” replied the king. “ Go to bed again, but leave the door ajar.”

“ He *has* seen his grandsire !” muttered Chiffinch, as he returned to his couch ; “ but he doesn’t like to own it.”

As may naturally be expected, Charles could not easily compose himself to sleep again. But he determined, after much reflection, to maintain silence respecting the strange incident.

When he arose next morn at his accustomed early hour, he tried to ascertain in what manner the mysterious intruder had entered the room.

Raising the tapestry, he carefully examined the wainscot, but failed to detect any sliding panel or secret door.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE KING WAS ROBBED BY CLAUDE DUVAL

In the course of his adventurous career, Charles had escaped too many perils not to have become a predestinarian ; and, being firmly persuaded that he was not destined to perish by the hand of an assassin, he soon shook off the fears inspired by his nocturnal visitor.

That the person was well acquainted with the mansion, or had been aided by some one possessing such knowledge, was certain. Besides the guests, there were innumerable lacqueys and servants in the house, and possibly the mysterious individual might be among them. But how was the king to recognize him, since he had not been able to obtain a full view of his features ?

However, the careless monarch made no such attempt. He instituted no inquiries, and took no precautions for his

safety. He went forth that morning wholly unattended, as usual, walked for two or three hours in the park, and even visited Sevenoaks.

After a copious breakfast, which he had earned by his vigorous exercise, he was too much engrossed by the amusements prepared for him by his noble host, to think more of the strange occurrence.

One of the diversions of the day was a rustic *fête*, which took place in the park, among the trees, at no great distance from the mansion.

The weather being most propitious, the *fête* was delightful. A maypole, hung with garlands and ropes of flowers, was reared in the midst of a broad patch of soft green sward, and round it danced the prettiest Phillises and the gayest Corydons of Sevenoaks.

Though both their majesties were present, no constraint was placed upon the assemblage. On the contrary, the Merry Monarch promoted the festivity by commanding a general dance, and set the example to his courtiers by selecting a blooming damsel for his partner.

How the rosy-cheeked girl blushed at the honor conferred upon her, and how she boasted of it afterwards!

That dance, in which court gallants were mingled with country maidens, and court dames with young rustics, was a pleasant sight—pleasanter far to witness than the grand revel of the night before.

Carpets were spread upon the sward, on which those who listed could sit down; and a tent was pitched close at hand, where refreshments were served to the country folk. Besides dancing, there were various rustic sports that caused infinite amusement.

While these were going on, the court dames and gallants exhibited their skill in archery. Targets, and what were called "rovers," had been placed in the beautiful dell to which we have alluded, and here they shot for prizes given

by Lord Buckhurst. The chief prize—a silver bugle—was won by Louise, who was enchanted by her success. She was still more pleased when Charles promised to add a chain garnished with pearls to the bugle.

As she was surveying the scene with the king, from the bank of the dell, she exclaimed, “Would Achille were here. How much he would have enjoyed these sports!”

“I wish he were here, with all my heart!” cried Charles. “Have you heard from him?”

“Yes. The messenger who arrived this morning with a letter from the princess to your majesty, brought me a few lines from him. Her highness, as you know, embarked yesterday from Dover, but rather late in the day. Achille did not care to travel by night, so we shall not see him till to-morrow.”

“I hope he will have some diverting adventure to relate on his return,” said the king. Then, with a change of manner, he added, “Poor Henrietta! she writes as if she were bidding me an eternal adieu! She seems to dread returning to Saint Cloud.”

“The duke, her husband, is a jealous tyrant, capable of any atrocious act,” cried Louise. “I sometimes tremble for her highness. I have warned her, and I hope she will not neglect my counsel.”

“You seem to have frightened her,” said Charles.

“Sire, you do not know the Duke of Orleans as well as I do. He is as perfidious as a Borgia, and capable of poisoning her.”

The king made no remark, but a dark shade came over his countenance.

Presently, however, he recovered his gaiety, and proceeded to the mansion, where all the guests partook of a sumptuous collation.

After the repast, Charles, who liked nothing so well as a game at bowls, and who had never found a bowling-green

more to his mind than that of Knole, was about to devote the afternoon to his favorite recreation ; but he was turned from his purpose by Louise, who proposed a ride in the park, declaring that she had not seen half its beauties.

The expression of her wishes was sufficient for Charles, and shortly afterwards a joyous troop sallied forth on horse-back.

But the king and Louise soon separated from the others, and rode on by themselves towards the further side of the park, halting, ever and anon, to admire the lovely pictures offered to their gaze. Knolls crowned by magnificent oaks, clumps of beech, long, sweeping glades, deep dells, coverts, amidst which herds of deer might be seen tossing their branching antlers, and here and there a solitary tree of enormous size. Some of the oldest trees in the country are to be seen in Knole Park.

They were passing through a copse, when a horseman, whose approach they had not noticed, suddenly presented himself before them. There was nothing very startling in the circumstance, except that this personage was masked.

He was extremely well mounted, and gaily attired in a scarlet riding-dress, embroidered with gold. As he had pistols in his holsters, it struck both those who beheld him that he must be the much-talked-about Claude Duval.

The king, however, manifested neither surprise nor uneasiness, as the horseman removed his feathered hat, and bowed profoundly, but courteously returned the salutation.

“ ’Tis Claude Duval, sire ; I am sure of it ! ” cried Louise.

“ You are right, mademoiselle. I am the person you suppose,” said the masked horseman, addressing her in French, and speaking with a marked and peculiar accent.

“ Are you aware that you are in the presence of his majesty ? ” pursued Louise.

“ I am quite aware of it, mademoiselle,” replied Duval, with profound deference.

“Then I presume that you do not design to rob *me*?” cried the king, with a half laugh.

“Pardon me, sire; I have that intention,” rejoined Duval. “I should be wanting to myself, if I allowed the opportunity of crowning my reputation to escape me.”

The assurance with which this was uttered made the king laugh heartily.

“Oddsfish!” he exclaimed; “this is a novel adventure.”

“Let me give him my purse, sire,” said Louise, detaching an embroidered velvet escarcelle from her girdle.

“Mademoiselle, I must have something from the king himself,” observed Claude Duval. “The diamond buckle from his majesty’s hat, or a ring, will perfectly content me.”

“*Parbleu!* you are excessively moderate in your demand,” cried Charles, still laughing. “But before I give you aught, you must unmask.”

“Your majesty must be pleased to excuse me,” rejoined Duval. “Out of consideration for Mademoiselle de Quéroualle, I cannot remove my mask. My aspect would horrify her. Besides, I have a vow that hinders me.”

“Let him have the ring, I entreat you, sire,” cried Louise. “I begin to feel afraid.”

“Fear no *maladresse* on my part, mademoiselle,” said Duval. “It is true that I have companions in this wood, but I should never dream of summoning them.”

“’Twould be a pity to disappoint so polite a gentleman,” observed Charles. “Give him the ring if you will,” he added, presenting it to Louise.

Opening her escarcelle, she dropped the ring into it, and gave the little bag to Duval, who received it with a graceful bow.

“Grammercy, sire!” he cried. “I would rather have this than a thousand pounds.”

“I challenge you to wear it in my presence,” said the king.

“I accept the challenge, sire,” replied Duval. “You shall behold it on my finger.”

“I know not if this is meant as a frolic, sir,” said Charles, amazed at the other’s audacity. “If so, it may cost you dear. I shall order instant pursuit; and if captured, you will assuredly be hanged.”

“I must take my chance, sire,” rejoined Duval. “But I do not think I shall be captured. I have the honor to salute your majesty.”

Bowing profoundly, he galloped off.

He had not disappeared, when another horseman entered the copse from behind.

It proved to be Talbot Harland, and the king hallooed to him to come on.

“What think you has happened?” cried Charles. “Nay, you will never guess. I have been robbed.”

“Robbed, sire?” echoed Talbot, in astonishment.

“Robbed of a ruby ring by Claude Duval. ’Tis he who has just ridden off. Pursue him!”

“I will follow him to the death,” cried Talbot.

And clapping spurs to his steed, he dashed off in the direction taken by Duval.

“If Bellegarde had not been at Dover, I should have thought that this was he,” cried Charles.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PURSUIT

The oak copse in which the incident just described took place, was situated at the outskirts of Knole Park.

As Talbot burst from the wood, he descried Duval, who was not more than a couple of hundred yards off, evidently mak-

ing towards the park pales, and he shouted to him to stop, though with little expectation of his compliance.

Duval neither looked back, nor quickened his pace ; but in another moment jumped the palings, and disappeared.

Talbot followed without hesitation, being luckily mounted on one of Lord Buckhurst's best hunters ; but on landing on the other side of the pales, he could see nothing of the flying robber.

However, a countryman, whom he espied, called out that "t'other gentleman" had ridden down the hill, and Talbot instantly took the course pointed out.

The gentle slope which he was descending was covered with fern, with hollies and broom scattered about, but at the bottom there was a thicket, in which he felt sure the robber had taken shelter.

In this he was mistaken. Duval had merely passed through the wood, and could now be discerned mounting the opposite side of the glen. Apparently, he gave himself little concern about his pursuer, for he rode slowly up the ascent, and on gaining the summit, halted, and looked round, as if considering in what direction he should next shape his course.

Tunbridge was but seven miles distant, and he may have thought of proceeding thither ; but, perhaps, some difficulties occurred to him, and he rode off towards Sundridge.

Meantime, Talbot had drawn nearer to him, and kept him full in view.

After reaching a narrow lane with high banks, in which, fortunately for the fugitive, no cart or other vehicle was encountered, they came upon an extensive heath ; and here Talbot did his best to overtake the robber. But he soon found that his steed was no match, in point of swiftness, for that of Duval.

Hitherto, the robber had made no effort to escape ; but he now careered across the common at a pace that would have

soon carried him out of sight if he had maintained it ; but he evidently enjoyed the chase, and had no wish to put an end to it.

He allowed his pursuer to come within bow-shot of him, and then started off again as swiftly as before.

Avoiding the little village of Sundridge, which lay towards the left, he rode on past River Head, and soon reached the foot of Madam's Court Hill.

As yet, he had experienced no hindrance of any kind. The roads he had taken were unfrequented ; and none of the few pedestrians he met ventured to stop him, though urged to do so by Talbot's vociferations. The sight of the pistols in Duval's holsters kept them at a respectful distance.

He now rode leisurely up Madam's Court Hill, from the summit of which a magnificent view over the weald of Kent is commanded, and was surveying the country, as if still undecided in which direction to shape his course, when three or four horsemen, apparently coming from Farnborough, were seen mounting the hill.

Not caring to meet them, he turned about, when he found that Talbot was nearer than he supposed—so near, indeed, that an encounter with him was inevitable.

Drawing his sword, Talbot spurred his horse towards the robber, shouting out to him to surrender himself a prisoner.

Duval quietly awaited the charge ; and when his antagonist was within three or four yards of him, fired, and horse and rider rolled to the ground. A bullet had pierced the poor animal's brain.

“ *Suivez moi, si vous pouvez, à Londres,*” cried Duval.

With these words, he dashed down the hill.

The horsemen who were mounting the ascent witnessed the rencounter, and fancied that Talbot was shot ; but ere they got up, the young man was on his legs.

Very little explanation was needed. The newcomers quite understood that it must be a highwayman who had fled, but

they one and all refused to go in pursuit of him. They thought the attempt too hazardous. The next shot might be for the rider—not for the horse.

“I call upon you in the king’s name to assist me!” cried Talbot, authoritatively. “Refuse at your peril. I belong to his majesty’s household. I must have a horse from one of you.”

“Take mine,” cried a stout man, dismounting. “I am a butcher of Farnborough; Gideon Brisket by name. I’ll walk on to Sevenoaks. If my horse gets shot, like this poor beast, you’ll have to pay twenty pounds for him.”

Without more ado, Talbot sprang into the saddle which Gideon had just quitted, and bidding the others follow, rode down the hill.

If, with the best hunter in the Knole stables, he had failed to catch Duval, it did not seem very likely he would be able to overtake him now with the sorry steed he had acquired; but he determined to do his best.

Much time had been lost, and Duval had disappeared. But, from the brow of the hill, Talbot had seen him strike off towards Otford, and he and his companions were about to take the same course, when they heard the trampling of horses in the distance, and soon afterwards perceived a little troop galloping along the road from Sevenoaks.

Overjoyed at the sight, Talbot immediately halted.

The troop consisted of half-a-dozen grooms, headed by the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Feversham, who had been sent by the king in pursuit of the robber. They had ascertained that he had taken the London road.

Talbot was now furnished with an excellent horse by one of the grooms, and dispensed with the further services of the Farnborough men.

More time had been lost; but the troop galloped on to Otford, keeping a sharp lookout on the way.

At Otford, they learnt that Duval had crossed the downs;

and as they mounted the lofty chalk ridge, a shepherd told them he had seen him pass, and that he could not be more than a mile ahead.

They heard of him again at Halstead and High Elms, and hoped soon to come up with him. At Farnborough, however, they missed him, and after some consultation, a division took place in the troop; Talbot, with two of the grooms, proceeding along a lane to Orpington, while the others kept on the high road to Bromley.

Talbot had the best luck. As he and his attendants were speeding along the beautiful valley of the Cray, they discovered the fugitive about a quarter of a mile off.

Whether he had strained his horse, or was resting him, Talbot could not tell; but he was proceeding very leisurely, and though apparently aware of the approach of his foes, did not attempt to accelerate his speed till they were within a hundred yards of him.

He then started off; and while they were making every effort to come up with him, wheeled round with such suddenness, that they could not check their headlong career, but flew past him. Before they could recover themselves and turn about, he had got to a considerable distance.

While he executed this clever manœuvre, the robber was unmasked, and Talbot obtained a distinct view of his features, which were decidedly English in expression. Moreover, his derisive laughter had a peculiarly English ring about it.

Any notions about the Count de Bellegarde, which the young man might have conceived, were effectually dissipated. The mysterious robber bore no resemblance whatever to the count.

After galloping for nearly half a mile along the banks of the Cray, Duval cleared the little stream, and crossed the broad mead on the further side.

Talbot and his attendants followed; but they soon lost sight of him, and though they continued the chase for more than an hour, they never again got on the right track.

The two nobles were equally unsuccessful. They went on to Bromley, and then turning back, encountered Talbot. The Duke of Buckingham laughed heartily on hearing of Duval's escape.

"After all, I am glad the rascal got off," he said. "Since you have seen him without his mask, and affirm that he is not Bellegarde, my interest in the chase is over. Let us get back to Knole as fast as we can, and relieve Old Rowley's mind."

"Old Rowley would be more relieved in mind if we could have restored his ring," laughed Lord Feversham.

"And what will Buckhurst say, when he learns that his favorite hunter has been shot?" cried Talbot. "I shall not dare to face him."

"Poh! Old Rowley must give him another horse," said Buckingham. "I'll add a few more couplets to my song, and put him in good humor."

The banquet was over when they got back to Knole.

"You have managed badly, to let this confounded Claude Duval escape you," observed the king to Talbot; "and it is vexatious that Buckhurst's horse should have been shot. But I am glad you have seen the robber without his mask."

"Do tell me what he is like?" cried Louise.

"That would be difficult," cried Talbot. "But he is *not* like the Count de Bellegarde."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COUNT DE BELLEGARDE RESTORES THE RING TO
HIS MAJESTY

Next morning, the Count de Bellegarde arrived from Dover, and immediately presented himself to the king, who was on the bowling-green, surrounded by his courtiers.

The count did not seem at all fatigued by his journey; and, indeed, looked much better than the courtiers who had been spending the night in dancing and revelry. He gave his majesty full particulars of the embarkation of the Duchess of Orleans, and delivered a message with which she had charged him.

“Have you no message for me?” asked Louise, who, hearing of the count’s arrival, had followed him to the bowling-green.

“Her highness has sent you a little token, which I will deliver presently,” replied Bellegarde. “But I have something more to relate to his majesty.”

“An adventure, I hope,” observed Charles.

“Yes, sire; a very singular adventure. I have been stopped on the highway by a robber—by no other, in short, than Claude Duval.”

At this announcement, the king expressed great surprise, and all the courtiers gathered round, to listen to the narration.

“I had dined at Canterbury, sire,” commenced Bellegarde, with his customary vivacity,—“dined very well, I may remark, at the ‘Fleur-de-Lys’—and was riding slowly across a wide common, about midway between the ancient city and Maid-

stone, when I perceived a horseman coming towards me. He was dressed in a scarlet riding-coat, and I might not have suspected him of any ill design, had I not observed that he was masked. I had sent on my servant to Maidstone, where I meant to sleep, so that I was unattended. However, this did not discompose me. I fancy myself a match for any robber."

"Pardon the interruption, count," said the Duke of Buckingham, who was among the auditors; "but about what time did this singular rencounter take place?"

"About half-after eight, I imagine," replied Bellegarde. "It was just beginning to get dusk. Having found an excellent bottle of Bourdeaux at the 'Fleur-de-Lys,' I had stopped to finish it, and was, therefore, in excellent cue for an adventure.

"My friend in the scarlet coat did not leave me long in doubt respecting his intentions. As he came up, pistol in hand, he shouted out, '*La bourse, ou la vie!*' 'Aha, my friend!' I exclaimed; 'I thought I could not be mistaken! You are Monsieur Claude Duval.' 'At your service, Monsieur le Comte,' he replied, with perfect politeness. 'I have had a rare piece of luck to-day. I have had the honor of robbing his majesty.' '*Sarpedieu!* that will not pass with me, friend,' I cried, sceptically. 'I have heard of your exploits with certain court dames, but you will permit me to doubt this assertion.' 'If I show you the ring that I took from his majesty, it will perhaps convince you,' he rejoined. 'Let me see it,' I said.

"On this, he exhibited a ring, which I immediately recognized. My mind was made up in an instant. I am tolerably quick; and while he was thus occupied, I wrested the pistol from him, and held it to his head. 'You shall be robbed in your turn, coquin,' I cried. 'Give me the ring, or I will blow out your brains.' And he surrendered it with the best grace he could. 'You have another pistol in your

Charles II

After the painting by Sir Peter Lely.



holster,' I said. 'I must have it.' He seemed inclined to resist, but at last yielded up the weapon.

"'Now, begone, rascal,'" I cried; 'and thank your stars that you are allowed to escape with life.' 'A word before I go, Monsieur le Comte,' he cried. 'Is it your intention to restore the ring to his majesty?' '*Parbleu!* such is my design, rascal,' I exclaimed, affronted by the question. 'Then be pleased to make his majesty understand my inability to wear it in his presence, as I had engaged to do.' And he rode off, leaving me to pursue my journey."

The king and all the listeners laughed heartily at the recital.

"'But where is the ring, count?'" inquired Charles.

Bellegarde took off his glove; and drawing the ring from his finger, presented it, with a low bow, to the king.

"'Oddsfish! an excellent conclusion to the story,'" cried Charles. "You have done better than those who went in pursuit of the robber."

"'Far better!'" cried Talbot. "The glory is the count's—the trouble has been ours."

"'And the loss mine,'" observed Lord Buckhurst, thinking of his hunter.

"'Well, this Duval is an amusing rascal,'" cried the king. "But I hope we shall hear no more of him. And now for a game at bowls."

CHAPTER XXIV

LOUISE GIVES THE COUNT ADVICE

The festivities at Knole were continued for two days longer ; and, during this interval, Talbot's jealousy was excited by the attentions paid by Bellegarde to Dorinda.

As we have already remarked, the count had a fascination of manner that few women could resist, and Dorinda began now to experience its influence. He made himself so exceedingly agreeable, told her so many droll stories, and amused her in so many ways, that the minutes seemed tedious without him. He was ever in attendance upon her, when she rode out in the park, took part in any pastime in which she engaged, and danced with her at the evening revels.

Whether he was really as much smitten as he appeared, we will not pretend to say ; but Talbot began to look upon him as a very dangerous rival, and determined to pick another quarrel with him on the slightest pretext, and on the earliest possible occasion that presented itself.

Meantime, the foolish young fellow had become sullen in his deportment towards Dorinda, and by such absurd conduct, naturally incurred her displeasure.

To punish him for his folly, she would not dance with him ; and when he saw Bellegarde carry her off in triumph to the cushion-dance, which was danced every night in the Brown Gallery, he was ready to explode with jealous rage.

As may readily be supposed, his anger did not cause the count to discontinue his attentions to the fair one. However, Louise thought proper to give her cousin some advice.

“ I must take you to task, Achille,” she said. “ You are

persuading this charming girl that you are very much in love with her, while I know you are only amusing yourself at her expense. And you are tormenting that poor Talbot out of his life, because he is foolish enough to show that he is jealous. Now, he is really attached to the girl, and is far more deserving of her than you are, even if your intentions were serious, which I am sure they are not, and I therefore insist upon your ceasing to interfere with him. If you were to cause a rupture between them, I should never forgive you. There are many court dames to whom your attentions would be agreeable, and whose husbands would not quarrel with you; and I would recommend you to confine yourself to them."

"This lecture comes very well from you, fair cousin," replied Bellegarde, laughing; "and I should endeavor to profit by it, if I thought it in the least called for. But you seem to be far better acquainted with my sentiments than I am myself. Till this moment, I imagined I was really enamored of Dorinda Neville; and though my merits may be inferior to those of Talbot Harland, yet if she prefers me to him, I shall be content. I do not feel bound to make any sacrifice to a rival."

"I hope you will reflect upon what I have said, Achille," observed Louise, gravely. "You are wholly unfitted for marriage; and I could not wish Dorinda a greater misfortune than to be united to you!"

"I am obliged by your good opinion of me, fair cousin," rejoined Bellegarde; "and I have no doubt you have formed a correct estimate of my qualifications for matrimony. Before taking such a decided step, I shall make a point of consulting you."

"Can you be serious for a moment, Achille?"

"I am perfectly serious, now."

"Then, be advised by me, and desist from this pursuit, or you will infallibly incur the king's displeasure."

“I never was in greater favor with his majesty than at the present moment,” said Bellegarde.

“You are deceived,” rejoined Louise. “Any further indiscretion on your part will be visited by banishment from court. You have gone too far with your jests; and though the king is the easiest person living, there are limits even to his good nature.”

“I will not affect to misunderstand your meaning, fair cousin, because I am aware you have got some absurd notions respecting me into your head; but since I have really done nothing to offend his majesty, I am not in the least uneasy.”

“You calculate on my protection in case of need, do you not?”

“Most certainly.”

“Then do something to deserve it.”

“You have only to command me, fair cousin. What am I to do?”

“Help me to get rid of an odious creature who troubles me. You recollect that *fausse paysanne* whose portrait was to have been painted by Lely? I suspect she is an actress. She has been here at Knole during your absence. She danced one night at the revel, in a Spanish costume; and though she was masked, I recognized her, and so did Sir Peter. I have some reason to believe she is here still.”

“Here! in the house? I do not think that likely,” rejoined Bellegarde.

“Here, or in the neighborhood. She has been seen.”

“By whom?” asked the count, quickly.

“No matter by whom. You must have her removed.”

“But I must first discover her,” replied Bellegarde, laughing.

“That will not be a very difficult task to you,” said Louise; “and I beg you will set about it without delay.”

“Well, I will do my best,” he replied.

“Do not play me false in this matter, Achille, or——But I won't threaten. This girl must not cross my path.”

“She shall not, if I can prevent it,” said Bellegarde.

“And I know you have the power,” she rejoined.

The foregoing conversation took place in the garden, and at its close they separated.

CHAPTER XXV

BELLEGARDE AND TALBOT HARLAND ARE BANISHED FROM COURT

In spite of the counsel given him by Louise, the count continued his attentions to Dorinda.

There was hawking that morning in the park, and most of the court dames rode out to witness the sport. Amongst them was Dorinda. Bellegarde was constantly by her side ; but Talbot never once came near her.

If the fickle damsel secretly pitied her wretched lover, her looks did not betray the state of her feelings, for she seemed in high spirits, and laughed immoderately at the count's lively sallies.

On their return to the mansion, Bellegarde assisted her to alight, and was lingering within the inner quadrangle, when Talbot approached, and with forced politeness begged the favor of his company for a moment on the terrace.

“Willingly,” replied Bellegarde, attending him. “I am afraid you did not enjoy the sport, yet it was excellent. Miss Neville was delighted.”

“Enough, sir,” interrupted Talbot, sternly. “I did not bring you here to talk about hawking, but to tell you that your attentions to the young lady whose name you have just

mentioned, are disagreeable to me, and that I cannot permit them."

"On my faith, this is excessively amusing!" cried Bellegarde, laughing derisively. "I should really be very happy to oblige you, but as my attentions, though disagreeable to you, appear to be agreeable to the young lady, I propose to continue them, even at the hazard of giving you offence. I presume you have nothing further to say to me?"

"Yes, there must be another meeting between us."

"I should have thought that the first might have satisfied you," rejoined Bellegarde. "Wait till your arm is quite cured, and then we will talk about a second meeting."

"My arm is strong enough to chastise you, as you will find," cried Talbot, exasperated by the sneer. "I will force you to meet me, and that without delay. I gave you credit for more courage than you seem to possess."

"You have no right to call my courage in question, sir," said Bellegarde, with provoking calmness. "And I might fairly refuse your challenge. But since you are in the mood for fighting, I will not baulk you. We will settle the affair to-morrow morning, as early as you please, in a retired part of the park."

"Be it so," cried Talbot. "I will come forth at six o'clock, with Lord Feversham. If you will take the trouble to follow, I will lead you to a convenient spot."

"I will not fail; and will bring the Duke of Buckingham with me," rejoined Bellegarde.

They formally saluted each other, and separated.

Bellegarde proceeded to the bowling-green, where he found Buckingham, and told him what had happened.

"I am not surprised," said the duke, laughing; "for I remarked that Talbot was highly offended by your attentions to the charmer. I hope you don't mean to kill him."

"Kill him—no! But since he is resolved to make himself troublesome, I must keep him quiet."

“Well, you may count upon me,” said the duke. “But six o’clock is an early hour; I shall be roused out of my first sleep.”

“Better not go to bed till we come back,” observed the count. “We will sit up at piquet, if your grace thinks proper.”

Whether Bellegarde’s proposition was actually carried into effect we know not, but as the turret clock struck six next morn, he and the duke issued forth from the gate-house.

Talbot and Lord Feversham were standing beneath the great sycamore, and, on seeing them, bowed, and set off across the park. Bellegarde and Buckingham followed more slowly in the same direction.

Their proceedings were noticed by another person, who was out before them, and taking exercise in the park. Suspecting their object, this individual watched whither they were going.

It was a most lovely morning, and all nature seemed rejoicing in the sunshine. The rooks were clamoring amid the topmost branches of the trees; the smaller choristers were carolling blithely in the groves; the deer tripped across the wide lawns; and there was a freshness in the air that produced a most exhilarating effect on the spirits.

Even Buckingham, though rarely alive to the beauties of nature, was charmed by the lovely scene, and paused for a moment to gaze around.

“After all, there is some enjoyment in early rising, as Old Rowley has discovered,” he exclaimed. “Methinks, I shall adopt his plan in future.”

“Adopt mine, and sit up all night,” said Bellegarde. “It comes to the same thing.”

“You are the most extraordinary person I ever met with, count!” cried Buckingham. “You never seem wearied, and your spirits never flag.”

“Not often,” rejoined Bellegarde. “But I have my moments

of depression, like the rest. My gaiety is constitutional, and seldom deserts me. Things generally present themselves to me under an amusing aspect. As to bodily fatigue, I never feel it. But we must not loiter here. They are waiting for us."

They then pressed on towards a giant tree, beside which Talbot and the earl had taken their stand.

Between this patriarch of the grove and the adjacent wood a clear space of green sward was left. No better spot could have been selected for the purpose.

Courteous salutations were exchanged between the principals in the affair.

They then took their places, drew their swords, and saluted each other for the second time.

The assault had just commenced—furiously on the part of Talbot, cautiously on that of the count—when a loud, authoritative voice commanded them to hold.

But as, in spite of the order, they continued to exchange passes, Buckingham rushed between them with his drawn rapier, exclaiming, "Are you mad? It is the king!"

On this, they sheathed their swords, and bowed deferentially to Charles, who was standing beside the old tree, looking very angry.

"Soh, gentlemen," he cried, furiously, "you dare to continue the combat when I command you to stop! I will teach you the respect you owe me."

"Down on your knees," whispered Buckingham to the combatants. "You have greatly offended him."

Acting on the hint, they flung themselves at the king's feet.

Charles, however, was not to be appeased. Regarding them sternly, he said, "I am determined to put a stop to these perpetual duels about trifles among those belonging to the court. Every day some foolish quarrel is settled with the sword. An example must be made. You are both banished from my presence."

“Banished!” cried Talbot, starting to his feet. “I had as lief your majesty doomed me to death, as banish me from court.”

“You are thinking of Dorinda Neville,” observed Charles.

“The punishment is too severe for so light an offence, sire,” said Bellegarde.

“The offence is not light,” rejoined the king. “The sentence is pronounced. I am inflexible.”

And he strode away.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK

BOOK II

THE COURT AT WHITEHALL

CHAPTER I

TYBURN

On a profoundly dark night, some months after the events previously narrated, a little troop of well-mounted horsemen, headed by a powerfully-built individual, who was no other than the redoubted Colonel Blood, rode across Hyde Park, and shaping their course towards the bare, broad field, which then, and for more than a century afterwards, was set apart as the place of public execution, drew up beside the Tyburn Tree.

This fatal tree, which, with grim jocularly, was said to bear fruit all the year round, was a huge triangular frame of wood, having strong cross-beams, supported by tall posts.

To those beams the carcasses of Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton had been attached. Nine years before, on the anniversary of the execution of Charles I., the bodies of the chief regicides were exhumed, dragged on common hurdles to Tyburn, and, with every mark of indignity, hung to three corners of the gallows.

The night, as we have said, was pitch dark, and the ill-omened tree could scarcely be distinguished by the horsemen gathered around it.

Nevertheless, one of them, at the command of Blood, leapt from his steed, and with great activity climbed the gallows, and seated himself astride a cross-beam. He then called out that he was ready; whereupon Blood handed him a halter, which he fastened to the beam, testing its security by his own weight as he descended.

For some time, thunder had been growling in the distance; and at this moment a flash of lightning illumined the strange

scene, giving those assembled round the gallows a weird and fantastic appearance.

"A storm is at hand," cried Blood. "But I hope it will not burst before our work is done. The hour of vengeance is at hand. Before midnight, my long-deferred project will be executed.

"Look down upon me, murdered brethren, and approve my act! When you were iniquitously put to death by the relentless Ormond, I vowed that he should perish in like manner. Now I am about to keep my oath. To this tree, which from its dismal branches has borne the corpses of three Englishmen nobler by far than himself, I will hang the proud duke—hang him till he is dead, and then your cries for vengeance shall cease.

"This night," he continued, "the proud duke shall be sought for far and wide—sought for vainly; for none will seek him here, at Tyburn. But at dawn to-morrow, those who pass by shall behold him hanging from this tree, with a scroll upon his breast, proclaiming that his death has been an act of retributive justice."

Again the lightning flashed, and showed that the speaker's hand was extended towards heaven, while his features were agitated by half-frenzied enthusiasm.

But he soon became calm, and addressed his companions in his usual deep, earnest tones.

"The deed we have sworn to accomplish is one of the most daring ever planned, and might well appall the stoutest heart; but the very boldness of the project will ensure its success, provided it be executed with vigor and despatch."

"Have no fear of us, colonel," said Montalt,—it was he who had tied the halter to the gallows. "We have stood by you on many an occasion, and we shall not flinch now."

"You are all brave fellows, and as true as steel; that I know full well," said Blood. "But this is an enterprise of

a different character from any you have yet undertaken, and demands activity as well as courage. We must pounce upon our prey like eagles."

"We all know what we have got to do, colonel," observed Mandeville. "But it may be well to repeat your orders."

"You are aware that the Duke of Ormond, whose destruction I have sworn, is feasting this day in the city. After the banquet, which is the last he will partake of, it is certain that his grace will drive back to Clarendon House, in Piccadilly; but it is equally certain he will never arrive there, for before he reaches his princely mansion, we will force him from his gilded coach, in which he may be dreaming of fresh triumphs, and bear him hither to his fate. I myself will be his executioner; and he shall find that I can play the part as skilfully as his Dublin hangman."

And he laughed fiercely at the thought.

"You have told us how we are to capture the duke, colonel; but not how we are to bring him hither," said Flodoard.

"He shall ride behind me," rejoined Blood; "bound to me by this broad belt. My horse is strong enough to carry double."

"And now, let us about it. A deed shall be done this night that shall fill all London with consternation on the morrow, and make the king himself tremble in his palace!"

A roll of thunder formed a fitting accompaniment to their departure on their fearful errand.

CHAPTER II

THE ATTACK ON THE DUKE OF ORMOND

They galloped down Park Lane, which then answered to its name ; but slackened their pace as they approached Piccadilly. Few were in the street at that hour ; and the night suited their fell purpose.

When close to Clarendon House, which occupied a splendid position, almost facing the upper end of St. James's Street, Blood posted his men at various points, and stationed himself at the corner of the street, ready to give the signal of the Duke of Ormond's approach.

Clarendon House, which, at the period of our story, was in possession of the Duke of Ormond, was built by the great Lord Chancellor Clarendon in his palmy days of power, and was accounted one of the most magnificent structures in London.

The dear old gossip, Pepys, who surveyed it when near its completion, describes it as "the finest pile I ever did see in my life, and will be a glorious house." A glorious house it was, though Evelyn says "it had many defects as to the architecture ;" but he adds, "it was placed most gracefully."

The situation, indeed, was splendid, and the proud, palatial pile overlooked all the meaner edifices around it. Its internal arrangements and decorations corresponded with the magnificent exterior. No palace could be more sumptuous. It had vast suites of apartments, richly furnished, and boasted a picture-gallery filled with portraits. Extensive gardens surrounded it. But the splendor of his mansion contributed to Clarendon's downfall. Its enormous cost was so far beyond

his resources, that it was said he must have taken bribes from France to enable him to erect it. Another circumstance, regarded with general displeasure, was that the mansion was built with the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral, after the destruction of the ancient fabric by the great fire of London. Clarendon did not long enjoy his splendid residence. His swelling pride was reduced.

After his disgrace and exile, it was purchased by Monk, Duke of Albemarle, and on the death of the latter, by the Duke of Ormond, of whom we must now say a few words.

No one had been a more faithful adherent of Charles—one had made greater sacrifices for his sovereign than James Butler, Duke of Ormond. Refusing all Cromwell's conditions, he followed the fugitive prince to France, and remained with him till the Restoration. He was appointed Grand Steward of the Household, and First Lord of the Bedchamber. As Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, he discharged the important office with zeal and ability; but his incorruptible honesty made him many enemies, chief among whom was Buckingham; and they eventually succeeded in procuring his recall.

It was during Ormond's government in Ireland that the events occurred that led to Blood's atrocious design against the duke's life. A formidable plot had been hatched in Dublin by a few hundreds of desperate individuals, at whose head was Blood, to surprise the Castle, plunder the magazine of arms, put the lord-lieutenant to death, assume the government of the country, and proclaim war against England.

The plot was discovered in time to prevent an outbreak. The ringleaders, with the exception of Blood, were taken and hanged. Vindictive and resolute, Blood solemnly vowed to avenge his friends upon Ormond, and we have seen that he meant to keep his oath.

Born in 1610, the Duke of Ormond was now just sixty; but he bore his years extremely well. He was graceful in appearance, and dignified in manner. His morals were irre-

proachable ; and this drew upon him the sneers of the profligate courtiers. The duke kept a noble table, and maintained a princely establishment at Clarendon House.

On the night in question, Ormond was returning from the city, where he had assisted at a splendid banquet given to the young Prince of Orange by the Goldsmiths' Company. Little did he dream of the ambuscade that was laid for him. Pleasant thoughts occupied his mind.

He had driven slowly along Pall Mall, and still more slowly up St. James's Street. Two footmen, in gorgeous liveries, walked beside the carriage. Before he had reached the top of the street he had fallen into a doze ; but he was rudely awakened by strange and alarming sounds.

Just as the carriage turned the corner of Piccadilly, it was beset by several men on horseback, who appeared, to the terrified attendants, to rush upon them from all quarters.

The leader of the attack ordered the coachman to stop ; but as the unfortunate man, though much frightened, tried to whip on his horses, he was instantly shot through the head, and dropped from the box. The panic-stricken footmen offered no resistance.

By this time, Blood had sprung from his horse, and forcing open the door of the carriage, ordered the duke, in a peremptory voice, to alight.

Ormond, however, refused, and endeavored to defend himself ; but Blood seized him by the throat, and dragged him forth.

"Would you assassinate me, villain?" cried the duke, who was half-strangled.

"Your grace's sole chance of safety lies in keeping quiet," said Blood. "Attempt to give the alarm, and I will shoot you, as I have just shot your coachman."

Undeterred, however, by the menace, Ormond struggled to get free, and shouted out lustily for help, but none came. Nor did the footmen even attempt to assist him.

But moments were precious to Blood. As he had explained to his accomplices, the success of the daring exploit depended on despatch.

Committing the duke to Montalt and Flodoard, who tied a handkerchief over his mouth to stifle his cries, the active ruffian again mounted his steed.

Despite his struggles, Ormond was then placed by main force behind his captor, and fastened to him by the belt.

In another moment, Blood was dashing off exultingly with his prey, while his companions followed as quickly as they could.

“Make for the place of rendezvous by different routes,” he shouted to them.

While Blood, with the captive duke, *en croupe*, was galloping along towards the corner of Hyde Park, shouts were heard in the rear, and he looked back to ascertain if pursuit had commenced; but, owing to the gloom, he could perceive nothing.

The movement he had made, however, enabled the duke, whose hands were free, to pluck the handkerchief from his mouth, and being now able to speak, he asked his captor whither he was taking him.

“Your grace will learn soon enough,” rejoined Blood, gruffly. “But since you desire to know, I will tell you. I am taking you to Tyburn.”

At these sinister words, a shiver ran through the duke’s frame.

Blood perceived it, and, with savage satisfaction, hastened to add, “I am taking you to Tyburn, to hang you on the common gallows, as you hanged my brethren at Dublin.”

“Ha! you were one of the traitors!” cried Ormond.

Blood took no notice of the remark, but said presently,—

“If you have any preparations to make, make them quickly. We have not far to go.”

By this time the other horsemen had disappeared, and finding they were alone, the duke essayed to move his captor.

“Set me free, and I will make you wealthy,” he said; “I swear it.”

“If you would give me Clarendon House and all within it, I would not spare your life,” rejoined Blood, in an inexorable tone.

Thereupon the duke remained silent.

While he was considering what he could do to effect his escape, the shouts behind them grew louder, and awakened hopes of deliverance in his breast.

“Hark!” he exclaimed; “help is at hand. I shall be rescued. You had better accept my offer. I will not break my word.”

“Nor I mine,” rejoined Blood, sternly. “I have sworn to hang you.”

So saying, he urged on his horse.

But he did not go far. The duke put in practice the plan that he had conceived. Having got his right foot under the heel of his captor, he suddenly raised Blood’s leg, and exerting all his force, hurled him out of the saddle.

They both fell heavily to the ground.

Ormond was so shaken by the fall that he could not move; but Blood, though by far the heavier man, was less hurt, and unfastening the belt, quickly scrambled to his feet.

Through the gloom, he could discern several persons hurrying to the spot, and scarce a moment was allowed to provide for his safety.

His well-trained horse had stopped a few yards off, and running towards him, he contrived to gain the saddle once more.

He then discharged a pistol—but luckily without effect—at the prostrate duke, and, with a deep imprecation, rode off and eluded pursuit.

None of his accomplices were captured.

CHAPTER III

THE EARL OF OSSORY

The daring outrage we have described filled the whole community with alarm and indignation.

The mysterious circumstances attending the attempt intensified the excitement occasioned by it. The halter was found attached to the gallows at Tyburn, proving beyond all doubt the real object of the duke's assailants.

A proclamation was immediately issued, offering a reward of a thousand pounds for the discovery of the assassins, but it did not lead to their capture. It was thought they must be screened by some important personage; otherwise they must have fallen into the hands of justice. Suspicion fell on Buckingham, who was known to be Ormond's chief enemy.

The Duke of Ormond had received no serious injury, but he was confined to his room for a few days, and being unable to present himself at Whitehall, sent his eldest son, the Earl of Ossory—a gallant, but hot-tempered young noble—to thank his majesty for his inquiries after him.

Ossory was admitted to the king's private cabinet, and having delivered his father's message, declared his conviction that Buckingham was the author of the attack. Charles endeavored, but in vain, to convince him that his suspicions were groundless.

Unluckily, before the fiery young earl had departed, Buckingham himself appeared. He could not help noticing Ossory's fierce looks, but with as much nonchalance as he could assume, he said to him, "How is the good duke your father, my lord?"

“It will be small satisfaction, I apprehend, to your grace, to learn that he has well-nigh recovered from the murderous attack made upon him by your bravos,” rejoined Ossory, sternly.

“My bravos?” exclaimed the duke.

“Your hired assassins, if you prefer the term,” cried Ossory. “What I say to you, I have just said to his majesty. I believe you to be the author of this detestable attack on my father’s life. I believe you, also, to be capable of making another attempt, since the first has failed; and I therefore warn you that if any harm shall henceforth befall him—if, by open violence, or secret, subtle means, by poison or by steel, my father shall be done to death—I will hold you responsible. I will treat you as the assassin. I will take the law into my own hands. I will shoot you, even if you should take refuge behind his majesty’s chair.”

And he clutched the handle of his sword, as he uttered the menacing words.

“Must I endure the ravings of this madman, sire?” demanded Buckingham.

“My lord,” said the king, gravely, to Ossory, “I can make every allowance for your excited feelings, but language such as this must not be held in my presence. You have no proof whatever of the charges you prefer against his Grace of Buckingham.”

“Proof will be forthcoming, sire,” replied the young man.

“Till then, be silent,” said the king, with dignity.

“My accusations are made to his grace’s face, not behind his back!” cried Ossory.

“I wish to heaven the villains *had* hanged your father!” said Buckingham, losing all control of himself. “It would have been a good riddance—you may tell him so.”

“I will not fail to convey to him your grace’s approval of the infamous deed. He will know what to think of it,” re-

joined Ossory. "Meantime, I retract nothing, and repeat my warning."

And, with a profound reverence to the king, and a scornful and defiant look at Buckingham, he withdrew.

"I will wash out these insults in his blood!" cried the duke.

"I forbid you to follow him!" said Charles, authoritatively. "I will send you to the Tower, rather than you shall fight him. A duel with Ossory would not clear you from suspicion. Were he to fall by your hand, people would say you had murdered him."

"Does your majesty really believe I have had any hand in this untoward affair?" said the duke, suppressing his rage by a great effort.

"I don't know what to think," rejoined Charles. "Rightly or wrongly, you have got all the opprobrium of the deed. They say you shelter the assassins, and keep them out of the way, lest they should betray you. Have you any idea who was the leader of the attack?"

"How should I, sire?"

"I am sure I have seen him," said Charles.

And he proceeded to relate to the duke the mysterious incident that had occurred at Knole.

"I believe my nocturnal visitor to be the man," he added, in conclusion.

"Your majesty is right," cried Buckingham. "'Tis he, beyond a doubt. He has not paid you a second visit, I presume?"

"No; but I feel certain I shall see him again ere long. He has been here."

"At night, sire?"

"No; in broad daylight. One morning, about three weeks ago, I heard his voice in the ante-chamber. He was conversing with you."

"With me, sire?" exclaimed the duke, in some confusion.

"The door happened to be partly open ; you were speaking to some one within ; and the voice of your interlocutor was that of my mysterious visitant. I knew it at once."

"You say this occurred about three weeks ago, sire. I am surprised you did not mention the circumstance to me at the time."

"I should have mentioned it, had you come in. But you left with the person in question."

"This is strange !" cried the duke. "Who could it be ?"

"He had a deep voice," observed the king.

"That does not help me, sire ; deep voices are not uncommon. Did you hear aught that was said ?"

"I only remarked that you spoke impatiently to him."

"That's not singular. I am always impatient when troubled, and I am constantly troubled in the ante-chamber. But your majesty says I left with him ?"

"I thought so," replied the king. "Come, come ! you know more about this mysterious individual than you care to confess. If a secret society really exists—as would appear from what has just happened to Ormond—and if this man is the leader, we ought to be able to lay hands upon him. I myself am not safe. He can as easily penetrate to my chamber at Whitehall as to that at Knole."

"I will answer for your majesty's safety," replied the duke. "This man shall be found ; but I cannot deliver him up to justice. If we crush him, we shall bring the whole hornet's nest upon us. Better make terms with him ; he may prove useful."

"You have found him so," observed the king, drily.

"And so may your majesty," rejoined Buckingham. "But let us change the theme. I have just seen the Duchess of Cleveland. Her grace is furious at the honors your majesty has just conferred on Mademoiselle de Quéroualle. At first she refused to believe me, but I told her it was perfectly true, and that her rival had been created by letters patent Baroness

of Petersfield, Countess of Farnham, and Duchess of Portsmouth."

"You might have added, that equal honors have been conferred upon her by Louis XIV., who has just created her Duchess of Aubigné," observed Charles, laughing.

"I did not neglect to mention that fact, sire; and I was malicious enough to add that the Duchess of Portsmouth's pension will exceed her own. When I told her this, I thought she would have gone mad with rage. There was nothing spiteful that she did not say of your majesty. She vowed she would never see you again, but would leave Whitehall forever."

"Would to heaven she would keep her word!" exclaimed the king.

"I applauded her resolution," said the duke. "But she then changed her note, and declared she would stay to plague you and her rival."

"I thought she would not be got rid of so easily," observed the king. "Well, let her stay: her malice is impotent."

"Not so impotent as your majesty imagines. A woman can always make mischief."

"Oddsfish! that's true enough," said the king. "I have had some experience of the dear duchess's talent in that line. But there is no State Council to-day. Come with me to the Duchess of Portsmouth's apartments. You shall see how she bears her new honors."

"I was about to solicit permission to attend your majesty," rejoined the duke. "I am eager to pay my devoirs to her grace."

With this, they quitted the cabinet by a private door, and proceeded along a narrow passage, used only by the king, to the Stone Gallery.

CHAPTER IV

WHITEHALL

The Palace of Whitehall, in the time of Charles the Second, though not very magnificent, was of immense extent. Having no pretensions to uniformity of design, it looked like a collection of buildings of various sizes, rather than a single edifice; and such, indeed, would be the most correct description that could be given of it.

Portions had been rebuilt, and constant additions made, without reference to any particular plan. In spite of all this, it was one of those old, rambling, extraordinary piles, that are infinitely more agreeable to inhabit than a palace designed according to the strictest rule of art, and reared on the grandest scale, like Versailles.

Vast as it was, and containing endless apartments, Whitehall in the days of the Merry Monarch, whose aim was to have the gayest court in Europe, was very much overcrowded.

Everybody connected with the court, from the highest officers to those of the most inferior grade, had lodgings in the palace. The lord chamberlain, the vice-chamberlain, the master of the horse, the gentlemen ushers, the grooms of the privy chamber, pages, purveyors, clerks, yeomen of the guard, the watermen belonging to the royal barges, footmen that might be counted by the hundred,—all were housed there.

Her majesty the queen had separate rooms, and a separate establishment of her own, religious as well as civil—the former comprising a grand almoner, three almoners, her confessor, two Portuguese preachers, six Benedictines, eleven Franciscan friars, and the musicians belonging to her chapel.

All these, as well as her numerous household, inhabited the palace. The ladies of the bedchamber and the maids of honor likewise had rooms there.

Separated from the main body of the palace by a large court, though connected with it by a line of buildings, was the great banqueting-house, built by Inigo Jones, from a window of which the ill-fated Charles the First went forth to die. Hereabouts, was the Privy Garden, which was charmingly laid out in trim parterres in the French taste, and adorned with numerous statues in bronze and marble. In the midst was a curious dial.

Divided from the garden by a shady walk was the bowling-green, where Charles recreated himself daily. A private passage, contrived within one of the gate-ways, built by Holbein, in the time of Henry VIII., communicated with the tennis-court and royal cockpit.

In our hasty survey of the palace, we have said nothing of the domestic offices. As will easily be imagined, with such an enormous establishment to provide for, these were immense.

Where feasting was going on continually, many kitchens and many cooks were needed. There were flesh larders and fish larders, a great buttery, a confectionery, wine-cellars and beer-cellars, coach-houses, and stables that held five score horses. Imagine the din and confusion occasioned by such a host of servants.

Many of the saloons and halls within the palace were sumptuously furnished; but the king's apartments were less splendid than those of his favorites. A great patron of the arts, as is well known, Charles the First had made an admirable collection of pictures; and though some of these were lost, the chief part had been recovered, and now adorned the walls of the great gallery.

Viewed from the river, whence it was seen to the greatest advantage, Whitehall, from its irregularity of outline, pre-

sented a very picturesque appearance. Though wanting in elevation, and having many architectural defects, unquestionably it was the pleasantest of royal residences, as its master, who knew better than any other monarch how to enjoy himself, perfectly understood.

The Stone Gallery, which the king and Buckingham had just entered, was of great length, and ran along the whole north side of the palace. It overlooked the Privy Gardens, the two splendid Holbein Gates, and the Horse Guards.

This magnificent gallery, as we have incidentally remarked, was hung with fine pictures, and embellished with bronzes and statues.

On the left were several doors, communicating with various apartments; and on this side, also, was a smaller gallery, leading to the rooms appropriated to the maids of honor. At the entrance to the lesser gallery, two grooms of the chamber and an usher were stationed.

The grand gallery was thronged at the time with gaily attired courtiers, all of whom were amusing themselves in different ways: some were collected around a basset-table, on which a great heap of gold was piled; others were playing at cards; some were recounting their amorous adventures; while others were confiding billets-doux to the pages to deliver to their mistresses.

Jests and laughter resounded on all sides; nor did the merry groups become silent, or the gamesters disturb themselves from their play, on the appearance of the king and Buckingham. They knew the easy nature of the monarch too well, and presumed upon it.

Those, however, near whom the king passed, or whom his eye alighted upon, bowed reverently.

While the king was glancing around, his attention was attracted to a young gallant, who was talking to a page, and giving him a billet. This gallant turned away quickly, but not so quickly as to prevent Charles from discovering that it

was Talbot Harland, whose sentence of banishment from court he had not yet remitted.

His majesty did not appear to notice the offender, but calling the page to him, took the note, and, finding it addressed to Miss Neville, went on.

Arrived at the corridor leading, as we have said, to the apartments of the maids of honor, Charles and the duke entered it, and had not gone far when the king stopped, and tapped at a door, which was instantly opened by a chambermaid.

“Tell Miss Neville that Old Rowley has brought a note for her,” said Charles.

On hearing his majesty’s voice, Dorinda, who was in an inner room, immediately came forth. Her confusion was very great when she received the note, and saw from whom it came.

“Read it!” cried the king, feigning displeasure; “and tell me what it contains.”

Dorinda was so agitated that she could not make out a word.

“Give it me,” said Charles.

“Oh, no, no, sire!” she cried, with increased alarm. “Mr. Harland entreats me to obtain for him your majesty’s forgiveness, that is all. Pray pardon him, sire. The fault was mine, not his.”

“I cannot pardon him, without pardoning Bellegarde,” said the king.

“Then pardon both, sire,” she cried.

“Hum!” exclaimed Charles; “you know how to communicate with your lover, I am sure. I left him in the Stone Gallery. Send him presently to the Duchess of Portsmouth’s apartments, whither I am going. I will then hear what he has to say, and—decide.”

“I thank your majesty in advance,” cried Dorinda, with a look of profound gratitude.

CHAPTER V

THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH'S BOUDOIR

The Duchess of Portsmouth's apartments were situated at the end of the gallery, and the windows looked upon the Thames.

They were the most charming rooms in the palace, and had been recently fitted up in a superb manner by the king. In the ante-chamber were Chiffinch and three or four pages.

As Charles and Buckingham entered, the tinkling of a guitar from within caught their ears, while a very agreeable voice began to sing a French love-ditty.

"Who is with the duchess?" inquired the king, of Chiffinch.

"A French minstrel, sire," was the discreet valet's reply.

"'Tis Bellegarde, I'll be sworn," cried Buckingham.

"Oddsfish! it sounds like his voice," observed the king. "We will see."

And preventing Chiffinch from announcing him, he softly opened the door, and, raising the tapestry that masked it, looked in, while Buckingham peered over his shoulder.

A very charming picture was offered to their gaze.

The boudoir was most exquisitely furnished, and in the French style. Everything within it came from Paris, and many of the choicest articles, such as the massive silver sconces and braseras, the superb pendules, and the rich ornaments upon the chimney-piece, were presents from Louis XIV.

The walls were hung with Gobelin tapestry of marvellous beauty, representing hunting-scenes and views of Versailles and St. Germain. This tapestry was likewise the gift of the Grand Monarque.

Besides these, there were exquisite groups of figures, dainty baskets of the rarest porcelain, caskets encrusted with pearls, paintings by famous French artists, Japan cabinets, and screens.

Rose-colored curtains subdued the light, while the atmosphere was redolent of perfume. The furniture consisted of small tables, causeuses, and fauteuils of the most graceful shape. Nothing, in short, was wanting that could add to the luxury of the room.

The beautiful duchess, it appeared, had not quite completed her toilet.

Enveloped in a loose robe of sky-blue satin, embroidered with lace, which, while it concealed her figure, displayed the loveliest neck in the world, she was reclining in a fauteuil, with her feet—and what charming little feet they were!—upon a velvet tabouret.

Two French tirewomen, both young, pretty, and coquetish-looking, were employed in combing out her magnificent black tresses. Ever and anon she cast a glance at a small mirror, encircled by feathers, to see that they performed their task satisfactorily.

Two persons, besides her attendants, were with the duchess at the time. One of these was Sir Peter Lely, who was seated near a little table, with a portfolio before him, in which he was sketching the charming group.

The other was rather a singular figure, and seemed fresh from a masquerade, for he was wrapped in a black domino, and his features were concealed by a mask. This masquerader it was who was playing upon the guitar, and singing the French love-song to the duchess; and so captivating were his strains, that the susceptible tirewomen almost neglected their task to listen to him.

The spectators of this charming scene might have remained undiscovered for a few minutes, if two little long-eared spaniels had not leaped up from a cushion, and betrayed them by their bark.

As the king and Buckingham appeared, the masquerader immediately ceased his song, and rising from the sofa on which he was seated, retired behind one of the screens.

Charles took no notice of the movement ; but addressing the duchess, said, " I have brought the Duke of Buckingham to pay his devoirs to you."

" Charmed to see your grace," she replied, extending her fair hand to the duke, who pressed it very gallantly to his lips, and proceeded to congratulate her in the warmest terms on her newly-acquired dignity.

" His majesty will tell you how delighted I am," he said. " You are now on a par with the envious Duchess of Cleveland, if you cannot take precedence of her."

The duchess tossed her head with so much disdain, that she pulled the comb from the hands of one of the tire-women.

" *I will* take precedence of her!" she exclaimed. " She has tried to humiliate me ; now I will humiliate her."

This explosion called back the king, who was talking to Lely, and admiring his sketch.

" I must tell you how I am obeyed," he said, anxious to turn the conversation. " While passing through the Stone Gallery just now, I perceived Talbot Harland. Yes, he was there in defiance of my orders. How ought I to punish his disobedience?"

" I think he has been punished quite sufficiently," replied the duchess. " Let me make his peace. I want to have poor Bellegarde back at court. He is in despair at his long banishment, and will certainly return to France unless your majesty relents. He is very much missed."

" By whom?" observed the king. " I have heard no one regret his absence. Have you?" he added, to Buckingham.

" Not I, sire," replied the duke, taking the hint. " No one wants Bellegarde back. He was always winning our money, and not always winning it fairly ; always getting into

scrapes, and never getting creditably out of them; always boasting of his amours, though rarely successful; always relating tiresome stories, and never perceiving they were tiresome. I cannot deny that the fellow has some agreeable qualities; but, on the whole, we are better without him. I cannot vote for his recall."

"I should like to know what he has been doing during his exile?" remarked Charles.

"He has been following Rochester's example—amusing himself among the citizens, eating their dinners, and making love to their wives," replied the duke. "Moreover, I hear he has been acting at the fairs as a saltimbanque and a charlatan, and I think it likely enough, for he has plenty of buffoonery."

"If I have not been misinformed, your grace excelled in both characters, and made a vast deal of money by acting as a Jack-Pudding, and vending quack medicines," observed the Duchess of Portsmouth, rather sharply.

"Very true," rejoined Buckingham. "But then, I sold my mithridate and galbanum to the Roundheads. Bellegarde, I fear, will only make money at the gaming-tables."

"I won't allow you to calumniate him any longer," said the duchess. "Come forward, Achille, and confront your accuser."

On this, the masquerader threw off his domino and vizard, and prostrated himself before the king.

Charles bade him rise, in a good-humored tone.

"Like Talbot Harland, you have not waited for my forgiveness before coming back, count," he said. "Luckily, you have each a good friend at court."

"I do not owe many thanks to the Duke of Buckingham, sire," said Bellegarde. "I did not think his grace capable of such perfidy."

"Bah!" cried the king. "Buckingham was only jesting. We both knew you were present."

“To be sure we did,” cried the duke, laughing. “I will now make amends, and retract all I have just uttered. You are the most honorable player I know—lose your money without losing your temper, and win without being elated. No one gets out of a scrape more adroitly; no one boasts less of his gallantries; no one tells a story more agreeably. Will this satisfy you?”

“Perfectly,” replied Bellegarde.

“Let me add that all the courtiers will be enchanted to have you back.”

At this juncture, Chiffinch entered, and ushered in Dorinda, who was followed by Talbot Harland.

The latter, however, did not venture beyond a step into the room, until encouraged by a gracious look from his majesty. He then threw himself at the king’s feet.

“Mr. Harland did not dare to present himself without me, sire,” said Dorinda.

“You did quite right to accompany him,” observed Charles. “It is entirely to your intercession that he owes my forgiveness. You must take care he does not offend in like manner again.”

“He shall not fight another duel on my account, if I can help it, sire,” said Dorinda.

CHAPTER VI

ARCHIGÈNE, THE FORTUNE-TELLER

While this was passing, the Duchess of Portsmouth had retired into an inner room to finish her toilette; and when she reappeared, it was in the most charming costume imaginable, which had just arrived from Paris.

Lely was in raptures, and began a fresh sketch.

During her grace's absence, chocolate was served by two valets in the royal livery.

It was quite evident, from the king's manner to Bellegarde, that the count was completely restored to the royal favor. While sipping his chocolate, Charles questioned him about his recent adventures.

"There is some little truth in what the Duke of Buckingham has been saying about me, I must own," said the count. "Since I have been banished from your majesty's presence, I have been obliged to amuse myself in the best way I could, and have played several strange parts; among others, that of a fortune-teller.

"I took some lodgings near Spring Gardens; and announcing myself as the renowned Archigène de Luxembourg, *Discur de bonne Aventure à Madame de Montespan*, acquired immediate celebrity.

"Visits were paid me by most of the court ladies. And as I was connected with many curious circumstances connected with them, I was able to tell their fortunes in a manner that convinced them that Archigène must be a veritable wizard.

"They all came to me in disguise; but I soon found them out, while not one of them recognized me in my flowing robe—adorned with mystical characters, tall, steeple-crowned hat, and huge green spectacles.

"I will betray no confidences; but I told a very distinguished lady, who visited me, that the highest honors would soon be bestowed upon her, and methinks my prediction has come to pass."

"Impossible you could have been the fortune-teller, Achille!" cried the Duchess of Portsmouth, laughing. "Why, he looked as old as Nostradamus."

"He was your grace's humble servant, nevertheless," replied the count.

“I may as well confess that I paid Archigène a visit,” said Dorinda.

“You?” exclaimed Talbot.

“Yes. I went with my aunt, Lady Muskerry. We were both completely disguised——”

“I defy Lady Muskerry to disguise herself,” cried Buckingham.

“Well, we were both dressed in close hoods and bands, like Puritan dames,” replied Dorinda, “and were received by a pretty, dark-eyed page, who looked very much like a damsel in male attire, and were ushered into an inner room, where we found Archigène. His bent figure and his accents seemed to proclaim great age. My aunt first consulted him, and, after looking at her hand for a few minutes, he said, ‘Your ladyship, I can see, is a widow; but you will have two more husbands, and will be married again before the year is out.’”

“Her ladyship ought to have paid well for that prediction,” observed the king, laughing.

“A green silk purse full of gold was Archigène’s reward, sire,” said Bellegarde.

“Your fortune was told, of course?” cried Talbot.

“Certainly,” rejoined Dorinda; “and a very nice fortune it will be, if it only comes true; but I am not going to reveal it, especially to you.”

“And my lips are sealed,” observed Bellegarde.

“Enough of this fortune-teller,” said the duchess. “Are you aware, Mr. Harland, that we are going to Newmarket? I am looking forward to it with delight. I have never seen an English horse-race.”

“’Tis the finest sight in the world, and Newmarket is the best race-course in England,” cried Talbot.

“I promise your grace excellent sport,” said the king. “I mean to run some of my own horses, and so does the Duke of York.”

“Let us make a match, sire,” cried Buckingham. “Talbot Harland is fond of racing, and rides well. Bellegarde is a first-rate jockey, as you know. I will back my Barbary mare, Mab, against your famous black horse, Bosco. The race to be for a gold cup, to be given between us, and to belong to the rider of the winning horse. Bellegarde shall ride Bosco, and Talbot Harland shall ride Mab. Is it a match?”

“’Tis a match,” replied Charles. “How say you, messieurs? Will you ride the race?”

Both expressed their readiness.

“What shall be the value of the cup, sire?” said Buckingham.

“It must be worth a struggle,” rejoined the king. “I will give three hundred guineas, if you will add the like sum.”

“Agreed!” cried the duke.

“Bravo!” exclaimed Bellegarde, enchanted. “A six-hundred-guinea cup will be well worth a struggle!”

“Oh, how I should like to see the race!” cried Dorinda.

“You will see it,” replied the king. “Her majesty is going to Newmarket.”

“I am delighted to hear it, sire,” she rejoined.

“And this will be a race worth seeing, for the horses are well matched,” observed Buckingham.

The discourse was proceeding very merrily, when a noise was heard in the ante-chamber, and the last person expected, and the least desired, the Duchess of Cleveland, burst into the room.

Chiffinch vainly attempted to oppose her entrance.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIVAL DUCHESSSES

Dismay was painted on every countenance except that of the Duchess of Portsmouth, who didn't seem at all embarrassed by the unlooked-for appearance of her rival.

Anticipating a scene, at which she did not choose to assist, Dorinda made her escape as quickly as she could, and flew to her own apartments.

Though disliking nothing so much as these scenes, to which he was not unfrequently subjected by the violence of the Duchess of Cleveland's temper, the king was powerless to prevent them.

He uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and shrugged his shoulders, but did not attempt to interfere. Bellegarde made a droll grimace, and exchanged a glance with Buckingham. Both were secretly amused by the incident.

The Duchess of Cleveland stood still, and after scornfully surveying the beautiful objects in the boudoir, exclaimed, in a sarcastic tone, "Mighty fine, upon my word! I have no room to compare to it."

"I am glad your grace admires my boudoir," rejoined the Duchess of Portsmouth, who had advanced to meet her. "It is his majesty's taste—not mine."

"The French king's taste, you mean," rejoined the other, rudely. "His English majesty has wretched taste in furniture—as in everything else."

"Not in *everything*," said the Duchess of Portsmouth. "Surely, in one particular instance, he may be complimented on his taste."

"If he ever possessed any, he has lost it," rejoined the Duchess of Cleveland.

How handsome they looked, those two imperious women, as they gazed at each other with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks.

But the Duchess of Portsmouth, though highly incensed, possessed most command over herself.

"I will not for a moment suppose that your grace has come here to insult me," she said, with dignity, "though your manner might lead to such a construction."

"Insult you! no! I have come to offer you my congratulations, as in duty bound."

"You do me too much honor," rejoined the other, haughtily.

"Your grace seems to forget that I am present," said the king, stepping forward, and addressing the Duchess of Cleveland.

"No wonder I should have overlooked your majesty," she rejoined, without making him any reverence. "You are lost amid so many objects of attraction. I do not envy the Duchess of Portsmouth her charming boudoir, because I know she cannot enjoy it, since she has to tolerate the society of a royal master whom she dislikes—and deceives."

And she broke into a mocking laugh.

"Your grace imagines that all women are made upon your own model," observed the Duchess of Portsmouth.

Her rival was about to make a sharp rejoinder, but the king interposed, exclaiming authoritatively to the Duchess of Cleveland:

"No more of this, madam. Comport yourself properly, or retire. You owe an apology to the Duchess of Portsmouth for this unwarrantable intrusion."

"I will make her none," cried the enraged dame, stamping her foot upon the floor. "And she may think herself fortunate that I do not dash in pieces some of her costly trinkets. Artful wretch! I should like to tear her eyes out."

"Protect me from this fury, sire," cried the Duchess of Portsmouth, with affected terror.

"Will you go, madam?" cried Charles.

"No!" replied the angry dame. "I have a great deal more to say to her; and may not have another opportunity. Not only has she rendered your majesty supremely ridiculous to all your court, but to your subjects. That a monarch who piques himself on his wit and cleverness, should become the dupe of a French intrigante, without any personal charms to recommend her, shows how well her plans have been laid."

"Oddsfish! one would think I had never been duped before," remarked Charles. "At least, I have thrown off *your* fetters."

"To put on others far heavier," retorted the duchess. "I dare say your new favorite will obtain you plenary indulgence from Rome for your numerous peccadilloes. She *can* do it, if she will."

"My Lord of Buckingham," said Charles, "be pleased to conduct the Duchess of Cleveland to her room. And let a guard be placed at the door."

"Am I to be made a prisoner in the palace?" she cried.

"Ay, till you come to your senses, and can bridle your tongue," rejoined the king.

"I am the most injured woman in the kingdom, and all the world shall know it," she cried.

"All the world knows it already," said Buckingham, advancing to take her hand.

But she motioned him off with a proud gesture.

"I will put an end to this scene, if your majesty will permit me," whispered Bellegarde to the king.

"For heaven's sake, do so!" replied Charles. "You will earn my eternal gratitude."

Upon this, the count stepped towards the impracticable duchess, and said to her, in a significant tone, "Your grace

will remember paying a visit to Archigène, the French fortune-teller——”

“I remember nothing about it,” she interrupted, haughtily.

“On that occasion,” pursued the count, calmly, “you dropped a letter, which came into my possession. Behold it. ’Tis from Jacob Hall, the rope-dancer. Shall I read it to his majesty? It cannot fail to divert him. The rope-dancer writes a charming letter.”

“Read it—read it!” cried Charles.

“Shall I, or will you go?” said Bellegarde, to the duchess, who was thrown into great confusion.

With an exclamation of rage, she snatched the letter from him, and rushed out of the boudoir.

“It was not from Jacob Hall,” said Bellegarde to the king; “but it answered the purpose.”

“A capital ruse!” cried Charles, laughing.

CHAPTER VIII

NEWMARKET IN CHARLES THE SECOND'S TIME

Both Charles the Second and the Duke of York delighted in racing, and gave great encouragement to the sport. Charles built a palace at Newmarket, to which he repaired, with a portion of his court, whenever a meeting took place, and there were several during the year.

The architect of the palace at Newmarket was the famous Sir Christopher Wren; but the edifice was never entirely completed during the monarch's lifetime—probably, from want of funds.

Sir Christopher Wren, though so great a man, and so lofty

in his designs, was short in stature. The king liked the palace very much, but found the rooms too low, and complained of the fault to the architect. "The rooms are high enough for *me*, sire," said Wren.

"Possibly, Sir Christopher," replied the king. "But they are too low for *me*."

We are apt to imagine that we have attained the perfection of racing now-a-days, and that the sport was very imperfectly understood two centuries ago. No mistake could be greater. The racing then was excellent. The disreputable tricks that have brought the turf into deserved disgrace were unknown. There was no systematic betting. No "books" were made. Blacklegs there might be, though not such a fraternity as now exists; and there was no noisy "ring." The jockeys rode to *win*; and owners did not bet *against* their horses. Racing, though in its infancy, was conducted as it ought to be, and was consequently a noble sport.

Nor has the breed of horses improved. In Charles's days, there were Arabs of unmixed blood, of wonderful swiftness and endurance, and incomparable jennets.

The Duke of York had a splendid stud, even better than the king.

His majesty had arrived at his palace at Newmarket, with the queen, her ladies, and a portion of his court, and was favored, as royal persons generally seem to be, with magnificent weather. Nothing could be in better order than the turf, and nowhere is there such turf as on the Newmarket race-course.

The first day's racing was excellent, and the Duchess of Portsmouth was delighted. The sight more than realized her expectations.

After the racing, which occupied the whole of the afternoon, there were the usual festivities at the palace.

The match between the king and the Duke of Buckingham formed the great event of the second day, and as it had been

much talked about, a considerable concourse was gathered together to witness it.

Country gentlemen rode over from their seats in the neighboring counties of Suffolk and Norfolk. Others had come from Cambridge, Huntingdon, and Ely, and twenty other places.

The farmers and hinds flocked to Newmarket from the surrounding districts, with their wives and daughters, quite as much to stare at the king and the court ladies as to see the race for the gold cup.

With most of the assemblage, high or low, the Duchess of Portsmouth was the chief object of attraction; and when she appeared by the side of Charles, mounted on a sprightly jennet, and attired in a superb blue velvet riding-dress, laced with silver, she was generally admired, though she did not escape censure.

But here, as elsewhere, Dorinda Neville eclipsed all others.

The splendid train of court dames and gallants, by which the king was attended, formed a charming picture—such as can never be seen again at Newmarket. The magnificent heath is still the same, but where are the lovely equestrians that graced it then? Where is the throng of handsome gallants, rustling in silk and velvet, that rode beside those fair dames, and diverted them with their jests? Where is the good-humored monarch who headed them?

But hark! the bell rings. The race is about to be run.

No occasion to clear the course, for the crowd is not so great, after all. Many usages, now deemed indispensable, have not as yet been introduced, and when the horses make their appearance, their riders are on their backs.

Do not imagine for a moment that the riders are habited like jockeys of our own day. They wear *Montero* caps, and are attired in light and graceful riding-coats of velvet, differing, of course, in hue; *Bellegarde's* color being green, and *Talbot's* blue.

Both horsemen look remarkably well, and ride up together to salute the king, and bow to the queen, who is seated in a splendid calèche.

During this interval, the eyes of all the spectators are fixed upon them, and the capabilities of their horses eagerly canvassed.

Bosco, for many reasons, is the favorite, and, indeed, he deserves to be, for he is a splendid animal, in superb condition, with a coat shining like satin ; but there are some who think the Barbary mare, who looks full of fire, has not a bad chance.

Badges are next bestowed on the riders. A green silk scarf, edged with gold, is placed over Bellegarde's shoulders by the Duchess of Portsmouth ; while a scarf of white silk is bestowed on Talbot by Dorinda, who tells him to win.

Great is the excitement of the crowd during this performance.

Accompanied by the king and the Duke of York, Bellegarde now rides slowly along the course towards the starting-place, which is four miles off, while Talbot follows, accompanied by Buckingham.

Bosco maintains his prestige with the multitude ; his action is magnificent. Very few fancy Mab. Yet she has her backers, notwithstanding.

After riding with Bellegarde for about a mile, Charles and the Duke of York return amid the acclamations of the spectators.

A tedious interval now occurs, though enlivened by many droll incidents ; but at last the exhilarating shout is heard, "They are off !" And this is echoed by a thousand voices.

For some time they seem to move but slowly, and appear close together ; but when they get within a mile or so of the goal, they begin to try the powers of their horses.

Bosco is now clearly ahead, and the shouting spectators declare that he has already won the race. His majesty is of the

same opinion, and smiles at the Duchess of Portsmouth. Dorinda's beautiful lip quivers with excitement, her cheeks flush, and her heart throbs violently.

The horses came on at a tremendous pace—Bosco still ahead, but not increasing his distance. The mare keeps well up, and does not seem in the least distressed.

The king begins to feel a little nervous, for he notices a peculiar smile on Buckingham's countenance.

The spectators have now become half frantic with excitement. The air rings with their shouts. "Bosco! Bosco!" resounds on all sides.

Bellegarde feels perfectly secure, and casts a backward glance of triumph at Talbot.

But, at the moment, he perceives his danger, and for the first time begins to use whip and spur.

The mare is gaining upon him—is close at hand! They are neck and neck together!

The frenzy of the crowd increases! Already they have become hoarse with shouting!

"Mab wins!" is now heard; and the cry stimulates Talbot, while it slightly disheartens Bellegarde.

'Tis a capital race, and almost promises to be a dead heat.

They are now within a hundred yards of the goal, and the maddened crowd closes behind them, as they dash on with lightning swiftness.

Nearer and nearer they come, and still they are neck and neck.

Excitement is now at the highest pitch, and pervades all the beholders,—court dames, court gallants, all.

"The king wins!" cry a thousand voices. "No—the duke!" respond a thousand others.

To the last moment, the issue of the race is uncertain. Even the Duke of York and Lord Buckhurst, who are stationed at the winning-post as judges, are puzzled.

But there is no doubt at the last. With a bound, the mare springs forward, and wins by a head.

A tremendous shout rends the air, and for a few minutes the most tumultuous excitement prevails.

“Oddsfish!” exclaimed the king, looking rather blank. “I did not think Bosco would have been beaten. I have lost a thousand pounds on the race.”

“And I have won two thousand,” cried Buckingham, exultingly. “I knew what Mab could do. Talbot Harland has ridden her splendidly. He richly deserves the cup.”

Shortly afterwards, the two riders, who had just been contending together so gallantly, forced their way through the dense crowd to the royal party.

Talbot looked flushed with triumph; but Bellegarde, though pale, bore his defeat with perfect composure. Everybody congratulated Talbot on his achievement. But the congratulations he cared for most were those of Dorinda Neville.

The magnificent gold cup, which had been displayed on a stand to the admiring assemblage, was then formally delivered to the winner by the Duke of Buckingham, in his majesty's name and his own; and this little ceremony concluded the business of the race.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER THE RACE

Among the spectators were four well-mounted individuals, who had watched the race with the keenest interest, and had strenuously backed Bosco.

There was nothing particular in their attire to distinguish

them from the crowd with whom they were mingled, but to judge from the appearance of their horses, they had come from a distance—possibly, from Peterborough, for they said something about that ancient city, whether with the design of misleading those who overheard them, we will not pretend to say. Their riding coats were of a russet hue, and had evidently seen some service. The senior of the party was strongly built, and rather better dressed than his comrades, and appeared to have some authority over them.

A look had passed between this person and Bellegarde, as the latter rode towards the starting-place, and that look told the stalwart horseman that all was right, and that Bosco was sure to win. On this, he and his friends confidently backed the king's horse, and lost, amongst them, a considerable sum, that well-nigh emptied their pockets.

The voice of the stalwart horseman could be heard above the din of the crowd cheering on Bosco, as the struggling racers rushed by ; but how his countenance fell, and what a deep imprecation he uttered, when Bellegarde was beaten !

However, he soon recovered, and paid his losses with an air of unconcern. All four pushed forward amid the crowd to have a look at the cup, when it was delivered by Buckingham to Talbot, and its splendor increased their mortification.

“ That cup ought to have been ours,” whispered Montalt to his leader.

“ It shall be ours yet,” replied Colonel Blood, in the same tone.

And his greedy eyes followed the glittering prize as it was borne off to a place of safety by one of the royal servants.

Shortly afterwards, he contrived to get sufficiently near Bellegarde to exchange a word with him, and was told by the count, in an undertone, that he would see him at night.

“ I shall have something to say to you then,” added Bellegarde, with a significant look.

“Relative to the cup?” asked Blood.

“Ay, ay,” replied the count, moving away.

Both riders of the race dined with his majesty that day, and perhaps the gayest of the two was Bellegarde. Though rallied a good deal on his ill-luck by the Duchess of Portsmouth, next to whom he sat at table, he bore her raillery with the utmost good humor.

Naturally, Talbot was elated by his victory, and his satisfaction was heightened by the praises bestowed on his jockeyship by Dorinda. Had he dared do so, he would have offered her the rich prize he had won, and his hand along with it; but though the words were on his lips, they were never uttered.

After dinner, the Merry Monarch, as if to show that his defeat gave him little concern, toasted the winner of the cup, which was set upon the buffet with the other plate; and in his reply, Talbot told his majesty that if he had not worn a certain white scarf, he should not have gained the prize. That ensured him the victory. Dorinda blushed very much at this speech, but did not seem displeased by it.

The races being now over, this was the last evening at Newmarket, for the royal party were about to return to Whitehall on the morrow. Indeed, the Duke of York, Buckingham, and several others had already taken their departure. Bellegarde had ascertained that Talbot Harland did not mean to sleep at Newmarket that night, but to proceed to Cambridge. On hearing of Talbot's intention, the king asked him what he meant to do with the cup.

“Take it with me, sire, of course,” replied the young man.

“I shall put it in a bag, and the postboy will carry it for me.”

“But are you not afraid of being robbed?” observed the king. “There are some strange characters at Newmarket. I have not heard that Claude Duval has been seen in these parts—indeed, the rascal seems to have disappeared altogether—but there are others just as dangerous, and not so polite. I will have it packed up with the rest of the plate.”

“I thank your majesty ; but I wish to show it to my uncle, Dr. Harland, the Master of Trinity.”

“*A la bonne heure !*” cried Charles. “But I fancy Dr. Harland will not approve of your turning jockey.”

“The cup will propitiate him, sire. If he is pleased with it, I shall present it to him. I am his favorite nephew.”

“I understand,” replied the king.

This conversation was overheard by Bellegarde, who was talking to the Duchess of Portsmouth at the time, but he did not appear to notice it.

“I have a long ride before me to-night,” he said. “I have promised to meet the Duke of Buckingham to-morrow morning, at Whitehall.”

“*Grand dieu !*” she exclaimed. “You are not going to ride to London to-night ?”

“’Tis only sixty miles,” he rejoined, with a laugh. “True, the roads are not very good ; but that does not matter. I shall do it in less than six hours, even if I fall asleep in the saddle.”

“What are you saying about falling asleep in the saddle ?” inquired the king, turning towards them.

“The count is about to ride to London to-night, sire,” replied the duchess.

“Oddsfish !” exclaimed Charles. “Then I should advise him to start without delay.”

“I was about to ask the duchess to make my excuses to your majesty.”

“But why in such haste ?” asked Charles.

“Sire, I have promised to meet the Duke of Buckingham betimes to-morrow.”

“There will be dancing presently—ombre and basset,” said the duchess.

“Great temptations ; but I am not in luck to-day.”

“Nay, follow your own inclinations,” said the king. “*Bon soir, et bon voyage !*”

And with a profound reverence, Bellegarde departed.

CHAPTER X

A RACE BY MOONLIGHT

The Count de Bellegarde must have been several miles on his way to London before Talbot Harland set out from Newmarket to Cambridge. A postboy accompanied him, carrying the gold cup, which had been carefully placed in a bag, slung from his shoulders.

It was a fine moonlight night, almost as bright as day, and Talbot promised himself a pleasant ride. He had no apprehension of danger, though he had pistols in his holsters.

The road to Cambridge lay along the wide heath, and followed the four-mile course over which he had ridden in the morning. How different were his present emotions from those which he had then experienced! He had then a desperate struggle before him, in which he might be defeated, and though full of ardor, and resolved, if possible, to win, fortune might not befriend him. Now his triumph was assured. Moreover, he had distinguished himself in the eyes of one whom it was his chief desire to please.

Full of these pleasant thoughts, he cantered along the elastic turf, closely followed by the postboy, who cracked his whip merrily, as if proud of the burden he bore. He, too, was in good spirits, for he had betted upon the mare, and had been promised a cup of strong Trinity ale when he arrived at Cambridge. We fancy he had emptied a horn of the like potent beverage before starting from Newmarket.

The wide heath, which had been covered in the morning with persons scampering over it in all directions, was now completely deserted. Only a solitary horseman could be

descried, and he appeared to be travelling in the same direction as themselves, though he was more than half a mile ahead.

Very beautiful looked the broad expanse, bathed as it was in the moonbeams—more beautiful than when seen by the garish light of day. A moonlit heath is always a charming sight, but there was an inexpressible charm about Newmarket Heath on that lovely night. At least, Talbot Harland thought so.

Perfect stillness reigned around. A distant hum from the little town they had quitted alone reached the ear. But this sound soon ceased. Black shadows were thrown upon the turf, as the horsemen speeded over it. The air was cold, but its freshness calmed Talbot's excitement.

They were now about five miles from Newmarket, and within a mile of Bottisham, but had not yet reached the limits of the heath, when the cry of a screech-owl caught Talbot's ear, and startled him as well as the postboy.

They both looked round, expecting to see the ill-omened bird fly past, but could distinguish nothing. The cry, however, seemed to have alarmed the traveller, whom they had now nearly overtaken, for he halted, as if wishing to join them.

Next minute, the screech-owl's harsh voice was heard again; but this time the cry came from a different quarter. The invisible bird must have flown on.

All at once, the idea flashed upon Talbot that these cries were signals, and the correctness of the supposition was confirmed by the sudden appearance of three well-mounted horsemen, who emerged from a hollow near the road, where they had lain concealed.

Talbot instantly comprehended the peril in which he stood, and his alarm was shared by the postboy, who called out, "Robbers, sir, robbers! Turn back, and ride for your life!"

“ Ride back to Newmarket, and leave me to deal with them,” rejoined Talbot. “ Ride as if the fiend were at your heels.”

The postboy, who was thoroughly scared, needed no second bidding, but started off at once. He had not proceeded many yards, however, when he was stopped by two other horsemen, who burst upon him from behind some tall furze-bushes.

“ Halt a minute, my lad,” cried one of these men, in a jeering tone. “ We have a few words to say to you. You appear to have something valuable in that bag slung from your shoulder. What is it?”

Nothing but an old leather bottle, an’ please your honor, not worth taking,” rejoined the trembling postboy.

“ We shall see that anon,” said the other horseman, who was much more strongly-built than his companion, and wore a mask. “ Deliver it up, sirrah, without delay!”

But, though greatly terrified, the postboy did not like to surrender the treasure. Retreating towards Talbot, who was now parleying with the others, he called out lustily for help.

The traveller, who had preceded the young man across the heath, turned out to be the captain of the band.

He was masked, but, before he uttered a word, Talbot had recognized him. That slight, graceful figure, those gay habiliments, the black flowing peruke, the hat surrounded by white feathers, could belong to no other than the gallant Claude Duval.

Duval had lost none of his courtesy, and it was with marked politeness that he addressed the luckless young gentleman who had fallen into his hands. His accent, when he spoke, was as marked and peculiar as ever.

“ Permit me to offer you my congratulations on your success to-day, Mr. Talbot Harland,” he said. “ I saw the race run, and can affirm that you rode admirably—far better than

your opponent. Though the count is my compatriot, and I would fain uphold him, truth compels me to declare that he is a very bad jockey. I think *I* could have beaten you, if I had been in his place."

"You think so?" cried Talbot, amused by his address.

"I flatter myself I could," rejoined Duval. "You may remember that I *have* beaten you on a former occasion."

"That was not exactly a race," observed Talbot. "You were riding for life."

"Granted," said Duval. "Now give me a moment's attention. I have a proposition to make. Perhaps it may be agreeable to you to accept it. It is this. I know you have with you the gold cup which you won so cleverly this morning. I need not say that I could take it from you, if I chose. But I would rather win it fairly. We will have a race for it, if you please."

"A race!" exclaimed Talbot. "Faith! that is a novel idea."

"Novelty has always a charm," observed Duval. "If I am the winner, the cup will be mine, of course. If you are lucky for the second time, 'twill be yours absolutely. No one shall deprive you of it. I will answer for my comrades."

"We will answer for ourselves," interposed Blood. "Had I been consulted, I would not have recommended such a proposal; but, since it has been made by Captain Duval, we will all abide by it."

"We will," cried the others.

"How say you, sir?" cried Duval. "Is it to be a race? I hope you will not place me under the disagreeable necessity of——"

"I agree," said Talbot, hastily. "Where is the trial to take place?"

"On the race-course," rejoined Duval. "We will ride thither at once. The distance to be one mile."

"A mile be it," said Talbot. "I am content."

A few words, in an undertone, then passed between Duval and Blood; and when their brief colloquy was over, the latter said to Talbot, "You are armed, sir; to prevent mischief, I must require you to deliver up your pistols to me."

The young man hesitated.

"Will you give me your word that you will not use them?" said Duval.

"I promise not to use them unless I am assailed," replied Talbot.

"Enough!" cried Duval. "*Allons donc, messieurs!*"

He then rode off in the direction of the race-course, and the whole troop followed, Talbot being so completely surrounded that escape would have been impossible even if he had meditated the attempt. Close behind him came the postboy, with a guard on either side.

Affairs having taken a very different turn from what he expected, this youth had long since ceased his clamor, and, indeed, was secretly delighted at the prospect of witnessing a very singular race. He would fain have conversed with his captors, but they returned no answer to his questions, and at last bade him hold his tongue.

Duval kept upon the turf, at some distance from the road. No travellers, however, were to be seen; nothing, in short, except a wagon from Bury St. Edmunds, toiling on its way to Cambridge. The wagoner stared at the troop as it went by, but did not stop.

Ere long, they reached the race-course, and entered it at the point from which Bellegarde and Talbot had started in the morning. But this was now destined to be the winning-post, and Blood stationed himself near it, with the postboy and his two guardians, while Duval and Talbot rode on, accompanied by Montalt and Flodoard.

As they proceeded, each rider for the cup carefully examined his adversary's horse, and the result of the scrutiny, on either side, was that they were fairly matched.

Montalt and Flodoard were of the same opinion, and thought it would be a good race. Both chargers were powerful, and well bred. Of their relative swiftness it was not easy to judge; that would be tested anon. In color, the horses were scarcely distinguishable by that light; though Duval's was bright bay, and Talbot's sorrel.

When they had ridden a mile, as they judged, they came to a halt, and Duval proposed that Montalt should start them, to which the other agreed.

They then placed themselves without loss of time, and, the word being given, they dashed off together, like arrows from a bow, making it evident from the outset that this would be no lingering race. Montalt and Flodoard followed as they might; and though both spurred on their steeds, they were speedily left behind.

It was a strange sight to witness such a contest at such an hour. Seen by that witching light, the two adversaries, as they flew along, side by side, and in silence, might have been taken for phantom horsemen.

Talbot was scarcely less eager to win this race than he had been to win that of the morning. His blood was now up. Duval was even more excited. He felt as if he had a defeat to efface. He made every effort to leave his adversary behind, but Talbot stuck closely to him.

On—they went, without change of position. To those who watched them from afar, they looked as if blent together. Colonel Blood chafed with impatience at the strange spectacle; and, at length, unable to restrain himself, he rode towards them.

He had not gone far, when one of the figures detached itself from the other, but in that doubtful light he could not make out who was leading. He feared it was Talbot Harland, and under this impression, he cursed Duval for his folly in giving him this chance for the cup.

But his doubts were speedily removed, and his rage gave

way to transports of delight. He now clearly perceived that Duval was in front, and expressed his satisfaction at the discovery by a loud shout, which was echoed by the troopers in charge of the postboy, and even by the postboy himself, though the latter scarcely knew why he shouted.

Though the result of the contest was no longer doubtful—at least, to Blood,—Talbot maintained a gallant struggle to the last. He would not give in. To the last he plied whip and spur. But all his efforts were fruitless—the race was Duval's.

Amid the cheers of his comrades, with which those of the recreant postboy were mingled, the robber captain came in triumphantly.

It must be borne in mind that Duval never for a moment removed his mask during the race—nor did he remove it now—so that the effect of his victory could not be discerned upon his features. But his manner did not betray the slightest excitement, nor did the exertion of the contest seem to have disturbed him much.

Talbot, on the contrary, appeared quite overcome, and his accents were hoarse. Noticing his condition, Blood produced a pocket-flask, and filling a small silver cup with brandy, offered it to him. The young man did not decline the attention.

“You have fairly won the race, and the prize is yours,” he observed to Duval.

“I almost grieve to deprive you of it,” replied the other. “But I must keep it as a trophy. Pray tell the Count de Bellegarde that I esteem him an indifferent jockey.”

By this time Montalt and Flodoard had come up, and offered their congratulations to the winner. At the same time, they good-naturedly essayed to console Talbot Harland for his defeat.

The gold cup was next taken from the bag, and the postboy was compelled to offer it to Duval—an order which he

obeyed with a very bad grace. The magnificent vessel sparkled brilliantly in the moonlight, and the whole scene at this moment was exceedingly striking and picturesque.

The sight of the splendid cup roused fierce feelings in Talbot's breast, and, for a single moment, the desire of snatching it from the robbers possessed him. But he was deterred from the insane attempt by the pledge he had given.

Blood, who was near him, perceived what was passing in his breast, and kept his hand upon a pistol.

Meanwhile, the flask of brandy was rapidly passed from hand to hand, and the little silver cup as quickly filled and emptied. The last to empty it was the postboy. Duval having sufficiently admired his prize, it was restored to the receptacle from which it had been taken, and committed to the care of Mandeville.

"Am I at liberty to depart?" said Talbot, to Duval.

"As soon as you please," rejoined the other. "Accept my thanks for the sport you have afforded me. If you return to Newmarket, pray describe our race to his majesty. I am sorry he did not witness it."

"The race is not yet over," rejoined Talbot, sternly. "As soon as I can procure assistance, I will be on your track."

With this, he struck spurs into his horse's flanks, and dashed off, followed by the postboy, who had been set free at the same moment.

Almost immediately afterwards, Duval and his band were scouring across the heath in the opposite direction, all laughing heartily at the adventure.

CHAPTER XI

TALBOT HARLAND PRESENTS THE GOLD CUP TO THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH

The king and the court had returned from Newmarket to Whitehall.

On the morning after his arrival, Charles was in the Duchess of Portsmouth's boudoir, and her grace was complaining of the fatigue of her journey, when the Duke of Buckingham was announced.

After the duke had made his reverence, and paid some well-merited compliments to the duchess on her looks, the king said to him, "Did you see Bellegarde yester-morning? He told me he had an appointment with you."

"Yes, sire. He came to me before I was up, looking as fresh almost as her grace, though he had ridden from Newmarket during the night."

"Can you tell us at what hour he reached Whitehall?" observed the duchess. "His majesty is curious on the point."

"I can give you precise information," replied Buckingham. "He arrived here at four o'clock in the morning, and as the palace gates were closed, he had to knock up the porter."

The duchess glanced at the king.

"He performed the distance under six hours," pursued Buckingham; "and all things considered, I regard it as a wonderful feat."

"It would be a wonderful feat, indeed, if he rode that second race with Talbot Harland," observed Charles.

"What second race, sire?" cried Buckingham. "I have not heard of it."

The king then related the extraordinary adventure that had befallen Talbot; and the duke laughed heartily at the recital.

“This Claude Duval is a deucedly clever fellow,” he exclaimed. “His exploits have all the air of practical jokes.”

“I have always said so,” observed Charles. “This may turn out the best of them. Talbot Harland started from Newmarket in pursuit of the robbers, but I doubt his success.”

“I have heard nothing of him,” replied Buckingham.

At this moment the person in question was announced.

“What news of Claude Duval?” cried the king, as Talbot came in. “Have you captured him?”

“I am deeply mortified to be obliged to answer no, sire,” replied the young man. “He and his band seem to have dispersed on quitting the heath. I could discover no traces of them.”

“So you have lost the cup, after all, I find,” cried Buckingham, in a jeering tone. “I thought you would have taken better care of it.”

“I deserve all the ridicule your grace can heap upon me,” rejoined Talbot. “But I hope you will be generous, and spare me.”

“If I spare you, Sedley and Etherege won’t. I will treat you as tenderly as I can, but I must add, however, a few more couplets to my ballad.”

“That ballad will never end,” remarked the duchess, laughing.

“Not as long as Claude Duval remains at large,” said the king. “But here comes Bellegarde,” he added, as the count was ushered into the room by Chiffinch.

Bellegarde’s countenance was radiant with satisfaction.

“Judging from your looks, count, you have something pleasant to tell us,” observed Charles.

“Your majesty is not mistaken,” rejoined Bellegarde, with a low bow. “I am very glad to find Mr. Talbot Harland here, as what I have to say concerns him.”

“Let us hear it,” said the king. “I’ll warrant your story relates to the cup.”

“Your majesty has a remarkable power of guessing,” replied Bellegarde, again bowing deeply. “This morning, while I was dressing, my valet brought a letter, accompanied by a very strange-looking bag, apparently containing a piece of plate. Without pausing to examine the contents of the bag, I opened the letter, and you will judge of my surprise when I found that it came from Claude Duval. With your majesty’s permission, I will read it to you.

“ ‘MONSIEUR LE COMTE,—

“ ‘I have redeemed the honor of our country, which you had endangered.

“ ‘In the race which you ran at Newmarket, in the presence of his majesty and the court, you proved yourself a vastly inferior horseman to Mr. Talbot Harland.

“ ‘Unable to bear this national reproach, I provoked Mr. Harland to another contest. I came off victorious. The glory of France is untarnished.

“ ‘But, for reasons which I need not particularize, the prize I have won cannot remain in my hands. I therefore send it to you, Monsieur le Comte—to you, who, as an accomplished *écuyer*, ought to have won it; leaving you to dispose of it as you may deem fit. *Vive la France!*

“ ‘*Votre dévoué,*

“ ‘CLAUDE DUVAL.’ ”

When the merriment caused by this letter had subsided, Bellegarde clapped his hands slightly, and at the signal the door opened, and Chiffinch entered, followed by a couple of pages, bearing the splendid racing-cup on a large silver tray.

At this sight, everybody expressed the greatest surprise.

"Oddsfish!" exclaimed the king. "This is a real *coup de maître!*"

"I brought the cup with me, to show it to your majesty," said Bellegarde. "And I am charmed to have the opportunity of restoring it, in your presence, to Mr. Talbot Harland, to whom it rightfully belongs. I know nothing about the contest to which Monsieur Claude Duval refers, nor is it anything to me; but I know that I was fairly beaten, and that I have no claim whatever to the prize."

The cup was then presented to Talbot by the pages, who bade them to lay it down on a table. This done, they withdrew with Chiffinch.

"I am inexpressibly indebted to you, count," said Talbot to Bellegarde.

"Not in the least, *mon cher,*" replied the other. "Whatever Monsieur Claude Duval may think, I am not a receiver of stolen goods."

"A capital joke! and capitally played!" exclaimed the king, who was ready to die with laughter.

"The thing looks like a jest, sire," observed Bellegarde. "But if it is one, I have had no part in it. I hope Mr. Talbot Harland does not think so."

"No one knows better than I do, count, that you could not possibly have been concerned in it," cried Talbot, earnestly.

"Oddsfish! this is delicious," exclaimed the king. "Now you have got back the cup," he added to Talbot, "you can carry out your design, and propitiate your venerable uncle, Dr. Harland."

But the young man had observed that the Duchess of Portsmouth had already set her eyes on the treasure.

He therefore said, "Excuse me, sire; I have another destination for it. The cup suits this room so well, that I trust her grace will allow it to remain here."

“*Grand Dieu!* do you mean to present it to me?” exclaimed the duchess, delighted.

“I entreat that honor,” replied Talbot.

“You are a model of gallantry,” she cried, with one of her sweetest smiles. “Is he not, sire? The cup is exquisite; but it is doubly valuable from the little history attached to it.”

“Ay, marry,” observed the king; “you must not forget that, but for Monsieur Claude Duval, this gem would not have found its way to your collection.”

While chocolate was being served, Charles took Bellegarde into the embrasure of a window overlooking the river, and said to him, “There is a little matter which you must execute for me, count.”

“Ever proud to obey your majesty’s behests,” replied Bellegarde.

“To you, the affair will present no difficulty,” pursued the king. “I want to discover the leader of the murderous attack upon the Duke of Ormond.”

“Permit me to observe, sire, that you impose upon me a very arduous task, and one to which I am quite unequal. A very large reward has been offered by your majesty for the capture of that person, and if the officers of justice have failed to arrest him, it is not likely I shall be more successful.”

“I will give you a hint that may help you—I am certain he is known to Buckingham. Commence your search in that quarter.”

“Possibly, your majesty may be right,” rejoined Bellegarde. “I do not like to play the spy; but, in the present instance, I must contrive to overcome my scruples.”

“’Tis to serve me,” said Charles. “If you make any discovery, communicate with me at once. I want to see the man.”

“To see him arrested, I presume, sire?”

“To confer with him,” rejoined Charles, with a singular smile.

“It must occur to your majesty that such a man is scarcely likely to trust himself——”

“He may do so,” interrupted the king. “Give him that assurance from me. ’Twill be enough for him.”

“It ought to be enough,” said Bellegarde. “Still, he may fancy it a snare.”

“If he hesitates, say that I have not forgotten what passed at Knole. One thing more, and I have done. The man I seek was at Newmarket.”

“At Newmarket, sire!” exclaimed the count, surprised.

“I heard his voice amid the crowd; but could not distinguish the speaker. He would not be hovering about me thus, if he had not some design—perhaps, against my life.”

“Sire!”

“Nay, I have no fear,” rejoined the king; “but it is important that I should see him without delay. Buckingham will not serve me—you must.”

And they quitted the embrasure.

Meanwhile, the company had been increased by Lady Muskerry and Dorinda, Lord Buckhurst, Sedley, Etherege, and others, all of whom were amazed to see the gold cup, and highly amused to hear by what strange means it had got there.

To show that she was not devoid of gratitude, the Duchess of Portsmouth was lavish in Talbot’s praises, and she contrived to do him a slight favor.

It appeared that their majesties were going that morning, in the royal barge, to the Tower, to inspect the Crown jewels, which the duchess had not yet seen; and as Dorinda must necessarily be in attendance on the queen, Talbot, to his great delight, was invited by the Duchess of Portsmouth to join the party.

This was what he gained by the gold cup; and, being desperately in love he considered himself amply repaid.

BOOK III

THE CROWN JEWELS

CHAPTER I

A ROYAL PROMENADE ON THE THAMES

About an hour later, attended by a throng of court dames and gallants, among whom were all those who had been assembled in the Duchess of Portsmouth's apartments, their majesties entered the royal barge, which was moored off the privy stairs of the palace.

Very gorgeous was the barge, almost as grand as the Venetian Bucentaur, in which, in old times, the Doge of Venice went forth to wed the sea; magnificently sculptured, and so richly gilt that its reflection seemed to turn the water to flame. Internally, this grand barge was nothing more than a splendid saloon, fitted up with luxurious couches, and having large windows that commanded a view of all around.

Four-and-twenty remarkably good-looking young watermen—wearing scarlet jerkins, with the royal badge on their sleeves, and directed by the barge master, who was naturally more grandly arrayed than his men, and bore the royal cognizance embroidered in gold on his breast—were required to row the barge; but so heavy was it, that they made but slow way, if the tide chanced to be against them, as was the case on the present occasion.

Trumpeters, whose silver clarions were decked with crimson flags woven with the royal arms, made the walls of the palace ring with joyous fanfares, as their majesties set forth on their promenade on the river.

When filled with the brilliant company we have described, the long saloon presented a splendid sight.

The day was delightful; and the surface of the Thames

smooth as a mirror, and sparkling with sunshine. The Thames was then a noble river; its waters, if not positively transparent, were clear and bright, and constantly covered with a multitude of craft of all shapes and sizes; while its banks were rendered picturesque by quaint old structures.

A water-party was then a favorite diversion with the citizens, and nothing could be more agreeable. The Merry Monarch was as fond of the amusement as any of his subjects. Lolling out of an open window of the barge, and gazing at the occupants of the numerous boats and wherries that passed by, he saw a hundred objects that entertained him, while the remarks—not unfrequently about himself—that reached his ear, provoked his laughter. Old Rowley could bear a jest at his own expense better than any man.

Near him, as he now looked out at the lively scene, were the Duchess of Portsmouth and Bellegarde, both of whom were quite as much diverted as his majesty.

At the next window were Talbot and Dorinda, but the young man was more engrossed by his lovely companion than by the spectacle before him. He gazed at her, and not at the river.

How the rest of the brilliant company amused themselves we need not inquire. Lively sallies and light laughter were heard on all sides.

They had now passed gloomy Bridewell, which cast a black shade on the shining stream, and the great dungeon-like pile known as Baynard's Castle, and had just come in sight of London Bridge, when a wherry, partly covered by an awning, and manned by two vigorous oarsmen, who might possibly be 'prentices, but were certainly not common watermen, passed by.

The boat was sufficiently near to allow the king to distinguish its occupants. Beneath the awning sat a damsel, whose lovely features instantly caught his attention. Could he forget those magnificent black eyes, and the superb raven

tresses? He knew her at once. It was Violet Oldacre. And the strongly-built man who was steering the boat must be her father.

With the instinct of jealousy, the Duchess of Portsmouth had made the same discovery at the same moment, but she said nothing. Charles, however, was so excited that he called out to Bellegarde :

“Look, count! whom do you see in that boat?”

“A very charming creature, sire,” rejoined Bellegarde, with affected indifference.

“Do not affect ignorance,” rejoined the king. “You know her as well as I do.”

“Do you call that creature beautiful?” cried the duchess, with a mocking laugh. “I think her frightful.”

“Why don't you stand up in defence of your mistress, count?” said the king, laughing.

“My mistress, sire! I don't even know her.”

“*Fi donc!*” cried Charles, laughing incredulously. “You ought to be proud of her. She does credit to your taste.”

“Sire, I accept your compliments, though I do not deserve them,” said Bellegarde, shrugging his shoulders.

At this juncture, the stalwart individual, who acted as coxswain, sang out lustily to the oarsmen. The words were nothing, but they struck the king forcibly, and almost made him start.

“That is the voice I heard at Newmarket!” he said, in a significant tone, to Bellegarde.

“Indeed, sire!” exclaimed the count, scarcely able to disguise his confusion.

“I am certain of it,” rejoined the king. “Now you know what to do.”

The oarsmen had been ordered by the coxswain to pull away rapidly, and they obeyed with such alacrity that the wherry had already shot off to some distance.

In her flight past the royal barge, Violet had not only been

recognized by the king, but by Talbot and Dorinda ; and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, the latter made a sign with her fan to the fair occupant of the wherry. It was this sign that made her father order the oarsmen to pull off.

CHAPTER II

THE JEWEL TOWER

The royal barge passed safely through the centre arch of London Bridge, and was subsequently moored off Tower Wharf, where a double line of warders, armed with their halberds, was drawn up.

The Duchess of Portsmouth, to whom this scene was new, was much struck with the appearance of the ancient fortress, especially with the dark and low-browed arches of Traitors' Gate, and with the stern and massive White Tower ; but she could not discern any resemblance between the vast and sombre pile and the Bastille, to which her thoughts naturally recurred.

Loud flourishes from the trumpeters had announced the arrival of the king, and had summoned forth all the principal officers of the fortress.

On disembarking, their majesties were received with much ceremony by the Lieutenant of the Tower, and Sir Gilbert Talbot, master and treasurer of the Jewel Tower.

Sir Gilbert Talbot, we may mention, had been appointed to the post by Charles, on the Restoration, and though some of the privileges and emoluments of the office had been abolished by Lord Chancellor Clarendon, it was still valuable and important, the perquisites amounting to 1,500*l.*, yearly—

a large sum in those days. Sir Gilbert was uncle, on the mother's side, to Talbot Harland.

The royal party next crossed the drawbridge that spans the moat near the By-ward Tower, and proceeding along the outer ward, passed through the dismal arch of the Bloody Tower, and so gained the inner ward, in the midst of which is reared the majestic White Tower.

The king's visit being perfectly private, no preparations had been made, and only the ordinary officials and warders were in attendance, but a company of musketeers was being exercised on the parade, and drums were beaten as their majesties appeared.

Charles having signified his intention of inspecting the regalia, Sir Gilbert Talbot hastened on to the Jewel Tower; and while he was gone, the royal party remained on the green.

This brief detention allowed the Duchess of Portsmouth an opportunity of surveying the White Tower and the chain of smaller towers surrounding the inner ward, in both of which state prisoners were then confined; but she turned aside with horror when a bare spot, marked by white stones, was pointed out to her, and the king added, in a low tone, that it was the place of execution, where Catherine Howard and Anne Boleyn had fallen by the headsman's axe.

Shortly afterwards the royal party were conducted to the Jewel Tower, which is situated at the northeast angle of the inner ward. Originally, this structure was known as the Martin Tower, and had been used as a prison lodging until it became the depository of the regalia.

The history of the Crown jewels is extremely curious, but it would occupy too much time to narrate it in full. Repeatedly pledged by successive monarchs, and conveyed away to Paris and Flanders, pawned almost in detail by the unhappy Henry the Sixth, they were again gathered together by the Tudors, and considerably augmented in number. A

careful inventory was made of them by James the First, who frequently gloated over his treasures.

At last, they came into possession of Charles the Second, and, if he could have ventured to do so, no doubt the Merry Monarch would have pawned them, as his predecessors had done. It was in his reign that the regalia were first exhibited to the public. Hitherto they had been kept in strong iron chests, in a secret chamber in the White Tower, and only inspected with the utmost caution; but they were now removed to the Martin Tower, which, thenceforward, changed its name to the Jewel Tower.

The chamber in which the Crown jewels were deposited was on the first story of the tower in question. Built of stone, with walls of enormous thickness, an arched and groined roof, deep embrasures, terminated by narrow loopholes, a ponderous door, studded with nails, and having a huge lock, the room seemed perfectly secure.

The greater part of the treasures were placed on open shelves, covered with crimson velvet, and ranged on one side of the chamber.

Conspicuous among these was the imperial crown, which had been made for Charles's own coronation, and which glittered with diamonds of the first water, rubies, pearls, emeralds, and sapphires. Next to it was the crown of state, likewise made for Charles, garnished with an emerald that might have come from Aladdin's palace, a priceless ruby, and the finest pearl in the world.

Beside these, there were three crowns assigned to the queen, each adorned with diamonds and pearls; the orb, which, we need scarcely say, is a large ball of gold, embellished with roses of diamonds and other precious stones; the ampulla, destined to contain the holy oil employed at the coronation; St. Edward's staff; the king's two sceptres, each of gold, and garnished with diamonds of inestimable value, and the queen's sceptre, with the cross.

These treasures, and a hundred others, which we have not time to describe, were only protected by a thick crimson curtain, which, of course, was drawn aside when they were exhibited.

CHAPTER III

TALBOT EDWARDS

The custodian of the Crown jewels at the time of our story was an old man named Talbot Edwards. He was a kinsman of Sir Gilbert Talbot, and being in reduced circumstances, was appointed by the master-treasurer to the post as a provision for his old age. A better guardian could not have been chosen. The brave old gentleman—for a gentleman he was by birth as well as in bearing—would have sold his life rather than part with the treasures confided to him. He was a Welshman, and, though poor, excessively proud, and somewhat quick-tempered, but much liked.

Old Edwards led a very agreeable life in the Jewel Tower, though he was sometimes rather troubled by the tremendous responsibility imposed upon him. Many strangers came to see the treasures, and from these he received small gratuities, that eked out his modest salary. The worthy old gentleman was married, his wife being much younger than himself, and having still some pretensions to good looks. Moreover, he had a daughter, Edith, who was accounted the prettiest girl in the Tower, and whom he was very anxious to see married.

Such was the personage who had the honor of attending upon the royal party during their inspection of the regalia. Sir Gilbert Talbot was likewise in attendance; but the treasures were lifted from the shelves and displayed by Edwards.

His extreme formality was almost ludicrous. However, he was courtier enough to feel that he ought to pay special attention to the Duchess of Portsmouth, and he had no difficulty in doing so, as she was near the king.

“What think you of these bawbles?” said Charles, to the duchess, who was in perfect ecstasies at the sight.

“Magnificent!” she replied. “I long to carry off the whole collection.”

“Will it please your grace to look at the imperial crown?” said Edwards, exhibiting it to her. “I pray you to notice that it is formed of four crosses, and four fleurs-de-lis of gold, rising from a golden circlet.”

“What lovely oval pearls!” she exclaimed. “Any one of them would content me.”

“Your grace must see the pearl on the crown of state. ’Tis the finest in the world!” said the custodian.

And he held up the other crown to her view.

“Ah, *mon Dieu*! what a pearl! what an emerald! what a ruby!” exclaimed the duchess.

The enamored monarch looked up, as if he could have presented them to her.

“I can show your grace plenty of other gems, but none like these,” said Edwards. “Here is her majesty’s crown, set with diamonds and pearls.”

But the duchess could think of nothing but the splendid emerald and the inestimable ruby which she had just seen. Collars of enamelled gold containing table diamonds were next exhibited; rings set with topazes, sapphires, and rubies; brocades of enamelled gold, diamond flowers and diamond feathers; carcanets, crosses and tablets,—all set with precious stones of immense value.

Never had the duchess’s cupidity been so strongly excited. But she was not the only person excited. Strange thoughts passed through Bellegarde’s breast as he examined the jewels.

CHAPTER IV

EDITH EDWARDS

The old custodian had now enough to do to attend to the many fair dames that thronged around him, curious to examine the collars, chains, and smaller ornaments ; and as he was unwilling to trust any of the jewels out of his own hands, he was obliged to call in the aid of his wife and daughter, who were standing near the door, probably awaiting a summons.

Mrs. Edwards, whom we have already described as a comely woman, was composed enough, but Edith was suffused with blushes, as she stood before the courtly throng, and heard the many remarks passed upon her by the gallants. As their remarks, however, were highly complimentary, they could not have been altogether disagreeable, as the fair damsel had some coquetry in her nature.

This was not the first time that her charms had been praised, though by a very different class of admirers. Now she was exposed to the gaze of some of the boldest rakes in town, and Buckingham, Etherege, and others ogled her most unmercifully. Rather a formidable ordeal, it must be owned, but she stood it tolerably well.

Edith resembled her mother, rather than her father, who was tall and gaunt, and with strongly pronounced features. Her figure was charmingly proportioned, but rather full ; her eyes blue, and tender in expression ; her complexion exquisitely fair, and her golden tresses as beautiful as those of Queen Elizabeth in her younger days.

Moreover, she had very white and very daintily-formed

hands, that could not fail to be observed as she held up the jewels for inspection.

Many a court dame envied her those taper fingers. Many an inflammable court gallant was scorched by her superb golden locks. Edith was Talbot Harland's second or third cousin, we scarcely know which ; but the foolish fellow did not care to avow the fact once to Dorinda, even when the latter noticed the smile of recognition that passed between them.

The appearance of the custodian's fair daughter gave a new turn to the Count de Bellegarde's meditations. Perhaps he thought she might assist the scheme he was forming in his breast. Perhaps he was merely struck by her beauty.

As he was the handsomest man in the room, he soon contrived to attract her attention ; and when he got near enough to exchange a few words with her, he felt sure that he had produced the impression he desired.

We have said that the count was irresistible. And he found it so in the present instance. The foolish little coquette felt sure she should see him again. Nor was she wrong.

Very little time, however, was allowed him to achieve this conquest. Almost immediately after Edith's appearance, the Duchess of Portsmouth lost her interest in the jewels. Her grace had been delighted with old Edwards, but she could not endure his daughter, especially when Edith's golden tresses were admired by his majesty.

She turned aside haughtily and contemptuously when the lovely lily-white hands proffered her a collar of gold with eighteen knots, set with seven fair diamonds and thirteen rubies, with thirteen pearl pendants, and would not look at it. She declared she had seen quite enough, and became impatient to depart. However, she had to await the queen's pleasure ; and her majesty, who was attended by Sir Gilbert Talbot, had not quite finished her inspection. At last, the royal party quitted the jewel-room.

Talbot Harland lingered for a moment behind the others, and so did Bellegarde.

“How is my pretty cousin Edith?” asked Talbot.

“Your cousin!” exclaimed Bellegarde, surprised. “Faith! you have a most charming cousin!”

“I thought Mr. Talbot Harland had disclaimed our relationship,” observed Edith. “He has never paid us a visit since we have been at the Tower. But we have heard that he makes a gay figure at court.”

“And you have heard the truth,” said Bellegarde. “No one is in higher favor with the king than your cousin.”

“But we have heard you were banished from court,” cried old Edwards. “I’m heartily glad to find the rumor incorrect.”

“It was correct enough,” observed Talbot. “I was banished for fighting a duel with this gentleman—the Count de Bellegarde. Happily, we have both been pardoned by his majesty, and are now in as great favor as ever.”

“Delighted to hear it,” cried Edwards. “I am the count’s very humble servant.”

“And I yours, sir,” replied Bellegarde, bowing. “Pray present me to your fair daughter.”

This was done, and the count saluted her very respectfully. Talbot then interposed, and begged his kinsfolk to excuse them, as they must perforce follow their majesties. Of course, Bellegarde was obliged to tear himself away, but he told Edith, in a whisper, that he hoped soon to behold her again.

While the inspection of the Crown jewels was going on, a collation had been prepared in the lieutenant’s lodgings, and to this the royal party now sat down.

After the repast, their majesties returned by water to Whitehall.

CHAPTER V

COLONEL BLOOD'S RETREAT IN WHITEFRIARS

Ever since the attack upon the Duke of Ormond, Colonel Blood and his comrades had taken up their quarters in Whitefriars, in which sanctuary they could set the officers of justice at defiance.

Here we must seek them ; and we shall find the colonel and his trusty associates in a large, badly-furnished and gloomy-looking room on the ground floor of an old crazy house that had served as a place of refuge to a succession of lawless characters.

This habitation chanced to be empty at the time, and so Blood took it, and it answered his present purpose well enough. We know not how many strange hiding-places and contrivances for escape it contained. There were trapdoors in the floor, sliding panels in the wainscots, secret staircases, and vaults communicating with other vaults, so that the river could be reached. But the officers of justice were never allowed to set foot within the liberties of Whitefriars. The room, as we have said, in which Blood and his comrades sat, was large and gloomy. A wood-fire was burning on the hearth, and cast its light on the harsh features of the colonel, which wore a very moody expression. He was thinking over the attack upon Ormond, and blaming himself for its ill-success. When he was in one of these sullen fits, his followers did not dare to disturb him, for his temper, at such times, was very savage. The flasks of wine on the table showed that the party had had a carouse. Mandeville was still drinking, while Montalt and Flodoard were playing at piquet. Suddenly, Blood looked up, and called, in a gruff voice, for a cup of sack, which was given him.

“Never was plan better contrived, nor more boldly executed,” he muttered; “and yet it failed—failed utterly, through my own gross neglect! Curses upon the villain Ormond! To think that I had him in my power—that he was on the road to Tyburn, and that he should manage to escape! But I will hang him yet!”

“Think no more of him, colonel,” said Mandeville. “You know that our leader, Claude Duval, never approved of the scheme, and would take no part in it. He told us it would lead to mischievous consequences, and so it has.”

“I should have been well content if I had avenged my friends,” said Blood. “But I must wipe out my failure by some other daring exploit.”

“Ay, that’s the way to look at it, colonel,” cried Mandeville. “No use lamenting the past. Think of the present. Have you any fresh scheme to propose to us?”

“I have none,” rejoined Blood, moodily.

“But I have,” cried a well-known voice. “I have a magnificent scheme to propose to you.”

Claude Duval stood before them.

He had come through a secret door, contrived in the wainscot near the chimney-piece. He was wrapped in a long, black coat, and carried a dark lantern in his hand. His appearance was hailed with the greatest satisfaction, all rising to welcome him except Blood.

Montalt assiduously helped him to take off his cloak, while Flodoard relieved him of the dark lantern. He then flung himself into a chair, and said:

“Give me a cup of wine. I have been half-stifled in those confounded vaults. Pah! Now, then, you shall hear what I have to propose. Listen to me, I beg of you, colonel. What I have to say will interest you. I have just parted with the Count de Bellegarde. He has been with their majesties to the Tower.”

“We passed the royal barge on its way thither,” remarked Blood.

“You did wrong to venture so near it,” said Duval; “you were noticed. But let me proceed. The Crown jewels, as you know, are deposited at the Tower, and the motive of his majesty’s visit was to show these treasures to the Duchess of Portsmouth. The count saw them for the first time, and his description of them was enough to make one’s mouth water. There are two crowns, and the precious stones with which they are garnished are beyond imagination and beyond all price. You will scarcely credit me when I tell you there is an emerald seven inches in circumference.”

“A prodigious pebble!” exclaimed Blood, who was now all attention. “How I should like to handle it!”

“To pocket it, you mean, colonel,” remarked Montalt.

“To say nothing of rubies, pearls, and sapphires, any one of which would make a man wealthy,” continued Duval. “The count was quite bewildered by the sight.”

“And well he might be,” cried Blood. “I am bewildered by the mere idea. What more did he behold?”

“The two sceptres,” replied Duval, “each of solid gold, and garnished with diamonds. The sceptre, with the dove, is three feet seven inches long, and three inches round; so you may guess its value.”

“Magnificent! Don’t you long to grasp it, colonel?” remarked Montalt to Blood.

“I would grasp it like a monarch,” rejoined the other.

“Then there was the orb!” pursued Duval. “A ball of solid gold, encircled by a golden fillet, embellished with roses of diamonds!”

“Hold!—hold!” exclaimed Blood, starting up. “I can bear no more! The description of these treasures excites me so strangely. ’Fore Heaven! it were an enterprise worthy of us to seize upon them!”

“That were an enterprise, indeed!” cried Flodoard.

The Race for the King's Cup, at Newmarket

But there is no doubt at the last. With a bound, the mare springs forward, and wins by a head.

A tremendous shout rends the air, and for a few minutes the most tumultuous excitement prevails.

"Odds-fish!" exclaimed the king, looking rather blank.

"I did not think Bosco would have been beaten. I have lost a thousand pounds on the race."

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"I was about to propose it to you," observed Claude Duval. "The project is hazardous, and can only be accomplished by stratagem."

"By stratagem! Ha, that suits me!" cried Blood.

"The treasures are deposited in the Jewel Tower," pursued Duval; "and are entrusted to the sole care of an old Welshman, Talbot Edwards, who inhabits the tower with his wife and daughter. The latter is a pretty coquette, and the Count de Bellegarde has already made acquaintance with her."

"I see!" observed Blood. "Is there no guard outside the tower?"

"Yes; a sentinel is placed at the door. Old Edwards might easily be overpowered, of course, and the jewels secured, but the sentinel offers the first difficulty. Then there are the three gates of the fortress, each with its sentinel, besides the warders in the guard-chamber. All these have to be passed."

"Were the sentinels doubled, we would pass them!" cried Blood. "Even while you have been speaking, my teeming brain has produced a scheme that cannot fail. You will all have parts in it," he added to his followers; "but the chief part will be enacted by myself. I shall go as a Welsh parson."

Shouts of laughter followed the announcement.

"As a Welsh parson!" exclaimed Duval. "Did I hear aright?"

"Laugh as much as you list," said Blood, maintaining a grave countenance amid the general merriment. "I shall put on canonicals. A cassock is as convenient as a domino. Clothed in a clerical garb, I shall be able to pass all the sentinels of the Tower without exciting suspicion. As a Welshman, old Edwards will hail with delight the Reverend Llewelyn Price, and take him to his bosom. Besides, Parson Price will have his daughter Winefred with him. I'll speak to her

at once." And striding towards a broad oaken staircase at the back, communicating with the upper rooms, he shouted out, with lusty lungs, "What ho, Sabine!"

"Coming, father," rejoined a musical voice from above.

CHAPTER VI

SABINE DISAPPROVES OF HER FATHER'S PROJECT

Presently, a light appeared, and a graceful figure was seen descending the staircase.

Need we say it was the same fair creature who has appeared in sundry portions of our story as Violet Oldacre?

She set down her taper, and, with a cry of delight, flew towards Duval; but he checked her by a slight gesture.

"You mistake me for the Count de Bellegarde," he said.

"Yes; I now see it is Captain Duval," she rejoined.

"You called me, father."

"Ay; I have a great project to break to you," observed Blood.

"Always some new project, father."

"But this is greater than all the others. 'Twill make us rich beyond all computation. 'Twill enable you to live like a princess in France or Flanders. All your dreams of splendor will be realized."

"I fear these are but dreams in which you are indulging, father," observed Sabine, with a smile.

"You are an incredulous little fool," said Blood. "Ask Captain Duval if I have in the slightest degree exaggerated."

"Your father has not said a word too much," replied Duval. "'Tis a splendid scheme; and if crowned with success, will yield millions."

"Millions!" exclaimed Sabine, surprised. "What can it be? Have you discovered the philosopher's stone?"

"Bah! All the disciples of Hermes could not produce such a heap of gold and precious stones as we have found out."

"And, pray, where is this wonderful treasure hidden?"

"In an enchanted castle," replied Duval; "defended by gates and drawbridges innumerable; surrounded by a double line of fortifications; locked up in a donjon; and watched by a jealous old dragon, whom it will be your business to put to sleep."

"Ah! you mean the Crown jewels!" cried Sabine.

"You have guessed aright," said Blood. "Those jewels shall be ours ere many weeks are past. Now, was I wrong in styling the project a great one?"

"'Tis a dreadful project, father. I tremble to think of it."

"Pshaw!" returned the colonel; "there is no more danger in it than in many a matter of trifling import."

"'Tis not the danger I think of, father, but the magnitude of the crime."

"Hard words, girl. But you need have no scruples. His majesty will be able to replace his jewels; if not, it matters little. They are mere useless gewgaws where they now are kept. We will turn them to good account."

"But you do not expect me to take part in such a scheme, father?" said Sabine. "I cannot do it."

Before Blood, who was getting angry, could reply, Duval arose, and approaching her, observed:

"Did I not say, *mignonne*, that it would be your business to put to sleep the watchful dragon?"

"Do not impose such a hateful task upon me," she rejoined.

"Hateful or not, you must perform it," cried her father, in a tone calculated to enforce obedience. "I require your assistance. To-morrow we shall go to the Tower together. In the interim, I will instruct you in the part you will have to play. It will not be difficult, I promise you."

While she remained silent and sad, Duval took Blood aside.

“His majesty desires to see his nocturnal visitor again,” he said.

“Ha!” exclaimed Blood.

“You may go to him without fear,” pursued Duval.

“I will not go to him till this affair is over,” said Blood. “Then I can act as circumstances may dictate. An interview with him at this juncture would interfere with the progress of our scheme—perhaps thwart it altogether.”

“Well, I will protest to him that I cannot find you. Have you heard aught from Buckingham?”

“Nothing; nor do I expect to hear from him. He will not trouble me.”

“Be not too sure of that,” returned Claude. “However, if you succeed in your design, you must take instant leave of England, and embark for France.”

“I will neglect no precaution, rest assured,” rejoined Blood.

“My mission is ended,” said Duval. “Perchance I may meet Parson Price and his fair daughter at the Tower to-morrow; but if I do, we shall be strangers, of course.”

He then turned to Sabine, who still looked downcast, and pressed her hand to his lips, as he bade her adieu.

“Excuse my hasty departure, sweetheart,” he whispered. “There is a ball to-night at Whitehall, at which the Count de Bellegarde must be present.”

She looked at him with tearful eyes, but made no remonstrance.

“*Bon soir, messieurs!*” he exclaimed. “*Empoignez le trésor, et vogue la galère!*”

Montalt helped him to put on his mantle, Flodoard gave him the dark lantern, and both bowed respectfully as he disappeared through the secret door.

*CHAPTER VII**PARSON PRICE AND HIS DAUGHTER*

Next morning, a wherry, which had come down the river from Whitefriars, and was rowed by four lusty young oarsmen, stopped at Tower Wharf, and landed a very stout ecclesiastic and his daughter.

Clergymen, we may state, in those days, always appeared in public in full canonicals—gown, cassock, and bands. Consequently, they were never taken for laymen.

Our stout parson had a jovial visage, and did not seem to have mortified the flesh with over-severity. His loose robe gave additional width to shoulders already too broad. His gown was well kept, and his bands spotless. Though his features were harsh, his looks were not unprepossessing, and his manner was decorous and benign; so very benign, indeed, that when a warder approached, he seemed to pronounce an internal blessing upon the man.

Our parson's daughter was remarkably pretty, with magnificent black eyes, and rich black tresses. A graceful figure does not require the aid of dress to set it off; and her blue petticoat and red gown, of very plain material, suited her perfectly.

The pair we have described were gazing with wonder, not unmingled with awe, at the ancient fortress, when a big warder, with a bluff countenance, and a great C.R. embroidered in gold on his scarlet jerkin, who was lounging on the wharf, accosted them, and asked if he should show his reverence, and the young lady, the lions.

"You shall show me the way to the Jewel Tower, if it please you, my good friend," said the parson, bestowing the

benediction upon him we have recorded. "We are strangers here, as you may very well perceive."

"Ay, I can easily see that your reverence is from the country," returned the bluff-looking warder. "Many strangers visit the Tower. 'Tis the finest sight in all London."

"I should think so," cried the parson's daughter. "Dear! dear! what a wonderful place it is."

"Oh, you've seen nothing yet," cried the bluff warder. "Wait till you've seen the lions and the bears. They'll astonish you, I'll warrant. You can hear 'em roaring now. The big white bear goes a-fishing every afternoon in the Thames."

"Does he, indeed?" said the parson's daughter, looking surprised.

"We do not desire to see lions and bears, my good friend," said the parson, blandly. "Our object is to proceed at once to the Jewel Tower, which is kept by our estimable relative, Mr. Talbot Edwards. You know him, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes, I know him, and a very worthy old gentleman he is—a Welshman, and remarkably fond of toasted cheese," replied the warder.

"Toasted cheese is a very good thing, my friend, let me tell you. Perhaps you may have heard Mr. Edwards speak of the Reverend Llewellyn Price, of Caermarthen. I am Parson Price, and this is my daughter Winefred."

"I don't remember hearing Mr. Edwards mention your reverence," replied the bluff warder, somewhat abating his surliness. "But I am sure it will afford him pleasure to see you and your daughter, as it will me to conduct you to him."

"You are very obliging," said the assumed Parson Price. "May I ask your name, my good friend?"

"Dunstan—Kenelm Dunstan; known among my brother warders as Burly Dunstan," was the answer.

"A brave name! I shall not forget it. I am glad to

know you, honest Kenelm—very glad indeed ; and if it would not affront you, I would ask you to drink my health in a cup of mulled sack.”

The burly warder now entirely relaxed his previous bluntness, and smilingly accepted the piece of silver that Parson Price placed in his hand.

“I will drink your reverence’s and the young lady’s health in a cup of the best sack to be had at the Stone Kitchen,” he said.

“I hope to find my cousin Edward in good health, Kenelm,” pursued Parson Price ; “I have not seen him for these many years. Can you tell me if he was in London when he obtained his appointment?”

“No, your reverence. He was residing at Llandaff, and very badly off, as I’ve heard. Sir Gilbert Talbot sent for him, and gave him the post.”

“Ah ! I knew the worthy gentleman had had misfortunes,” remarked Parson Price, with a sigh ; “but I thought he had left Llandaff long ago.”

“You’ll find him hale and hearty, sir,” observed the warder ; “and as to his daughter Edith, she will stand a comparison with your own fair young lady.”

“You hear that, Winefred,” said Parson Price, smiling. “Now, honest Kenelm, you will kindly show us the way?”

“That I will, your reverence.”

The warder took them across the drawbridge, and then through the gateway of the By-ward Tower, near which several other burly individuals, like himself, in scarlet jerkins, embroidered with the royal badge, were assembled. All of them respectfully saluted the parson, who stopped to pronounce a benediction upon them.

“Be pleased to mention my name to your brother warders, Kenelm,” said Parson Price. “As I shall often visit my cousin Edwards, it may be well they should know me.”

"I will not fail," replied the warder.

As they went on, their conductor pointed out to them many objects of interest, and showed them the towers in which several prisoners of state were confined.

The sight of the sombre buildings and grated windows made Winefred turn pale. Her father did not seem so much impressed, but kept constantly asking questions about his cousin Edwards.

At length, they reached the Jewel Tower.

"Can I be of any further service to your reverence?" inquired the warder, about to take leave.

"Yes, my dear Kenelm; you will do me a particular favor if you will announce me to my cousin Edwards. I do not wish to take the old gentleman by surprise."

CHAPTER VIII

PARSON PRICE AND HIS DAUGHTER ARE WELCOMED AT THE JEWEL TOWER

The old warder went in, as requested, and presently returned, accompanied by old Mr. Edwards, who seemed scarcely to have recovered from the surprise into which he had been thrown.

Parson Price, however, stopped the old gentleman's mouth by pronouncing a blessing upon him and his family; and then, with a warmth of manner which there was no resisting, cried out:

"Ah, my dear cousin, how glad I am to see you! I dare say you have quite forgotten Llewellyn Price of Caermarthen; but, you see, he has not forgotten you."

Truth to say, Mr. Edwards did not recollect him in the least. Completely mystified, he knew not what reply to make.

After all, Welshmen have so many cousins, that the worthy man might have had one at Caermarthen without remembering the circumstance.

“No wonder you don’t recollect me,” continued Price. “I was but a boy when you saw me at Llandaff. This is my daughter Winefred. Her poor mother is buried at St. David’s. She was a Griffith of Llandovery; but I can’t trust myself to speak of her,” he added with well-feigned emotion.

No need of more. Old Edwards was completely imposed upon by the respectable appearance of his new relations, and gave them a cordial welcome.

After saluting Winefred affectionately, he took them both into the tower, and presented them in due form to his wife and daughter.

Another scene had to be gone through, but it ended in all the cousins becoming mutually delighted with each other.

Parson Price soon established himself in Mrs. Edwards’s good graces, and Edith was charmed with Winefred.

Cakes and metheglin were set before the visitors, and after they had partaken of the refreshments, old Edwards volunteered to show his cousins the Crown jewels.

He could not have made an offer more agreeable to Parson Price, who was enchanted to find himself in the treasure chamber.

How the parson’s eyes glistened and his breast dilated as he gazed at the splendid show.

But while examining the various objects, he stole many a furtive glance round the chamber, noted every object within it, and saw where the old custodian’s pistols and arquebus were hung, secretly laughing at the precautions.

“Mine eyes never had such a feast before,” he exclaimed as he relinquished the imperial crown to its guardian. “Lord!

lord! how princes do bedeck themselves. Solomon in all his glory had not a crown like this. You must allow me another opportunity of inspecting these wondrous treasures, my dear cousin, for though I have seen much, I am not satisfied."

"You shall inspect them whenever you please," replied Edwards.

"I should like to come and see them every day during our stay in London," cried Winefred. "I never beheld anything so lovely. I wish I were a princess, to wear some of them."

"One gets tired of jewels as of everything else," remarked Edith. "I think nothing of them."

"Jewels, indeed, are but vanities!" exclaimed Parson Price.

"Don't say that, father," cried Winefred. "You might as well say that all earthly treasures are but dross."

"And so they are, my dear," rejoined the parson. "Mere dross."

"I wish I had a little more of the dross," observed Edwards.

"Jewels would be very well, if one could wear them," remarked Edith. "But merely to gaze at them in this way becomes tiresome. How well you would look in this collar, my pretty cousin," she added, fastening a necklace set with diamonds and pearls round Winefred's fair throat.

"And in this regal ornament," said Mrs. Edwards, placing a circlet adorned with balas rubies, table diamonds, and emeralds on her brows.

"There! doesn't she look charming?" cried Edith, clapping her hands with delight.

"Charming, indeed!" echoed Mr. Edwards.

"Take them off, my child," said Parson Price. "Your foolish head will be turned."

"Let her keep them on for a few minutes," interposed Edwards. "They suit her remarkably well."

"Ay, but they fill her mind with pride."

"Nonsense, father. You are always preaching to me. I like the sensation of wearing them immensely."

"'Tis a thousand pities there is no one to see you in them besides ourselves, cousin," cried Edith.

Scarcely was utterance given to the wish, than the door opened, and the Count de Bellegarde stood before them.

CHAPTER IX

WINEFRED BECOMES JEALOUS OF EDITH

He seemed charmed by the picture presented to his gaze.

"Trying the effect of the jewels, eh?" he exclaimed.

"May I be permitted to assist at the experiment?"

"Certainly," replied Edith, laughing. "'Tis the Count de Bellegarde, father," she added, in a whisper.

Then, turning to the count, she explained that they were exhibiting the treasures to their Welsh cousins.

Bellegarde begged to be presented to the cousins, and quite captivated Parson Price by his politeness and affability.

"What a charming man!" whispered the parson to Edwards.

"Belongs to the court; came here yesterday, with their majesties," replied the other, in a low tone.

"Seems to be struck with your daughter," remarked the parson. "No wonder. She is a great beauty."

A further essay was now made at the count's request, and this time a gold collar set with three sapphires, and having ten knots of round pearls, was linked round Edith's snowy neck, while her golden tresses were crowned by another jewelled circlet.

Thus adorned, she looked surpassingly beautiful, and the count's admiration was so ardently expressed that it excited a pang of jealousy in Winefred's bosom.

The feeling was heightened by the undisguised delight with which his praises were received by Edith.

The vain little coquette was so much flattered that she was quite willing to try on some other ornaments.

"What's the matter, my child?" cried Parson Price, noticing his daughter's agitation.

"I don't know, father," she replied; "but I feel rather faint. I think I had better leave the room."

In an instant all was confusion. Totally unsuspecting of the truth, Edith hastily laid down the jewels she was about to try on, and flew to her cousin, who looked excessively pale, and ready to drop, and, with Mrs. Edwards's assistance, helped her out of the room.

Both Bellegarde and the old custodian expressed their concern to Parson Price, but he treated the matter very lightly.

"A mere passing indisposition," he said. "She will be quite well anon."

However, the Count de Bellegarde, who quite understood what was the matter with her, and feared that the success of the scheme might be jeopardized by some *contretemps*, thought it prudent to take his departure. Accordingly, he made his bow to the old custodian, promising to pay him another visit ere long.

A glance from Parson Price showed that he entirely approved of this step.

Just as Bellegarde was leaving, he met Edith, coming out of the lower chamber.

"Are you going, count?" she exclaimed, with a look of disappointment. "My poor cousin Winefred has frightened you away. She is better now. Am I ever to see you again?"

"You will certainly see me when I am next at the Tower."

“And when is that likely to be?”

“Not just yet. I should alarm your father if I appeared again too soon.”

“You need not come to the Jewel Tower. I always take an evening walk on the ramparts.”

“Then I may possibly find you there to-morrow evening. Adieu!”

Scarcely was he gone, when the old custodian and Parson Price issued from the jewel-chamber. Having carefully locked the door, Edwards thrust the key into his girdle.

“Are you never afraid of being robbed, my dear cousin?” asked the parson, innocently.

“No,” replied Edwards. “He must be a bold man and a cunning, who would attempt to plunder the Jewel Tower.”

Parson Price smiled to himself at the remark.

The parson and his daughter did not stay much longer, though pressed to do so by their hospitable relatives; but Price promised his cousin Edwards to come again next day, and bring with him two young gentlemen from Caermarthen.

“One of them,” he added, in a whisper, “is engaged to Winefred, but the other would be eligible as a suitor to Edith.”

Edith and her mother accompanied their newly-found relatives to the Tower Wharf, where the latter took a boat to the Temple Stairs, their lodgings being in the Strand.

But the silly coquette made her cousin perfectly wretched by confiding to her, as they proceeded to the place of embarkation, that she was about to meet the gallant Count de Bellegarde on the ramparts on the following evening.

Poor Winefred felt again ready to drop.

CHAPTER X

JENKIN PUGH AND CADWALLADER GRIFFITH

Parson Price was not long in paying another visit to his dear cousins at the Jewel Tower.

Next afternoon, he appeared again, and brought with him, according to his promise, two good-looking young gallants, whom he introduced as Jenkin Pugh and Cadwallader Griffith, both of Caermarthen.

Jenkin, he privately informed the old couple, was engaged to Winefred ; but Cadwallader was on his preferment, and being, as they saw, tall and proper, with two or three hundred a year in land at Abergwilly, in Caermarthenshire, and owner, moreover, of Merlin's Cave, he would make a very suitable match, he thought, for Edith.

This information produced the desired effect on the old custodian and his wife, especially when they perceived that the inflammable young Welshman was struck at once by the charms of their golden-haired daughter, and did not attempt to disguise his feelings, but paid her most assiduous attention. He met with no discouragement from Edith, who had heard from her mother of the three hundred a year in land and Merlin's Cave.

Cadwallader, we may mention, was no other than Montalt, while Jenkin bore a strong resemblance to a certain Flodoard. Both were very gaily attired.

Further to propitiate the ladies of the Jewel Tower, Parson Price had brought them some little presents—a few pairs of gloves, and some perfumes for Edith, with a partlet and hood for her mother.

Naturally, they both expressed great regret that Winefred

had been left behind; but Parson Price explained that his daughter was not very strong, and needed repose. She would come on some early day.

Everything went on prosperously. Neither of the young gallants was in the slightest degree bashful, but rattled away gaily, and seemed to know a good deal about town life. Now and then a glance from the parson checked them, when they were displaying rather too intimate an acquaintance with the gaming-tables.

As a matter of course, they were shown the Crown jewels, and while enjoying the exhibition, they cautiously examined the chamber, as their leader had done on the previous day.

It was here that Cadwallader seized the opportunity of describing Merlin's Cave.

"Merlin, as you are aware," he said, "was a great enchanter, and performed his incantations in that wonderful cave, which now belongs to me. In fact, I have reason to believe that I am a descendant of the renowned magician."

"We should never take you for a conjuror, my dear Cad," remarked Parson Price, good-humoredly. "What has Merlin's Cave got to do with these jewels?"

"A great deal, as you shall hear, sir," replied Cadwallader. "'Tis said, and I devoutly believe the legend, that countless treasures were buried in that cave by Merlin—great chests of gold, blood-red rubies of enormous size, diamonds that would outshine the stars, and emeralds to which that in the crown of state would be a tiny pebble. All these treasures, the legend says, are buried in the cave, and guarded by a potent spell, and unless that spell can be broken they will never be discovered. I have tried 'Abracadabra,' and all kinds of magical words, but have not succeeded. Still, I do not despair. They say the spell can only be dissolved by a virgin with a skin as white as snow, and locks glowing like gold—But then she must be a native of Wales."

“Bless me!” exclaimed Edith, “that seems to answer to my description. I won’t say anything about my complexion, but my tresses——”

“Are as bright as gold,” interrupted Cadwallader, gallantly. “You have all the requisite qualifications. Clearly, you are the virgin who could break the spell, and bring to light the treasure that has been hidden for centuries.”

“I should like to try,” she cried.

“You *shall* try,” exclaimed Cadwallader, with a fervor that almost amounted to a declaration, and made Edith blush and cast down her eyes.

Parson Price chuckled internally, and old Edwards winked at his wife, who looked very well pleased.

From this moment, the young Welshman’s suit made very rapid progress. In some cases, the first step is the only difficulty. Edith was so dazzled by the idea of Merlin’s Cave, that she could think of nothing else.

No wonder, after such an auspicious commencement, that the old custodian would not hear of parting with his guests, but insisted on their staying to supper. As an inducement he promised them a dish of toasted cheese, cooked in the true Welsh style, and this they could not resist.

Edith had not forgotten her appointment with the Count de Bellegarde, but she felt it would now be difficult to keep it. However, when evening came on, she contrived to escape from the company, and unlocking a small door at the back of the tower, communicating with the outer ward, speedily gained the ramparts. A sentinel was pacing to and fro. The count was true to his appointment. Perceiving him at a little distance, she flew towards him, and told him hurriedly that their interview must be very brief.

“I would not seek to detain you, were you able to stay,” replied the count. “We are watched.”

“Watched! by whom?” cried Edith. “My father and mother are in-doors with their guests. I have just left them.”

“Look there!” replied the count, drawing her attention to a female figure standing near the bastion at the northeast angle of the walls. “She is watching us.”

“Can it be my cousin Winefred? I was foolish enough to tell her of my appointment with you this evening.”

“’Tis she,” replied Bellegarde.

“There is nothing to fear from her,” said Edith.

“What is she doing here, unless she means mischief?”

“Very true,” responded Edith. “We must not meet again, count. I haven’t time to explain, but circumstances have occurred——”

“You have found a new lover—that’s it. What key is that?” he added, noticing that she had one in her hand.

“This key enabled me to get out of the Jewel Tower unperceived,” she replied, with an arch smile.

“It would enable me to get in in the same way. Lend it me.”

“Not for worlds,” she replied. “My father would never forgive me if he knew I had taken it.”

Bidding him a hasty adieu, Edith now tripped off; and almost at the same moment, the female figure that had remained stationary near the bastion disappeared.

No remark was made on Edith’s brief absence, and soon afterwards a plentiful supper was served.

Before they sat down to it, Parson Price did not neglect to say grace. With the promised toasted cheese, which proved to be excellent, and was greatly enjoyed by all the guests, a black jack filled with potent Welsh ale was sent round. The parson took a hearty pull at it.

They were in the midst of their enjoyment—Parson Price was chatting merrily with Mrs. Edwards, and Cadwallader was whispering soft words to Edith,—when a female servant entered, and delivered a little note to her master.

“What can it mean?” cried the old custodian, glancing at the letter.

“Let me look at it, father,” cried Edith, who was not without some uneasiness on her own account.

Snatching the letter from him, she opened it, and cast a hasty glance at its contents.

“What is it?” demanded Edwards.

“A warning to you, father,” she replied.

“A warning! Let me hear it.”

The parson and his associates exchanged covert looks.

They were not left long in suspense, for Edith read the letter aloud. It ran as follows:

“A plot has been formed against you. Beware, or you will lose that which you value more than life.”

“This, from a friend.”

“Who could plot against me?” cried Edwards, with a look of consternation that was reflected on his wife’s countenance.

“Who, indeed, my dear cousin?” cried Parson Price, scarcely able to conceal his uneasiness. “You don’t suspect me?”

“No, no, no!” cried the old custodian. “I suspect nobody. I don’t know what to think. What I value more than life must be——”

“Your daughter, of course, sir,” interposed Cadwallader.

“No—my jewels,” cried the old man. “I would die twenty deaths rather than lose them.”

“Don’t make yourself uneasy, father,” said Edith. “I can explain the meaning of the letter. It refers to me. The writer fancies you love me better than your treasures, and that it would break your heart to lose me.”

“I hope your worthy father does not mean to keep you forever,” cried Cadwallader. “If so, I unhesitatingly announce my intention of robbing him. All the locks and bolts he can place on the doors of this tower shall not deter me from making the attempt.”

General laughter followed this speech, the boldness of which did not displease the old custodian, who had been reassured by his daughter's observations. He felt she had something to explain, but this was not the time to ask for further explanation.

Parson Price saw that the danger was past, and, though secretly enraged by the incident, maintained a semblance of good humor. Cadwallader continued his addresses to Edith.

Mulled sack was introduced by Mrs. Edwards, and the rest of the evening passed away merrily.

Good hours are kept at the Tower, and the tattoo of a drum informed the guests it was time to depart.

While Parson Price was taking leave of his host, he observed, in a whisper, "Take my advice, my dear cousin; strike while the iron is hot. If you are satisfied with the suitor I have found for your daughter, don't let him slip through your fingers."

Old Edwards incontinently acted on the hint, and the parson and his young friends were asked to come again on the morrow.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN WINEFRED AND TALBOT HARLAND

The person who had delivered the letter, of which mention has just been made, was the warder Kenelm. He was standing beneath the trees that skirted the parade, with some of his companions, when a young damsel, whom he at once recognized as Parson Price's lovely Winefred, came up to him, and begged him to take a letter for her to the Jewel Tower, giving him a *douceur* at the same time.

Though rather surprised, the warder asked no questions, but went immediately on the errand.

Winefred was hastening towards the gateway of the Bloody Tower, when she heard quick footsteps behind her, and, turning at the sound, beheld Talbot Harland. The young man had been dining with his uncle, Sir Gilbert Talbot, who had lodgings in the Tower; and, having seen the young damsel give the letter to the warder, had followed her. He knew her only as Farmer Oldacre's daughter Violet, and there was a mystery about her and her proceedings that excited his curiosity.

"Give you good-e'en, fair damsel," he cried. "I am glad to see you again—but I did not expect to find you here."

"Do not detain me, sir," she rejoined. "My business here is done, and I am anxious to get away."

"One moment, and you shall go. 'Tis strange I should meet you. Miss Neville caught sight of you the other day on the river, and has spoken of you frequently since. She was in the royal barge."

"I saw her."

"She takes much interest in you, and will be pleased to hear of you. Have you any message for her?"

"None," she replied, with a troubled look. "She had better think no more of me. I am unworthy of her regard."

"I will not tell her what you say, for I do not believe it. Sit down for a moment on this bench. You seem agitated."

The young damsel felt so faint, that she was forced to comply. Talbot sat down beside her. For a brief space, not a word was said.

"I should like to see Miss Neville once more," said the young damsel, breaking the silence. "I am in a most difficult position, and know not how to act for the best. She might advise me. I have no other friend on earth."

"Not your father?" cried Talbot.

"I cannot consult him," she rejoined. "I have some-

thing to reveal to Miss Neville—something strange—something terrible. But I must see her without delay, or it will be too late to prevent the mischief.”

“Come, then, to Whitehall to-morrow morning. You will easily find her apartments. They are in the gallery assigned to the queen’s maids of honor. I will prepare her for the interview.”

“I will come, if I can. Should I be prevented, and aught happen, entreat her to judge me as kindly as she can.”

“Why not impart the secret to me? I swear to you I will keep it.”

“It concerns others beside myself—others whom I will never betray. I will confide it only to Dorinda Neville.”

Suddenly she started to her feet.

She had descried the Count de Bellegarde coming towards them along the parade, and without another word, hurried down to the gloomy archway, and disappeared.

“I hope I have not interrupted a *tête-à-tête*,” exclaimed the count, as he came up.

“You have prevented me from learning a secret, count, that is all,” replied Talbot.

“A secret!—that’s a pity! One comes to the Tower to learn State secrets.”

“That was your own errand, I suppose, count?”

“Yes; and I have learnt two or three important secrets since I have been here—secrets worth knowing, I can promise you. Are you for Whitehall? or do you mean to sleep at the Tower?”

“I am with you,” replied Talbot.

And they quitted the fortress together.

An hour later, Parson Price and his companions took boat at the Tower Wharf, and proceeded to Whitefriars. As they passed the guard-chamber, the parson perceived Kenelm, and stopping for a moment to chat with him, learnt that his daughter had been at the Tower that evening.

Concealing his anger, the parson merely observed, "She was too unwell to join the party at the Jewel Tower, so she wrote an excuse to my cousin Edwards."

"Yes; I took the letter," replied the warder; "and I remarked that the young lady looked unwell."

"She has endeavored to betray us," mentally ejaculated the parson, as he walked on. "Luckily, the design has failed. I will take good care she shall make no more mischief."

CHAPTER XII

SABINE THREATENS TO REVEAL THE SCHEME

Sabine was alone in the large, gloomy room of the old house at Whitefriars.

She was seated near the table, on which a lamp was placed, and her looks betokened the greatest mental distress. Rousing herself, at last, she took up the light, and was about to proceed to her own chamber, when her father and his companions entered from the outer door. Mandeville also was with them.

Blood had already disencumbered himself of his gown and cassock; he flung them down on a chair as he came in. His infuriated looks terrified Sabine, and she would have escaped; but he roughly seized her arm, and dragged her back.

"Traitor!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "What fiend prompted you to this insane act? 'Tis not your fault that I and my comrades are not now laden with fetters in the dungeons of the Tower. What led you to betray us? Speak!"

"I only wished to put the good old man on his guard, father."

“And, by so doing, jeopardize my life. Unnatural girl! Had you succeeded in rousing the old man’s suspicions, all had been over with me and my comrades, and the grandest scheme ever planned would have been marred. I hoped it had been some wild impulse to which you had yielded, without thought of the consequences; but I find it was a deliberate act. Truly, I have nourished a serpent in my bosom, to sting me.”

“Never, till now, have I been disobedient to you, father. I have taken part—reluctantly enough, as you know—in numberless schemes in which you have engaged; but this is a crime so monstrous, that my soul revolts against it. When I saw that good old man, my heart was suddenly changed. He will die if you deprive him of his treasures.”

“What are the treasures to him?” cried Blood, contemptuously. “I will make him richer than he has ever yet been in his life.”

“And I intend to wed his daughter Edith,” observed Montalt. “She is a wonderfully fine girl, and will just suit me. The old gentleman and his wife shall live with us at the Hague.”

“You judge him by yourselves,” said Sabine. “He will never survive the blow you are about to inflict upon him. May heaven avert it!”

At this moment the secret door near the chimney-piece flew open, and Claude Duval stepped forth.

A glance at the group told him what was passing.

Quitting Sabine, Blood took him aside, and they conferred together for a few minutes, in a low tone. During this interval Sabine watched him anxiously. At last Duval stepped towards her.

“I see you are angry with me,” she said, in a deprecatory tone. “But I could not help what I have done. I would save my father from a great crime.”

“You have been suddenly conscience-stricken, it appears,”

observed Duval, coldly. "But why make Talbot Harland your father-confessor?"

"I have told him nothing, as yet; but I will disclose all, unless the scheme is abandoned."

A peculiar smile played upon Duval's features.

"Your candor is charming," he cried. "You shall tell him whatever you please, if you can find an opportunity of conversing with him again."

"Then you mean to keep me a prisoner here?" she exclaimed.

"Your father will take such steps as he may deem consistent with his safety," observed Duval.

"Well, I will do my best to elude his vigilance."

"Then you are resolved to betray us? Say so frankly. You will not greatly alarm me."

"I will not betray *you*. But take care you do not betray yourself. Do not go to the Tower again."

"Hum!" muttered Duval, as if struck by the counsel. "That may not be bad advice, after all."

He then rejoined Blood, who was standing at a little distance, watching them, and said, in a low tone, "She is determined to thwart our project. Nothing I can say will turn her from her purpose. Keep her a close prisoner till the affair is accomplished."

"It shall be done," replied Blood. "I would send her on board the schooner I have hired, but the skipper won't be ready till to-morrow."

"She will be far safer here," said Duval. "But let her be carefully watched. She has told me she will escape if she can."

"What the plague can have taken possession of her?" muttered Blood. "She has never before turned rebellious, and now she falls from me at the most important crisis of my life."

"'Tis well she has not done more mischief," said Duval.

“But Talbot Harland’s suspicions may be aroused by what she has said to him, and some slight circumstance may lead to the discovery of the design. Are your preparations sufficiently made to enable you to strike the blow at once?”

“I would rather delay it for a few days.”

“The delay will be fraught with danger. You cannot improve your position with the old custodian and his family. You have gained their confidence, and may lose it by some inadvertence. You have had a narrow escape to-day. Who knows what may happen to-morrow?”

“Ay, who knows?” echoed Blood. “But by to-morrow night, I trust, I shall have got possession of the jewels, for I will strike the blow, prepared or not prepared.”

“Well resolved,” cried Duval. “You do not require further aid from me. I do not wish to be mixed up with the enterprise.”

“You have done quite enough,” said Blood. “Leave all the rest to me. I am not sorry you have forced me to take immediate action, for this important affair has been weighing heavily on my mind.”

“One last word of advice. Take good care of Sabine. She is your chief danger.”

“Have no fear of her. She shall not leave this place of refuge till the affair is over, and I can take her with me, on board the schooner. Then ho! for Holland.”

“For Holland ho! where we shall next meet,” rejoined Duval.

All this time Sabine had been watching him, and seeing he was departing without bidding her adieu, she rushed towards him, and flung herself into his arms.

“Have you no longer any love for me?” she cried, passionately.

“I love you better than life.”

“Prove it, by abandoning this scheme.”

“You must talk to your father, sweetheart. All rests now

with him. I have nothing more to do with it. Take her, sir."

And disengaging himself gently from her embrace, he consigned her to Blood, and passed through the secret door.

CHAPTER XIII

SABINE ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE

"Now, father, I must have a word with you," said Sabine.

"I will have no further conversation with you to-night," he rejoined, sternly. "You have displeased me greatly. Take your supper instantly, and get to your chamber."

"I do not require supper."

"As you please. But mark what I say!" he cried, with increasing sternness. "You will not leave your chamber till to-morrow night!"

"Not till to-morrow night?"

"Perhaps not then! So take with you all you need."

"I want nothing!" she rejoined.

"Nonsense! I shall not allow you to starve yourself. Put up some eatables and a flask of wine in a basket," he said to Flodoard.

The order was promptly obeyed by the young man, who placed a cold fowl, bread, and some other matters in a basket, which he gave to his leader.

"Anything more?" asked Flodoard.

"Have you enough?" demanded Blood.

"More than enough," she rejoined.

"Come, then, to your chamber," he cried, mounting the staircase, which creaked beneath his heavy footsteps.

Sabine's bed-chamber was the best in the house, but little could be said in its praise. It was large, low-roofed, sombre, and scantily furnished. Setting down the basket of provisions on the table, her father said :

“ You have to thank yourself that you will be kept a prisoner here. Good-night.”

Casting a hasty glance round the room, he then went out, locked the door carefully, and took away the key.

Sabine smiled at this precaution, knowing that she could easily defeat it.

The house, as we have said, was full of strange contrivances, and this room had a secret outlet, which she had discovered.

Her father had not been gone more than half an hour when she ventured forth, and crept stealthily to the head of the staircase.

But it was impossible to descend it unperceived. Blood and his comrades were carousing, and it would seem from their talk that they had no immediate intention of retiring to rest. She therefore returned to her own room.

An hour later she made a second attempt. The sounds of revelry were not so loud as they had previously been, but she heard her father's deep voice as he gave instructions to the others.

“ Besides the other articles I have specified,” he said, “ we shall need a mallet and a file, and a couple of large bags, such as lawyers are wont to carry.”

“ A mallet is an awkward implement to hide,” remarked Montalt, “ and not the sort of thing that a gentleman usually carries about with him. Cannot we dispense with it?”

“ Impossible! You will find out its use to-morrow.”

“ I am to remain with the horses at the foot of Tower Hill. Is it not so, colonel?” demanded Mandeville.

“ Ay,” replied Blood. “ I hope we may be able to embark quietly with the booty at the Tower Wharf, and go on

board the schooner ; but, in the event of alarm, we must ride off in different directions."

Sabine heard no more. Returning to her room, she remained there for another hour, when she ventured forth again.

Finding all still below, she took a few cautious steps down the staircase.

The lamp wanted trimming, but, dim as it was, it showed plainly enough that the whole party were fast asleep. Her father was slumbering in the arm-chair, and breathing deeply.

She continued to descend slowly ; but, in spite of her care, the stairs creaked, and Blood, who was easily aroused, started up.

"Who's that?" he vociferated, fancying he saw someone dart up-stairs.

"What's the matter, colonel?" cried Montalt, waking up, and rubbing his eyes.

"Methought I saw Sabine on the stairs," rejoined Blood ; "but that's impossible. I have the key of her door in my pocket. However, I'll satisfy myself at once."

Snatching up the lamp, he hurried up-stairs. Sabine's door was fastened precisely as he had left it. He listened for a moment, but could hear no sound within.

He did not unlock the door, but rapped sharply against it with his knuckles. His daughter immediately called out, and on hearing her voice, he felt sure all was right, and went back tranquilly.

Sabine made no further attempt to escape, but waited patiently till morning.

CHAPTER XIV

SABINE HAS AN AUDIENCE OF THE KING

When morn came, Sabine thought she should have a visit from her father, nor was she mistaken. He brought her some breakfast; but observing that she had not touched the viands that he had laid on the table overnight, he said, with a sneer :

“Soh, you are resolved to fast, I perceive. I did not enjoin the penance; but since you are practising it, I may remark that a little mortification of the body will do you good, and make you more obedient. I am sorry to deal harshly with you, Sabine,” he added, somewhat softening his tone; “but you compel me to do so. You will remain here a prisoner during the day; but at night I will send Mandeville for you, or come myself. Have you aught to say to me?”

“Only to implore you to abandon this wicked design, father.”

“No more of this,” he cried, impatiently; “or you will rekindle my anger against you.”

“Perhaps we may never meet again, father,” pleaded Sabine.

“Tut! tut! we shall meet again ere many hours, and then you will talk to me in a very different strain. Farewell!”

“Farewell forever, father!”

Blood looked at her for a moment, as if struggling with conflicting feelings. But his heart was hardened. Dashing out of the room, he locked the door outside, and took the key with him as before.

Sabine ventured forth every now and then, but her patience

was most severely tried ; for it was not till near eleven o'clock that she became convinced that the whole party were gone.

She had already made such changes in her attire as would enable her to present herself fittingly to Dorinda. Consequently there was nothing now to detain her ; but the outer door having been locked by Blood, she was obliged to make her exit through the sliding panel near the chimney-piece, and thread the vaulted labyrinth so frequently tracked by Duval.

This brought her eventually to the river-side, where she quickly hired a wherry, and was conveyed in it to Whitehall stairs. Her features being concealed by a hood, she did not fear recognition or molestation.

She found her way without difficulty, though not without some delay, to Dorinda's apartments in the palace. A page, who was in attendance in the gallery appropriated to the maids of honor, conducted her to them. She was admitted at once, for Dorinda was expecting her.

Though she had resolved to make a full disclosure of the scheme, Sabine was at first so much agitated that she could scarcely speak ; but when she had in some degree recovered her composure, the details she entered into filled her hearer with astonishment and alarm.

Dorinda saw at once the imminence of the peril. But what was to be done ? After a moment's reflection, she summoned the page, and despatched him at once with a message to the king, beseeching his majesty to grant her an immediate audience on a matter of the utmost import.

"You must accompany me to the king, and tell him all," she said to Sabine.

The unhappy damsel had now become so much terrified, that she would have retreated had it been possible ; but Dorinda strove to reassure her by representing that she had a paramount duty to perform, before which every other consideration must give way. She was still employing these

arguments, though with indifferent success, when Talbot Harland presented himself.

On seeing him, Sabine immediately sprang to her feet, and with an energy that startled both him and Dorinda, cried, "Go to the Tower at once. You may yet be in time. Go to the Jewel Tower, and remain there. Do not ask for any explanation. Go at once."

"Is this madness?" demanded Talbot, gazing at Dorinda.

"No," she replied, with an earnestness that carried conviction with it. "Do her bidding. She has good reason for giving you the order. A daring attempt is about to be made to carry off the Crown jewels."

"There is yet time to prevent it," cried Sabine.

"Heaven grant I may not be too late!" cried Talbot, appalled by the magnitude of the danger.

Scarcely knowing how he got there, he found himself in another minute at the palace stairs; and springing into a four-oared wherry, ordered the watermen to row to the Tower.

"Row for your lives!" he repeated. "'Tis his majesty's business."

The oars were instantly plunged into the stream, and the boat shot off like an arrow from a bow. Luckily, the tide was running swiftly down.

Shortly after Talbot's departure, the page returned, accompanied by Chiffinch, who brought a very gracious response from his majesty.

The two damsels were then conducted by the confidential valet through a private passage to the king's apartments.

Charles was in his cabinet, seated in an easy chair, and ruminating upon various matters—his sole companions being some half-dozen long-eared spaniels. He was just setting out to the tennis-court, when Dorinda's message stopped him, for he was too good-natured to refuse her the audience she requested.

Nothing could equal his surprise when she was ushered into his presence, accompanied by Sabine. He immediately rose to receive them, and prevented them from making the profound reverence they contemplated.

Chiffinch, the discreet, having performed his office, immediately retired.

"I fancy you have some favor to ask of me in behalf of this fair damsel," he said, glancing at Sabine, who remained timidly in the background. "Do not hesitate to prefer it. 'Tis granted ere asked."

"'Tis not a favor she solicits, sire," replied Dorinda. "She has a most important disclosure to make to your majesty."

"Ah, sire," exclaimed Sabine, rushing forward, and throwing herself at the king's feet; "your majesty has seen through my heart. I have, indeed, a great boon to ask of you."

"In return for the revelation you are about to make? Ha!" cried Charles. "Well, name the boon?"

"I ask my father's life, which he has most justly forfeited to your majesty," she cried. "I have betrayed him, and if he is put to death, I shall die, too. I would give my life to purchase his pardon."

"What has your father done?" demanded Charles, gravely. "Before I can hold out any hope of pardon, I must learn the crime he has committed."

"My liege, I tremble to inform you that he has conceived the design of carrying off the Crown jewels from the Tower; but I trust his scheme will prove abortive."

"Talbot Harland is already gone to the Tower, sire, and will take such steps as may be needful," interposed Dorinda.

"Oddsfish!" exclaimed the king. "This is, indeed, a formidable design, and the contriver of it can scarce pass unpunished."

"The scheme would infallibly have succeeded, sire, had I not felt bound to reveal it," said Sabine.

“But why defer the disclosure to the latest moment, so as to give the project a chance of success?” demanded the king.

“I have been kept a close prisoner till within these two hours, my liege, and prevented from holding communication with anyone. On making my escape, I flew to Miss Neville, and gave her information of the plot.”

“Arise!” exclaimed Charles.

“I will not rise, sire, till you promise me my father's life. I care not what punishment you inflict on me, but spare him.”

“You shall be rewarded rather than punished, fair damsel,” said the king, raising her gently.

“Reward me by the boon I have asked, sire,” she rejoined. “I will accept no other recompense.”

Charles made no reply, but stepping towards a table, struck a small silver bell.

At the summons, Chiffinch instantly appeared.

“Bid Lord Feversham repair, with the utmost despatch, to the Tower,” he said.

“Any further orders, sire?”

“None. His lordship will learn what he has to do when he arrives there. Stay! Is the Count de Bellegarde in the palace?”

“He is, sire—playing ombre in the Stone Gallery.”

“Bid him come to me at once.”

Charles watched the effect of this injunction upon Sabine, and perceived that she looked troubled.

“I shall learn something by confronting them together,” he thought.

“You have not told me your father's real name?” he added to Sabine. “Disguise nothing, if you would serve him.”

“My father is Colonel Blood, of Sarney, in the county of Meath,” she replied.

“An arch-rebel, and contriver of a plot to seize on Dublin Castle—I remember,” observed the king. “When I first saw you, you were called Violet Oldacre.”

“My real name is Sabine Blood, sire,” she rejoined.

“I do not wish to put many interrogations to you now. But has your father many accomplices?”

“Three, my liege. They are all with him.”

“All three?”

“All three, sire.”

At this juncture Bellegarde was ushered in.

Whatever might be his secret emotions on beholding Sabine, the count betrayed no discomposure.

“Your majesty has sent for me,” he said, bowing profoundly.

“I have some questions to ask you. Are you acquainted with Colonel Blood?”

“I have seen him occasionally at the gaming-houses, sire; but I have no particular acquaintance with him.”

“You know his daughter Sabine?”

“Is this the young lady, sire? I fancy I have seen her before, but I fail to recall the precise circumstances under which the meeting occurred.”

“Will you allow your lover to disown you thus?” observed the king.

“The Count de Bellegarde is *not* my lover, sire,” cried Sabine, with well-feigned indignation. “I know nothing of him.”

“Pray mark that, my liege!” cried the count. “The fair damsel disclaims all knowledge of me. May I venture to ask the object of these questions?”

“You will learn anon. I have not yet finished. Have you seen Colonel Blood of late?”

“Not for several months, sire.”

“Think again. He was at Newmarket.”

“He might be, and yet escape my notice.”

“Will it surprise you to learn that he has formed a daring plan to carry off the Crown jewels?”

“It surprises me beyond measure,” cried the count, affecting extreme astonishment. “But I rejoice that your majesty has discovered and defeated his design.”

“I trust it *has* been defeated,” said the king. “But I am still in uncertainty.”

“Ere this, Talbot Harland must have reached the Tower,” said Dorinda. “And your majesty may be sure he will send you instant intelligence.”

“But some little time must needs elapse——Ha!”

The exclamation was caused by the sound of a cannon, that shook the room.

“’Tis one of the heavy Tower guns!” cried the king. “Why is it fired?”

“Can your majesty ask?” exclaimed Dorinda, unable to repress her exultation. “’Tis a signal from Talbot Harland—a signal of success!”

“Heaven preserve my father in this dire extremity!—and pardon me!” murmured Sabine.

Bellegarde became very pale, but gave no other evidence of emotion. Sabine did not dare to look at him.

The king had been listening for another discharge, but none was heard.

“I trust that cannon announced the capture of the daring villain and his associates,” he exclaimed. “At any rate, the alarm has been given.”

Sabine could not repress a slight cry, and seemed ready to sink.

Touched by her condition, the king said to Dorinda, “Give this unhappy damsel an asylum till I receive further intelligence. I shall then know what to do.”

“I will take every care of her, my liege,” replied Dorinda, quitting the cabinet with Sabine.

‘Hark’ee, count,” said the king, drily, as soon as they

were alone. "I believe all you have told me respecting Colonel Blood; but if you have any apprehension of being implicated in his scheme, you had better decamp."

"Decamp, sire! I should be the last man to decamp. Your majesty wrongs me by these suspicions. If Colonel Blood has been captured—as I trust will prove to be the case—interrogate him; and if he charges me with aiding him in his audacious project, inflict upon me the severest punishment you can devise. With your majesty's permission, I shall not quit Whitehall."

Bowing profoundly, he withdrew.

CHAPTER XV

HOW BLOOD'S SCHEME PROSPERED

We must now return to Parson Price and his young friends, Cadwallader Griffith and Jenkin Pugh.

On quitting their retreat at Whitefriars, they took boat to the Tower. All three were armed with loaded pistols, and carried with them the bags designed to hold their booty, as well as the various implements which the parson thought would be required.

Mandeville did not accompany the others, his business being to wait with the horses at the foot of Tower Hill, near St. Catherine's Gate.

While passing the guard-chamber, Parson Price stopped to exchange a few friendly words with Kenelm, the warder; and that individual afterwards remarked, that he looked as cheerful and unconcerned as usual, and no one would have supposed that he had a criminal design on hand.

On arriving at the Jewel Tower, the party were very warmly welcomed by the old custodian and his wife and daughter.

Regrets were, of course, expressed at Winefred's absence, but Edith was secretly not sorry that she had stayed away. The warning letter made her distrust the young damsel.

Bent upon executing his design without delay, Parson Price took old Edwards aside, and said to him, in a low, confidential tone, "Ever since we left yesterday, Cadwallader has done nothing but talk about your daughter. You are a fortunate man, cousin, in getting such a son-in-law. I don't think much of Merlin's Cave, and its hidden treasures; but I think a great deal of broad acres and substantial farm-houses, and the rents they produce. Cadwallader has three hundred a year, if he has a penny!"

"And he likes the girl, you say, cousin?"

"Likes her? He adores her! Observe him now!"

"He does regard her very tenderly, I must own, cousin."

"Contrive to leave them together, and I'll warrant you they'll soon come to an understanding."

"Truly, I shall be glad to have it settled. I have no objections to the young man, and my daughter seems to have none. You are certain he has three hundred a year, cousin?"

"I would I were as certain of my own tithes as he is of his rents. Better land there cannot be than Cadwallader's."

"I'll do it at once," cried old Edwards. "We'll go to the jewel room, and I'll send my wife down stairs."

With this, he winked at Mrs. Edwards, who at once took the hint and left the room, declaring she was coming back immediately, though she had no such intention.

Parson Price at the same time winked at Jenkin Pugh, and they both followed the old custodian to the jewel chamber.

The loving pair were thus left alone together, and Cadwalader seemed disposed to improve the opportunity.

The moment had now arrived for action. No sooner had they entered the jewel chamber, than Flodoard—for we must now give him his proper designation—contrived to place himself between Edwards and the door, so as to cut off the old custodian's retreat.

This precaution was not unnecessary, for Edwards became alarmed at a sudden change in the parson's demeanor, as well as by the altered expression of his countenance.

"Anything the matter with you, cousin?" he asked.

"'Tis time you knew our real business here," rejoined Blood, in a stern voice, and with a menacing look. "Not to waste time, you will be pleased to understand that we mean to help ourselves to these jewels."

"Ah! have I been deceived by you all this time?" cried Edwards, transported with rage and terror. "You are robbers in disguise! Fool that I was to trust you!"

"Ay, our stratagem has succeeded perfectly!" rejoined Blood, in a mocking tone; "and now, my worthy friend, listen to what I have to say. For your own sake, I advise you to take the matter quietly and philosophically. You shall be no loser by the transaction. I swear to you, by all that is sacred, that we will give you a share in the plunder—a share large enough to make you rich. I do not ask you to help us, but keep quiet."

"Avaunt, tempting fiend!" cried Edwards, furiously. "Do you think me capable of betraying my trust?"

"I think you a sensible man, and alive to your interests," observed Blood, with a sneer.

"Oh, that my pistols were within reach!" cried Edwards; "I would soon show you—Help!—treason!—murder!"

A cloak thrown over his head by Flodoard stifled his cries, and while he was in this state the two ruffians bore him to the ground, gagged him, and bound him hand and foot with

cords. They then left him in this helpless condition, to watch their proceedings.

Violent hands were first laid by Blood on the imperial crown.

With what eagerness he clutched it ! The diamonds seemed to glitter more brightly than ever as he gazed at them.

His intention had been to beat the crown flat with the mallet, in order that he might carry it off with greater ease ; but he was now seized with compunction, and stayed his impious hand. The magnificent diadem was, therefore, fortunately preserved from destruction.

While he was thus deliberating, the poor old custodian made desperate but unavailing efforts to free himself, and groaned so dismally, that Blood, with a deep imprecation, threatened to brain him if he did not remain quiet.

Meantime, Flodoard had pounced upon the king's sceptre, and having broken off the cross at the top, which was covered with precious stones, with a large table diamond in the centre, had begun to file the thick, golden rod, which was nearly three feet in length, in order to break it in twain.

Hitherto, nothing had occurred to disturb the villains in their task. Blood had secured the orb, and was unscrewing the head of the ampulla, when some alarming sounds reached him. He cautiously opened the door, and then became assured that a fierce struggle was going on below, between Montalt and some other person.

"Thousand devils !" he exclaimed, as he came back. "We are discovered ! We must fly !"

On hearing this, Edwards made another desperate effort to raise himself and utter a cry. The attempt nearly cost the old man his life. Blood dealt him a blow on the head with the mallet that stretched him senseless on the floor.

What a pang it cost the desperado to lose the treasures that he had so nearly made his own ! He absolutely roared with rage and vexation as he gazed his last at them, and, for a moment, thought of sweeping off all he could carry.

But prudence checked his rapacity ; and contenting himself, perforce, with the orb and crown—the latter of which he concealed under his gown—he quitted the jewel chamber.

He was followed by Flodoard, who had broken off the pommel of the sceptre, and secured the rubies and emeralds with which it was adorned, but was obliged to leave the golden rod behind.

CHAPTER XVI

A STRUGGLE FOR THE CROWN

Let us now see what had befallen Montalt. Considering the circumstances, he had played his part remarkably well. Indeed, he was really smitten by the charms of the golden-haired damsel. Throwing himself at her feet, he declared his passion, and soon found that he need not despair.

Carried away by the ardor of his feelings, he confessed to the soft-hearted maiden that he had practised a deception upon her ; and, having got over this difficulty far better than he expected, he told her all, essaying to inflame her imagination by dilating upon the splendid manner in which they would live abroad ; but she was so bewildered, that she scarcely listened to him.

While he was in the midst of these glowing descriptions, the door burst open, and Talbot Harland came in. His manner betokened great excitement.

“Where is your father ?” he demanded of Edith.

“In the jewel chamber, with my cousin Price and a friend,” she replied.

“They are the robbers who are with him,” cried Talbot—
“come to steal the Crown jewels, and this is one of them.”

“Hold your peace, sir,” cried Montalt, drawing a pistol and levelling it at Talbot’s head, “or you are a dead man.”

But he hesitated to fire, from the fear of giving the alarm; and, seeing this, Talbot sprang upon him, and a desperate struggle took place between them. Edith was so frightened at the sight of the pistol, that she fell back in a half-fainting state.

Meanwhile, the struggle continued, and both being vigorous and extremely active young men, the issue seemed doubtful. The pistol had dropped from Montalt’s grasp, and lay upon the ground.

The combatants were thus engaged, when Blood and Flodoard passed the door, which was left ajar. Blood, being encumbered by the crown, did not attempt to offer any assistance, but Flodoard dashed in at once, and soon liberated his comrade.

By their combined efforts Talbot was thrown to the ground, and with such force that he was stunned for the moment, giving them time to effect their escape.

Picking up the pistol, they went out, locked the door, but did not take away the key, and joined Blood, who was anxiously waiting for them at the entrance. All three then went forth so quietly that they did not attract the attention of the sentry, who was pacing to and fro in front of the tower. As soon, however, as they got to a little distance, they quickened their pace.

The robbers had not been gone more than a minute, when Mrs. Edwards, who had heard some noises for which she could not account, came to the room where she had left her daughter and her suitor, and finding the door locked, instantly unfastened it, and released Talbot, who by this time had recovered from the fall.

Without entering into any explanation to the astounded dame, who could not imagine how he came there, the young man started in pursuit of the robbers.

As he issued forth, he descried them near the northwest angle of the White Tower, and dashed after them as quickly as he could, shouting lustily as he ran.

His shouts were heard by some warders and musketeers who happened to be on the parade at the time, and these persons seeing the robbers hurry down the descent to the Bloody Tower, instantly gave chase.

The fugitives had passed through the archway, and were speeding along the outer ward to the By-ward Tower, when their pursuers burst from the archway of the Bloody Tower, and gave the alarm.

A sentry was on the bridge, near the Middle Tower, but there was only one warder at the time at the first gate.

This was Kenelm. Hearing the alarm, he instantly put himself in a position to stop the fugitives, though he could scarcely believe his eyes when he perceived that the foremost of them was Parson Price. Blood had got a pistol in his right hand, but he kept it concealed under his cassock. Beneath his other arm he tightly grasped the crown.

"What's the matter, sir?" cried Kenelm, barring the way with his halbert, as the fugitives came up.

"Heaven knows! I don't!" rejoined Blood. "But let us pass."

"No, sir; I can't do that," said the warder. "You must stop and give an account of yourselves. I fear I have been greatly mistaken in you, sir."

"No mistake in that!" cried Blood, discharging the pistol at his head.

The bullet brushed the warder's cheek, but did him no harm. Kenelm, however, fell back, and the conspirators rushed on. The sentry on the bridge, startled by the report of the pistol, ordered them to stand; but as they took no heed, he fired at them, and wounding Flodoard in the leg, prevented his further flight. Blood dashed past; but Montalt was seized and detained.

Among the first who came up was Talbot Harland, and finding that Blood had escaped, he hurried after him.

The fugitive flung his useless pistol into the Tower moat, but held another in readiness. He had passed the Lion's Tower without hindrance; but being opposed by another sentry at the Bulwark Gate, he discharged his second pistol at him, and the man, though not hit, dropped.

Once out of the fortress, Blood deemed himself safe. He saw Mandeville, with the horses, near St. Catherine's Gate, and shouted to him. His vigilant follower, who was on the lookout, hastened to meet him.

Loud shouts now told the fugitive that he was hotly pursued; and, looking back, he perceived that Talbot was close behind him. Still he was safe if he could only reach his horse, and Mandeville was pressing on.

Next moment he came up. Blood's hand was upon the saddle, but he could not mount without abandoning the crown, the object of his especial solicitude. While he hesitated, he was seized by Talbot Harland.

"Yield, villain!" cried the young man, almost breathless with exertion. "You are my prisoner!"

Blood offered no resistance, for a dozen musketeers came up at the instant.

No sooner did Mandeville find that his leader was captured, and that he himself must be captured if he stayed, than he galloped off; and though two or three shots were fired at him by the musketeers, he effected his escape.

"What have you got beneath your gown, villain?" demanded Talbot Harland of the captive.

"'Tis the crown," replied Blood, whose *sang-froid* astonished all those around him. "Own that I have made a gallant struggle for it. Our gracious sovereign never fought better for his crown. Had I not been loth to part with the diadem, you would not have captured me."

"The treasonable attempt will cost you your head, villain!"

said Talbot, as he took the crown from him. "Is this all you have laid hands on? You may as well confess; you will be closely searched anon."

The astonishment of the beholders was increased as Blood coolly produced the orb, and delivered it to his captor.

"Search me as closely as you please, you will find nothing more," he said.

"Bring him to the Tower at once," said Talbot to the musketeers, who had surrounded the prisoner. "He will there be interrogated by Sir Gilbert Talbot."

"Hie on, quickly," he added to Kenelm, the warder, who had followed in the pursuit, "and let a cannon be fired to apprize his majesty that this desperate attempt has failed."

Kenelm hurried off instantly on the errand.

As this order was issued, a cloud gathered on the prisoner's brow.

"Has the king received information of the attempt?" he asked.

"Ay," replied Talbot, "or I should not have been here to prevent it."

Blood's brow grew darker, and he uttered a deep malediction.

He was then conducted by the guard to the fortress.

Just as he passed through the yawning archway of the By-ward Tower, the thunder of the cannon resounding from the summit of Traitors' Gate, proclaimed his capture.

CHAPTER XVII

BLOOD IS INTERROGATED BY THE KING

We must now inquire after the poor old custodian, whom we left bound hand and foot, gagged, and in a state of insensibility on the floor of the jewel chamber.

In this state he was found by his wife and daughter, who did their best to succor him, but it is certain he would have died of grief if the crown and orb had not been recovered.

When they were brought back to the Jewel Tower, and once more consigned to his custody, his joy was extravagant.

The table diamond, with the rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones, that had broken from the sceptre, were found upon Flodoard, and restored to the custodian. Nothing, indeed, was lost.

While Blood and his associates underwent an examination by Sir Gilbert Talbot and Lord Feversham, who by this time had arrived at the Tower, Talbot Harland hastened to Whitehall to acquaint the king with the capture of the conspirators.

Charles thanked him warmly for his zeal, and sent for Dorinda and Sabine, that they might hear the details.

Sabine listened to them with the deepest interest; and when Talbot concluded his recital, she again threw herself at the king's feet, and besought her father's life.

Charles raised her kindly, and said, "I am going to the Tower at once, and will interrogate him in person. If mercy can be shown it shall not be withheld. That is all the promise I can make."

Attended only by Talbot Harland, the king then proceeded to the Tower, and on arriving there, repaired at once to the

lieutenant's lodgings, where he found Sir Gilbert Talbot and Lord Feversham, both of whom appeared well pleased to see his majesty.

"Blood is obstinacy personified," said Sir Gilbert. "We have threatened to put him to the rack; but he derides the threat, and declares he will confess nothing save to your majesty. His accomplices are just as obstinate."

"Where is the arch-traitor?" demanded Charles.

"He is now in the Devilin Tower," replied Sir Gilbert. "His comrades are in separate cells of the lower dungeon. One of them has been slightly wounded. Your majesty will be pleased to learn that all the jewels have been recovered."

"That is well," replied Charles. "Let Blood be brought before me. I will interrogate him myself."

Orders were immediately given to that effect; and Charles proceeded to the council-chamber, a large room in which state prisoners were usually examined.

Here the conspirators engaged in the Gunpowder Treason were examined by the commissioners; and a monument was subsequently placed within it to commemorate the event. A bust of King James the First occupied a niche near this monument. Portraits of the Earl of Salisbury, of the Earls of Northampton, Nottingham, and Suffolk, of Sir Edward Cope and Sir William Waad, lieutenant of the Tower in King James's time, adorned the panels. A long oak table stood in the midst of the room, and on either side of this table were ranged carved oak chairs, with a raised seat at the head, on which the king seated himself.

After the lapse of a few minutes, a door at the lower end of the room was opened by Sir Gilbert Talbot, and the prisoner was brought in by two musketeers.

Having placed him at a certain distance from the royal chair, the guards, at a sign from the king, retired. Sir Gilbert Talbot also withdrew.

The king and Blood were then left alone. There was a

brief silence, during which Charles fixed a searching glance upon the prisoner, who bore the scrutiny unmoved.

Blood was now free from the canonicals in which he had disguised himself, and appeared in his ordinary apparel. His demeanor was bold, but respectful; and when brought before the king, he made a profound reverence. As Charles did not address him, he at last broke silence.

“As yet, I have refused to speak,” he said, in a firm voice; “and the torture with which I have been threatened by Sir Gilbert Talbot would not have forced a word from me. But I am ready to answer any question put to me by your majesty.”

“I recognize in you my nocturnal visitor at Knole,” observed Charles, still regarding him steadfastly.

“Yes, my liege, I am he,” replied Blood. “Since that night I have been the happy instrument of saving your majesty from many a secret peril. I have been untiring in my zeal to serve you.”

“The desperate act you have just committed is scarcely consistent with your professions of zeal in my service,” said the king, coldly.

“Is it possible your majesty does not discern my motive for the act?” rejoined Blood, with an almost incredible effrontery. “I fancied it would be palpable to you, if to no one else. Locked up as they now are, those jewels are a mine of wealth entirely lost to your majesty. The idea occurred to me that I could enable you to turn them to account. Had my scheme succeeded, your majesty would have been a gainer by some millions. I know that your privy purse is not too well filled.”

In spite of himself, the king could not help laughing.

“Then you meant first to rob me, and next bring me the proceeds of the robbery, eh?” he said.

“Precisely, my liege, and I think you will own it was an admirably devised plan. For obvious reasons, I could not

consult your majesty beforehand ; but I felt sure you would prefer money to diamonds. Though the scheme has failed, I deserve my reward, since I have endangered my life in your majesty's service."

"I can scarcely credit your representations," said the king, upon whom the prisoner's extraordinary assurance had produced an impression.

"I can convince you of their truth, my liege," said Blood. "You have no one near you, not even Chiffinch, on whom you may so confidently rely as on me. When I had last the honor of conversing with your majesty, I explained that I am the head of a secret society, the members of which are bound by a terrible oath to avenge each other. Were you to put me to death, the poniards of my comrades would inevitably reach you ; but I have no such apprehension. So far from punishing me, I am persuaded you will adequately reward my zeal and devotion. Employ me, sire, and you will find me faithful and ready to obey your slightest behest, *be it what it may*. If I am unscrupulous, I am loyal and staunch to the backbone."

Blood's manner has been described by Evelyn as *dangerously insinuating*. On the present occasion, his rough plausibility captivated the king.

"You are already engaged to the Duke of Buckingham," observed Charles.

"Not to speak it profanely, sire, I do not serve two masters. If I devote myself to you, I shall serve you only. With me at your elbow, you will have nothing to fear. You will learn all the secrets of your enemies."

"Answer me one question, and answer it truly," said the king. "Has the Count de Bellegarde had aught to do with this scheme?"

"I am the sole contriver of it, my liege. The plan, as I have explained, was for your majesty's benefit, and was only confided to those over whom I had perfect control."

For some moments Charles appeared lost in reflection.

Blood watched him narrowly, and felt sure he had gained his point. Nor was he mistaken.

“I think you may prove useful to me,” said the king, at length. “I will therefore retain you. You shall have a post at court.”

“Your majesty will never regret your generosity,” cried Blood, scarcely able to repress his exultation.

“Stay!” exclaimed Charles; “there is a difficulty that I have overlooked. You are the author of the attack on the Duke of Ormond?”

“I will not attempt to deny it, my liege,” returned Blood.

“You must have his pardon as well as mine.”

“His grace will refuse nothing to your majesty. He will forgive me far more readily than he will forgive the Duke of Buckingham.”

Charles made no remark on the latter observation, but struck a small bell that was placed on the table near him.

The summons immediately brought in the guard; while Sir Gilbert Talbot, with Lord Feversham and Talbot Harland, issued from a side door.

Blood folded his arms on his broad chest, and regarded them haughtily. They were all amazed at his audacity.

“I trust your majesty has found the prisoner less contumacious than I found him,” observed Gilbert.

“He has answered all my questions frankly and satisfactorily,” replied Charles.

“Then, I presume, the interrogation is ended. Let him be removed, and taken back to the Devilin Tower.”

Upon this, the guards advanced, but were checked by a gesture from the king.

“The prisoner is free!” cried Charles. “I have pardoned him!”

“Pardoned him, sire?” exclaimed Sir Gilbert, scarcely

able to credit what he heard. "It is not for me to question the wisdom of your majesty's decision, but——"

"His offence is personal to myself."

"True, my liege."

"I have, therefore, a right to forgive it. I have pardoned him and his associates."

"But he has been guilty of other crimes, sire. He is suspected of being the leader of the attack on his Grace of Ormond."

"He has confessed his guilt," said the king. "But there are mitigating circumstances."

"Mitigating circumstances!" exclaimed Lord Feversham, astounded.

"Ay, my lord," replied the king. "You will go at once to Clarendon House; tell the Duke of Ormond what I have said, and use your best endeavors with his grace to obtain from him Colonel Blood's pardon."

"I will do your majesty's bidding," rejoined Lord Feversham; "but I confess that I do not like the errand."

So saying, he withdrew.

"What is to be done with Blood and his associates, sire?" asked Sir Gilbert Talbot.

"Let them be detained till the Duke of Ormond's answer is received," replied the king. "If favorable, as I anticipate it will be, they are immediately to be discharged."

With this, he quitted the council-chamber, and immediately afterwards returned to Whitehall, attended by Talbot Harland.

Before his majesty's departure, Sir Gilbert Talbot besought him to gratify the poor old custodian of the Jewel Tower by a visit; but, though ordinarily good-natured, Charles refused. Perhaps he did not like to see the old man, after pardoning his assailants.

He had not long returned to Whitehall, when Lord Feversham made his appearance.

“ Well, what says the duke ? ” demanded Charles.

“ These are his exact words, my liege : ‘ If his majesty can forgive Blood for stealing the crown, I can easily forgive him the attempt on my life. ’Tis enough for me to learn his majesty’s pleasure.’ That was all he said.”

“ A noble answer, and worthy of him,” cried Charles. “ Now go back to the Tower, and let the prisoners be liberated.”

END OF THE THIRD BOOK

BOOK IV

THE MULBERRY GARDEN

CHAPTER I

FLORIO

Not many days after Colonel Blood's liberation from the Tower, he was established at Whitehall, with a secret pension of five hundred a year.

He now gave himself an air of great importance, dressed richly, and was constantly to be seen amid the throng of courtiers assembled in the Stone Gallery. Though hated by the young gallants, and shunned by the graver members of the court, he escaped insult, owing to his formidable character.

The familiarity with which he was treated by the king could not fail to give him weight, and suitors began to apply to him to use his influence in their behalf with his majesty. But his influence, such as it was, was never exercised—save for a consideration. This he made the applicants clearly understand.

He had the privilege of the back-stairs, and was always privately admitted to the cabinet. He was the terror of ushers, pages, and lackeys, but was on very good terms with Chiffinch, who was secretly rather afraid of him.

With the Count de Bellegarde, Blood was rather distant, and there did not appear to be any intimacy between them.

The conduct of Charles towards a desperado whose offences were so enormous and so notorious, has always appeared incomprehensible to historians—and it remains a mystery to this day, unless we have succeeded in throwing a light upon it.

Blood's apartments were in the wing of the palace that stood between the privy garden and the inner court. The

rooms were pleasant enough, and tolerably well furnished. His three followers, who had been liberated from the Tower at the same time as himself, were constantly with him, and proved very useful in various ways. Perhaps he meditated some other extraordinary *coup*—who knows? If he did so, he was prevented from accomplishing it, as will be seen.

Sabine had disappeared. She had incurred his displeasure, and he made no inquiries about her.

Just before Blood entered upon his post at Whitehall, a very good-looking, dark-eyed youth, named Florio, was appointed one of the queen's pages. Placed in attendance on the maids of honor by Chiffinch, Florio soon became an especial favorite with Dorinda Neville, and was constantly in her ante-chamber.

Talbot Harland could not fail to hear of the pretty page, but, strange to say, he never caught sight of him.

To be jealous of a page was absurd, but Talbot could not repress the feeling; and when paying a visit one morning to Dorinda, he took occasion to mention the matter to her. She laughed at him very heartily, and said:

“Some time ago you chose to be jealous of the Count de Bellegarde. Now you are still more unreasonable, and trouble your silly head about my poor little Florio. I own I am fond of the boy. He is by far the prettiest of her majesty's pages; and so amiable and obliging, that I have chosen him for my own particular attendant, and he devotes himself exclusively to me.”

“So I hear,” replied Talbot, very much piqued by her manner.

“I find him very agreeable,” she pursued. “He sings like a nightingale, and plays the guitar better than the Count de Bellegarde.”

“No end of accomplishments,” observed Talbot, with a sneer.

“My aunt, Lady Muskerri, will tell you that he dances

delightfully. Indeed, he cannot help dancing well, for he has the lightest and most graceful figure imaginable."

It was evident that she wished to heighten her lover's jealousy ; and she succeeded.

Talbot could not conceal his annoyance.

"Is he here?" he cried, quickly. "If so, pray call him. I should like to see whether he is as charming as represented."

"I dare say you will find him in the ante-chamber when you go forth," she rejoined. "I shall certainly not summon him."

"Then I will!" he cried, clapping his hands. "What ho, Florio!"

The door was partially opened, and the symmetrical figure of a page was visible for an instant.

Only for an instant, for Dorinda called out to him not to come in, and the page vanished.

Talbot had sense enough left to perceive that he was making himself ridiculous, and that by any further exhibition of ill-temper, he might forfeit Dorinda's regard.

He, therefore, deemed it expedient to alter his tone ; and had begun to assume a penitent air, when Lady Muskerly came in.

Her ladyship was as fantastically dressed as usual, and her cheeks were covered with fard and patches.

After kissing Dorinda, and saluting Talbot, she said, "I am come to propose a walk in St. James's Park. The morning is enchanting. His majesty and the Duchess of Portsmouth are gone to feed the ducks in the long canal. All the world is out and taking an airing. Shall we go?"

"By all means, aunt," replied Dorinda. "Let us go to Rosamond's Pond and the Birdcage Walk."

"Agreed!" cried her ladyship. "The Birdcage Walk will lead us to the Lime Walk, and the Lime Walk will bring us to the Mulberry Gardens, where there is a concert. We can go in and hear it."

“And while listening to the music, we can eat cheesecakes, aunt. I dote upon the cheesecakes at the Mulberry Gardens.”

“They are excellent,” cried her ladyship. “You shall eat as many as you please.”

“I hope I may be permitted to make one of the party?” said Talbot.

“I counted upon you,” replied Lady Muskerry. “*Apropos*, Dorinda, we must have your pretty page, Florio, with us. You have seen Florio, of course, Mr. Harland? Is he not charming?”

“Mr. Harland saw him for a moment just now, aunt,” interposed Dorinda. “But it is impossible I can bring him.”

“Why not, my love?”

“He never leaves the palace. And if he did, I don’t think Mr. Harland would care for his attendance,” she added, archly.

“Oh, you’re quite mistaken!” he cried.

But finding he was again getting on dangerous ground, he made his bow, promising to meet them in half an hour at Rosamond’s Pond.

As he passed through the ante-chamber, he looked about for Florio, but the page was not to be seen.

There were several pages in the gallery, and Florio might be among them; but how was he to distinguish him?

CHAPTER II

ST. JAMES'S PARK

Never was St. James's Park more agreeable as a place of promenade than in Charles the Second's time.

Properly speaking, it belonged to the palace ; but the good-natured monarch liked to be surrounded by his subjects, and so threw it open to them.

During the Protectorate, the park had been much neglected ; but on the Restoration, Charles laid it out according to his own taste, improving it in many ways by opening a variety of charming walks among the trees, and embellishing them with a multitude of ornamental objects.

Besides enlarging Rosamond's Pond, he formed a long canal, which he stocked with wild-fowl. Narrow as it was, this canal boasted an island, and the island possessed a governor, who was no other than the famous St. Evremont.

Connected with the canal was a large decoy for wild ducks. A ring fence for deer added to the attractions of this part of the park.

Lady Muskerry had correctly informed her niece that the king and the Duchess of Portsmouth had walked forth to the long canal. They were attended by the Duke of Buckingham and the Count de Bellegarde.

His majesty was sauntering slowly along the banks of the canal, feeding the ducks, which swam after him by dozens. Nothing pleased the king more than to witness their contests for the bread which he threw among them. But at last his supply was exhausted, and he walked on with the duchess, who, sooth to say, was not quite so much amused as he was by the spectacle.

The day was delightful. The Green Walk and the Close Walk, which were at the head of Rosamond's Pond, were crowded with richly-attired company—with gallants in velvet doublets of every hue, silken hose and flowing perukes, and with fair dames in exquisite morning costumes.

Though Charles, as we have said, placed no restraint upon those who chose to take exercise within the park, he was rarely intruded upon, and all who now passed him bowed respectfully, and went on.

He was followed, however, at a certain distance, by four individuals, who remained stationary when he halted, and moved on when he resumed his promenade.

These persons were well dressed, and wore long rapiers; and one of them, whose habiliments were somewhat richer, and his rapier even longer, than those of his companions, had a haughty, defiant look, which could belong to no other than Colonel Blood.

Blood it was, who, with his comrades, acted as a guard to the king. Hitherto, Charles had dispensed with such attendance, but Blood persuaded him that the precaution was necessary.

After chatting for some minutes with the Duchess of Portsmouth, Charles allowed her to walk on with Buckingham, and as soon as she was out of hearing, addressed himself to Bellegarde.

"I want some information from you, count," he said. "What has become of Blood's daughter? The ungrateful girl left Whitehall without even staying to thank me for the pardon which, at her solicitation, I had granted her father."

"Perhaps she was afraid of seeing your majesty, thinking you might ask some favor in return, that she might not be disposed to grant."

"Her flight annoyed me greatly," said Charles. "Her image haunts me, and I must see her again. I have questioned Blood about her, but he professes to be entirely ig-

norant of her retreat ; and, in this instance, I think he speaks the truth. Dorinda Neville, I am sure, knows whither she has fled, but I can elicit nothing from her. As a last resource, I address myself to you."

"Your majesty could not apply to anyone less able to assist you."

"Say 'less disposed,' count, and then I may credit the assertion. I am certain you know where she is."

"Since your majesty entertains that conviction, it seems useless for me to affirm the contrary. Nevertheless——"

"Find her for me, and ask what you please."

And without waiting for a reply, he quickened his pace, and rejoined the duchess.

"The Duke of Buckingham has just been relating to me a strange circumstance connected with Claude Duval, sire," observed the duchess, as the king came up.

"With Claude Duval?" exclaimed Charles. "Has the rascal reappeared?"

"He threatens to do so," rejoined Buckingham, laughing.

"I have just received a cartel from him."

"Oddsfish! that's excellent!" cried the king, laughing.

"How was the challenge delivered?"

"Your majesty shall hear," replied the duke. "Pray listen to the story, count," he added, to Bellegarde. "It will amuse you. The other night, while I was chatting with Wycherley and Sedley in the blue saloon, Lady Muskerry and a bevy of fair dames came out of the ball-room, where dancing was going on, and pressed me to sing my ballad about Claude Duval.

"Not being in the humor to oblige them, I excused myself by saying that Duval's achievements had been completely thrown into the shade by Blood's late exploit at the Tower, and that I believed the gallant robber had retired from his profession in disgust. At all events, until he performed some fresh action more daring and surprising than any that had

gone before, I should cease to chant his praises. They tried hard to persuade me to sing a few couplets, but I continued inexorable.

“Well, I thought no more of the circumstance until this morning, when, as I was passing along the Stone Gallery, a page slipped a letter into my hand. Fancying it might be a *billet-doux*, though I had no idea who could send me one, I did not read it at the moment. Guess my surprise when I found that it came from Claude Duval!”

“Have you the letter with you?” inquired the king.

“Yes, my liege,” replied the duke. “And I think the rascal’s impertinence will amuse you. It is addressed, as you perceive, ‘To his Grace the Duke of Buckingham.’”

“MY LORD DUKE,—

“I have felt highly flattered by being made the hero of one of those inimitable ballads which your grace alone can compose, and which afford so much amusement to the wittiest monarch in Europe.

“I am dying to hear the ballad sung by your grace, and I trust you will not refuse me that extraordinary gratification.

“Apropos of this ballad! Your grace was pleased to state the other night, to a party of court dames at Whitehall, that I have retired from my profession in disgust, because I have been superseded by Colonel Blood.

“Your grace has been misinformed. I do not recognize Colonel Blood, and I shall not retire till the list of achievements I have marked out for myself is complete.

“The most important feat of all remains to be accomplished.

“My catalogue, as I need scarcely remark to your grace, who is as well acquainted with it as myself, comprises the names of many illustrious persons—His majesty and the Duchess of Portsmouth, Lady Muskerry and the Duchess of Cleveland, Count de Bellegarde and Mr. Talbot Harland.

“ ‘But it wants the great name of the Duke of Buckingham.

“ ‘I trust to have the honor of an early meeting with your grace, when I will satisfy you that I have not abandoned my old pursuit, and at the same time furnish you with material for the finishing couplet of your incomparable ballad.

“ ‘*A notre prochaine rencontre !*

“ ‘CLAUDE DUVAL.’ ”

All his hearers laughed most heartily as the duke concluded the letter.

“What think you of it, my liege?” cried the duke.

“Think of it!” exclaimed Charles, laughing. “Odds-fish! ’tis the most delicious piece of rodomontade I ever heard.”

“What puzzles me, is how Duval could have heard of the remarks made by your grace to Lady Muskerrey and the other ladies,” observed the duchess, to Buckingham.

“Bah!” cried Charles. “Lady Muskerrey is the greatest gossip on earth, and repeats all the tittle-tattle she hears.”

“Your grace says the letter was delivered to you by a page,” observed Bellegarde. “Did you notice him?”

“I had not time,” replied the duke. “Almost at the instant the note was slipped into my hand, the bearer disappeared.”

“Your grace’s name will figure in Monsieur Duval’s catalogue—on that you may rely,” cried the Duchess of Portsmouth, laughing. “I hope you will oblige him by singing your famous ballad,” she added, with a slightly mocking tone.

“Impossible to foretell what may happen,” rejoined the duke. “But I rather think not.”

“If you *are* caught, I will bet a hundred guineas that you *do* sing it,” cried Bellegarde.

“Done!” rejoined Buckingham. “I will go further; I will give you a hundred guineas for every couplet I sing.”

“And two hundred for the finale,” laughed Bellegarde.

“The bet will come to nothing,” remarked Charles. “The whole thing is a jest, got up at your grace’s expense by the ladies whom you disappointed of the ballad. Ridiculous to suppose that the note in question came from Claude Duval. They are trying to frighten you.”

“I venture to differ in opinion from your majesty,” replied Buckingham. “I believe the note *does* come from Duval. But if the rascal attempts to stop me, he shall pay for his temerity with his life.”

“Come, let us go to the Mulberry Garden, and eat cheese-cakes,” observed Charles, to the Duchess of Portsmouth.

And they walked on in that direction.

CHAPTER III

CHEESECAKES AND CHAMPAGNE

The Mulberry Garden has long since disappeared, and Buckingham Palace occupies its site.

Dr. King’s lines seem almost prophetic. He thus wrote about the spot in 1709 :

“The fate of things lies always in the dark :
What Cavalier would know St. James’s Park ?
A princely palace on that space does rise,
Where Sedley’s noble muse found mulberries.”

The place derived its name from a grove of mulberry trees planted by James I., who was anxious to naturalize the silk-worm ; and although the experiment failed, the trees flourished, and eventually became the chief ornament of the extensive pleasure-gardens laid out on the spot.

Arbors, in which collations and suppers could be served; smooth-shaven grass-plots, on which dancing sometimes took place; long, shady alleys, or "lovers' walks" as they were styled; and a wilderness, so thick and tangled, that those who ventured within it were not unfrequently lost; these constituted the attractions of the Mulberry Garden.

In the midst stood a tavern, renowned for its wines and its cuisine, and noted also for the extravagance of its charges. To this tavern was attached a large room, in which concerts, balls, and other entertainments were given.

No place of public amusement was more in vogue than the Mulberry Garden in the time of the Merry Monarch. It is often referred to by the dramatists and satirical writers of the period, and has given the title to one of Sedley's best comedies. Amongst other things, the place was celebrated for its cheesecakes. Everybody resorted there to eat them.

His majesty's appearance in the Mulberry Garden did not create any extraordinary sensation—it being understood that at such times he entirely dispensed with form and etiquette. Of course, a certain deference was paid him, and his movements and those of his attendants were watched with interest, but no one intruded upon the royal party.

Though the hour was early, there was a good deal of well-dressed company in the garden, and a peculiar character was given to the scene, since many of the ladies wore lloo masks.

The pleasant game of pall-mall, which, after a long discontinuance, has been revived in our days under the appellation of croquet, was being played with great spirit by a number of fair dames and gallantly attired gallants on the lawn.

A band placed in an orchestra near the tavern enlivened the company with its strains. Mirth and good humor seemed generally to prevail, for a good deal of jesting and laughter was heard among the assemblage. To make the most of the passing hour, and banish reflection, was the main object in those halcyon days.

No one went to the Mulberry Garden save for amusement ; and everybody found it there, except, perhaps, those who were jealous of their spouses. But these were in the minority, since, happily, jealousy was then out of fashion.

We shall not follow the couples that sought the seclusion of the shady alleys, or lost themselves amid the groves of mulberry trees, but confine ourselves to the lively picture offered to our view in the centre of the garden. There we shall find plenty to look at.

On the lawn, as we have said, or on the broad gravel walks around it, all the best part of the company was assembled. A concert was going on in the music-hall within the tavern, but few stayed to listen to it. The day being very fine, they preferred the open air amusements.

Little parties were collected round rustic tables placed beneath the mulberry trees, devouring cheesecakes and drinking sillabub ; while others, who preferred retirement, had similar refreshments served to them in the arbors.

Altogether, it was a very gay scene, and he must have been a cynic indeed who could not be amused by it.

On entering the Mulberry Garden, the first persons whom his majesty, and those with him, encountered, were Lady Muskerry and her companions.

Notwithstanding her absurdities, her ladyship was a great favorite with the Duchess of Portsmouth, and she was, consequently, permitted to join the royal party. Dorinda, who was very fond of pall-mall, and played the game to admiration, was invited to join the party on the lawn, and readily assented.

Talbot likewise excelled in the game, and took care not to be left out ; and the Count de Bellegarde, who played at everything, and played everything well, followed suit.

Lady Muskerry would have followed suit, but her niece would not allow her to make herself publicly ridiculous.

While engaged in this pleasant pastime, Dorinda looked

charming. Nothing could be better calculated to display the singular graces of her figure than this game ; and her bloom was heightened by the exercise.

Talbot was more in love than ever ; and having eyes only for her, played very badly, and got laughed at, while Bellegarde performed wonders.

The king, who, as we know, liked all sorts of pastimes, watched the game with interest, and bestowed unqualified commendation on Dorinda's performance.

Colonel Blood felt it incumbent upon himself to follow his royal master into the garden, but he kept at a respectful distance ; and, seeing that the king was likely to remain, he sat down with his comrades at a table under a mulberry-tree, whence he could discern all that was going on.

"I thought we came here to eat cheesecakes, and not to look at that tiresome game of pall-mall," observed the duchess.

Begging her a thousand pardons, Charles addressed himself to Buckingham, who undertook that all should be ready in a very few minutes ; and he hurried off to be as good as his word, for he presently returned, and conducted them to an arbor, where an excellent collation had been laid out.

They were waited upon by the master of the garden, and his principal attendants. No ceremony was observed. Lady Muskerry and Buckingham sat down at the table, and, ere long, the party was reinforced by Dorinda and the two gallants, when they had finished their game at pall-mall.

The ladies greatly enjoyed the cheesecakes, and did not object to the champagne that accompanied them.

The Count de Bellegarde, as usual, made himself extremely agreeable, and was diverting the company with a very amusing story, when his cloak was slightly pulled, and a billet slipped into his hand.

Seated, as he was, at the entrance of the arbor, his position favored the delivery of the billet.

Covering it with his laced handkerchief, he went on with his story, as if nothing had happened.

Perhaps he thought the incident had escaped observation. If so, he was mistaken.

As soon as he finished, the king began to rally him unmercifully.

“What, count!” he cried; “the ladies will not let you alone! You cannot pass an hour in the Mulberry Garden without making a conquest!”

“More conquests are made in the Mulberry Garden than anywhere else,” observed Buckingham; “but the billet just received by the count came from the palace.”

“How know you that?” cried Charles.

“Because it was delivered by a page.”

“Are you certain?”

“Ask Talbot Harland, sire. He is sitting opposite Bellegarde, and must have seen the bearer of the billet.”

“He certainly appeared to be a page,” said Talbot, when appealed to by his majesty. “But he was masked.”

“Oddsfish! that does not mend the matter,” cried Charles.

Then, turning to Bellegarde, he added, “Your inamorata ought to be more prudent than to send a page here on such an errand.”

“Have I your majesty’s permission to open the billet?”

“Oh! by all means. I feel for your impatience,” cried the king, in a bantering tone.

“’Tis not from a lady!” said the count.

“Not from a lady!” exclaimed Buckingham. “Then I’ll be sworn it comes from Claude Duval.”

“A good guess,” cried Bellegarde. “It is from Duval. What is more, it relates to your grace.”

“To me! Then pray let us hear it,” said the duke.

“Fortunately, it is not long,” observed Bellegarde, proceeding to read the note.

“MONSIEUR LE COMTE,—

“You are a friend of the Duke of Buckingham, and may possibly learn from his grace that I have a little affair to arrange with him.

“Our meeting is unavoidable, and cannot be long delayed.

“Should the duke venture to ride forth alone, I would counsel him to carry plenty of cash. He will find it more serviceable than pistols.

“Pray tell him so from

“CLAUDE DUVAL.”

“After this warning, your grace is scarcely likely to ride out unattended,” observed Bellegarde, in a slightly mocking tone. “But if you do, carry a well-lined purse in your pocket. ’Twill be the safest plan.”

“I will carry something better,” rejoined the duke, rather sharply. “But how comes it that the rascal can get his notes delivered by one of the royal pages?”

“Pooh! the whole thing is a jest,” cried the king. “I believe Lady Muskerry herself to be at the bottom of it.”

“I, sire!” exclaimed her ladyship. “I have always maintained that Monsieur Claude Duval is the mirror of politeness, and dances the gaillarde better than any other man, but I don’t bribe the pages to convey his letters.”

“But haven’t you and your niece been playing a trick upon the duke? Come!—confess!”

“Your majesty is quite wrong in your suspicions,” observed Dorinda.

“’Tis all very well to deny it,” whispered Talbot to Dorinda; “but you must have had some hand in the trick, I am quite sure. This mysterious page is no other than your favorite Florio.”

“Hush!” she rejoined, imposing silence upon him. “Don’t speak of Florio now.”

CHAPTER IV

MORE CHAMPAGNE AND CHEESECAKES

We left Colonel Blood and his companions seated at a table beneath a mulberry tree.

The colonel had ordered a flask of Rhenish, and they had nearly finished it, when, to their great surprise, they saw the old custodian of the Jewel Tower and his daughter approach them.

Old Edwards looked very feeble, but Edith was as charming and coquettish as ever. She was very tastefully attired, and her symmetrical figure and golden tresses excited general admiration. She had to sustain a good deal of ogling as she moved along the walk, and she sustained it well.

Blood was not in the slightest degree abashed by the sight of the man whose life he had well-nigh taken; on the contrary, he appeared delighted to see him.

Uttering a joyful exclamation, he sprang from his seat, and rushing towards Edwards, seized both his hands, and after shaking them cordially, saluted his daughter.

Scarcely giving the old man time to speak, Blood forced him into a chair, and then called out lustily to an attendant to bring a bottle of champagne, with a dish of cheesecakes for the young lady.

If Blood only feigned satisfaction at the old custodian's unexpected appearance, Montalt was really enchanted to see Edith again. His passion for the golden-tressed damsel had by no means abated.

With the utmost *empressement* he led her to a seat at the table, and recommenced the attentions he had paid her at the Jewel Tower. Nor were his attentions unfavorably re-

ceived. Things had taken such an extraordinary turn, that she could not be angry with him.

Luckily, the champagne was not long in coming, and a glass of it raised the old man's spirits, and brought back all his daughter's vivacity.

"Another glass, my good friend," said Blood, pouring out a bumper. "You can now afford to laugh at that adventure in the Jewel Tower. Ho, ho! there's a mystery about that affair," he added, with a tremendous wink, "a mystery which, with all your penetration, you will never be able to unriddle."

"I can solve the enigma," remarked Edith; "but it won't do to speak out."

And she glanced at Montalt, who replied by a significant look, that told her she was quite right in her surmise.

"The affair has certainly had a very different result from what might have been anticipated," observed Edwards to Blood. "*You* have been honored and rewarded, while *I* have been upbraided and disgraced."

"Not disgraced, father," interposed Edith. "You have not been commended by his majesty for your conduct, but you have not been disgraced."

"Not to be commended under such circumstances is equivalent to disgrace," said Edwards. "At least, I feel it to be so."

"A drop more champagne, my good friend," said Blood, again filling his glass. "'Twill cheer your heart. To what lucky chance do I owe the pleasure of seeing you and your fair daughter in the Mulberry Garden?"

"I have been to Whitehall in quest of you, colonel, and have followed you hither," said Edwards.

"Then you have some favor to solicit, my worthy sir," rejoined Blood, in a patronizing tone. "'Tis granted ere 'tis asked. I have some little interest with his majesty."

"I am quite aware of it, colonel," said the other; "I am told that suitors now constantly apply to you."

"You have not been incorrectly informed," observed Blood. "But what can I do for you?—ha!"

"My father desires nothing, colonel, except to have his case represented to the king," interposed Edith. "His feelings are hurt that his services have not been recognized."

"But I am scarcely a fitting person to represent his case," said Blood, with a half-smile.

"Pardon me!" cried Edwards; "no one knows so well as yourself what efforts I made to preserve the crown."

"Let me tell you in confidence, my good friend," said Blood, tapping his nose as he spoke, "you would have pleased his majesty much better if you had offered no resistance. Do you understand?—ha!"

"I would rather not understand," replied Edwards. "I did my duty."

"And you have your reward!" observed Blood, with a sneer.

"I always tell my father that he did wrong," said Edith; "but I can't convince him."

"You never will convince him," rejoined the old man. "A few gracious words from his majesty are all I ask; and those he cannot, will not, refuse me."

"No more, my good friend. You quite touch my feelings," cried the arch-hypocrite. "I *will* mention the matter to his majesty, and I doubt not I shall prevail; but you have unwittingly offended him."

"Is it possible he can entertain such feelings towards one who has risked his life in defence of his trust?"

"My good friend, you will not understand. But come, champagne is the best remedy for grief. Here is a fresh bottle. Try it. Help the young lady, Montalt. We will drink to your daughter's speedy marriage. My friend Montalt is just as eligible as Cadwallader Pugh. He has not got three hundred a year in land, or Merlin's Cave, with its hidden treasures; but he is a handsome young gallant, though I say it to his face, and knows how to make money."

“And to spend it, too, I doubt not,” said Edwards. “Such a graceless galliard will not suit me.”

“I should take umbrage at the term you have applied to me, sir,” exclaimed Montalt; “did not my love for your fair daughter restrain me. Let me tell you, sir, that I am in a fair way of promotion; and when, through the interest of Colonel Blood, I have obtained the post to which I aspire, you will think very differently of me.”

“Between ourselves, ’tis an excellent post,” observed Blood to the old custodian. “But I must not particularize it.”

“You will excuse me if I appear distrustful, colonel; but I have been deceived once.”

“You were wrong then, my good friend, and are wrong now,” said Blood, in a low, confidential tone. “Don’t discourage the young gentleman’s suit. Your daughter evidently likes him.”

“We will talk more about it when he has got the post,” rejoined Edwards. “Meantime, I cannot allow him to come to the Jewel Tower.”

Edith and her suitor here exchanged a glance, which seemed to intimate that the prohibition would not be very strictly attended to.

Just at this moment, the royal party, having finished their repast, issued from the arbor, and proceeded along the walk that passed near the table where Blood and the others were seated.

“As I live, there is his majesty!” cried Edwards. “I did not know he was in the garden. Here is the opportunity I have prayed for. Present me to him, I entreat you, colonel.”

“Impossible, my good friend—quite impossible!” cried Blood, rising from his seat, and looking very much disturbed. “However much I may desire to serve you, I cannot—dare not do it. His majesty would be highly displeased. Take my advice, and keep out of his sight.”

“Get them out of the garden as quickly as you can,” he added in a whisper to Montalt.

Montalt made an attempt to obey, but neither Edwards nor his daughter would stir from the spot.

Edith had caught sight of the Count de Bellegarde ; and, besides, the vain little coquette almost fancied that his majesty would notice her.

CHAPTER V

THE OLD CUSTODIAN OBTAINS A PENSION FROM THE KING

Meanwhile, the royal party came on, laughing and talking gaily.

The king and the Duchess of Portsmouth were a little in advance of the others.

“His majesty will listen to me, I am sure !” cried Edwards, seized by an irresistible impulse. “Since you refuse to present me, I will throw myself at his feet.”

“Madman !” cried Blood, trying to detain him.

But the old custodian broke away from his grasp, and, rushing forward, prostrated himself before the king.

So sudden was the act, that Charles really thought the suppliant had lost his senses.

“’Tis the keeper of the Crown jewels, sire. Do you not recognize him ?” said the Duchess of Portsmouth.

“Oddsfish ! so it is,” cried the king, rather annoyed at being thus addressed in public, but assuming a gracious manner. “Arise, my good friend, and tell me what I can do for you.”

“I have suffered much, my liege ; but I ask nothing beyond an assurance from your majesty that I have faithfully

discharged my trust. If I do not receive it, I shall die heart-broken."

"Brave old man! he deserves a noble recompense," cried the duchess.

"Great injustice appears to have been done you, my good friend, but it shall be promptly repaired," said the king, in a sympathizing voice. "From what you say, I fear that the messages, expressive of my strong approval of your conduct, have not been delivered to you."

"No such messages have reached me, my liege," replied the old man. "But it gladdens my heart to learn that you are satisfied with me. I feared otherwise."

"You shall have wherewithal to gladden your heart," cried Charles. "Services like yours cannot be adequately rewarded, but a pension shall at once be bestowed upon you. Let this be done," he added to Buckingham.

"I humbly thank your majesty for your bounty," said the old man, bending deeply. "But your gracious words are more to me than the pension. I shall now die content."

"Talk not of dying," cried Charles in a tone well calculated to cheer him. "I trust you will live long to guard my jewels. But is not that your daughter? Methinks, I remember her. Bid her come forward."

The pretty coquette was prepared for the summons, and would, no doubt, have been sadly disappointed if she had not received it.

But her father looked confounded, and seeing that the old man was quite unequal to the occasion, Bellegarde flew to her aid, and led her towards the king.

Edith acquitted herself very well in the little ceremony that ensued, and made so graceful a reverence, that the Duchess of Portsmouth turned away in displeasure.

Bashfulness was not the pretty damsel's foible, and though all eyes were upon her, she displayed no embarrassment. The compliments paid her by his majesty were far more agreeable

to her than they were to the proud dame who overheard them; and the latter being determined to put a stop to the interview, signed to Bellegarde to take her away, and the count was forced to comply—but not before the amorous monarch had made the fair damsel comprehend that he was not insensible to her charms.

Blood did not venture to approach the king, fearing he might have incurred his displeasure; and the cold glance thrown at him by his majesty as he passed out of the garden, did not tend to reassure him.

As to Montalt, he had noticed the effect produced upon the king by Edith's charms, and redoubled his attentions to the bewitching damsel.

END OF THE FOURTH BOOK

BOOK V

THE COURT AT WINDSOR CASTLE

CHAPTER I

HOW THE DUKE OF YORK HUNTED THE HART IN WINDSOR FOREST

About a week after the visit to the Mulberry Garden, their majesties and the court removed from Whitehall to Windsor Castle.

In this regal residence, which has not its peer in Europe, the entertainments given were on a more splendid scale than at Whitehall. Besides all the principal nobles connected with the court, the Duke and Duchess of York, with all their retinue, had been invited, so that the castle, vast as it is, was filled with guests.

To see the fair dames, arrayed in the richest and most becoming costumes, gathered together on the magnificent terraces, was a charming sight. To see them troop forth into the great park to fly the falcon, or to chase the deer, habited in their riding-dresses of green velvet, and attended by their cavaliers in their picturesque hunting costumes, was a yet more splendid spectacle.

Every day, the Duke of York, who delighted in the chase, and seemed indefatigable, hunted the stag in the forest, and all who shared his tastes attended him.

But there were others who liked hawking just as well as hunting—perhaps, preferred it; since that pleasant pastime was not so fatiguing, and did not separate them from the objects of their adoration—and these went with the king and the Duchess of Portsmouth.

Among the number was Talbot Harland. He was at all the hawking parties, and ever by the side of Dorinda. The Duchess of Portsmouth took a warm interest in his suit, and

obtained a promise from the king that if the marriage could be arranged, he would give the fair damsel a handsome portion. This was communicated by the duchess to Dorinda, who said she would think seriously on the subject, and come to a speedy decision.

Since the court had been at Windsor Castle, Talbot had not been troubled about Florio. If he was there with the other pages, as was most probable, Talbot saw nothing of him, and Dorinda never mentioned him.

Of course, the Count de Bellegarde was at the castle. The most amusing person connected with the court could not be left out. Fond of active sport, and having no love affair on hand at the moment, the count hunted daily with the Duke of York, and appeared quite as insensible to fatigue as his royal highness himself. The hardest day's work never tired him. He was full of vivacity at dinner, nor did his spirits flag in the evening.

But the chase seemed to have become an all-absorbing passion with him. He talked of nothing else; and, at last, his descriptions, though vivid, became monotonous. The Duke of York sang his praises, and declared he had never seen a Frenchman ride so boldly, or kill a stag so featly, as the Count de Bellegarde.

No wonder the count enjoyed the chase in Windsor Forest. Nowhere else could hunting be had in such perfection as in that incomparable deer-park—nowhere else could such noble harts be found—nowhere could finer woodland scenery be gazed upon—nowhere could lovelier glades or smoother lawns be galloped over.

While hunting and hawking took place in the great park, revels were held in the castle. Every day the distinguished guests sat down to a grand banquet in St. George's Hall; every night there was a ball.

Play went on as at Whitehall. Bellegarde was more frequently in the card-room than the ball-room. But since he

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The Robbery of the Crown Jewels

His intention had been to beat the crown flat with the mallet, in order that he might carry it off with greater ease : but he was now seized with compunction, and stayed his impious hand. The magnificent diadem was, therefore, fortunately preserved from destruction.

While he was thus deliberating, the poor old custodian made desperate but unavailing efforts to free himself, and groaned so dismally, that Blood, with a deep imprecation, threatened to brain him if he did not remain quiet.

had taken with so much ardor to the chase, his customary good luck seemed to have deserted him. Whether he played at ombre or basset, he lost; and the Duke of Buckingham won a considerable sum from him at piquet.

Apropos of Buckingham, we may mention that his grace had not yet had an encounter with Claude Duval, though he declared he had given the rascal repeated opportunities of putting his threats into execution.

One night—it might be at the instigation of the Count de Bellegarde, who liked a little mischief—another attempt was made by Lady Muskerry to induce the duke to sing his famous ballad. He declined to gratify her.

“Excessively sorry to refuse your ladyship,” he said; “but I don’t mean to sing my ballad again till I can add the finishing couplet to it.”

“You will have to sing it to Claude Duval should you meet him,” observed Bellegarde, with a laugh. “Remember, we have a bet on the subject.”

“I have not forgotten it,” rejoined the duke. “But what can I do? I can’t go in search of the rascal, and he seems afraid to meet me.”

“It looks like it, I must own,” said Bellegarde. “But I begin to be of his majesty’s opinion, that the cartel came from Lady Muskerry.”

“*Méchant!*” cried her ladyship, tapping him playfully with her fan. “You know perfectly well I had nothing to do with it. I won’t forgive you, unless you dance the gavotte with me.”

Professing that nothing would delight him so much, the count led her to the ball-room.

Next day there was a stag-hunt, as usual, in the Great Park. Many a noble gallant rode forth with the Duke of York; but not one could compare, in richness of apparel or distinction of appearance, with Buckingham or Bellegarde, both of whom joined the hunting-party.

It would have been difficult to say which of the two was the most splendidly equipped, or the best mounted. They formed the most conspicuous figures among the crowd of huntsmen collected that morning on Cranbourne Chase, dotted with old oaks and thorns, lying to the right of the Long Walk, which had then only been recently planted by Charles.

No court dames graced the party with their presence. They were all out hawking with the king and the Duchess of Portsmouth in the Home Park.

Pleasant it was to watch the cavalcade as it proceeded at a slow pace with the hounds, which were held in leash, to a covert on the further side of the plain.

Here a noble hart was quickly unharbored. Horns were blown, hounds unslipped, and, amid joyous outcries, the chase commenced.

“Hyke, Ringwood!—hyke, Rupert!” shouted the Duke of York, cheering on the pack as the hart flew swiftly across the plain, in the direction of a thicket on the heights about two miles off, and known as Hawk’s Hill Wood.

Once within the thicket, the hart was safe for a short time; but being at last driven out, he dashed down a long, sweeping glade, bordered on either side by magnificent trees.

Nothing could be more animating than the chase at this moment. The stag was in full view—the hounds were speeding after him, making the woods ring with their melody—and the whole splendid cavalcade was galloping on at the top of their speed.

At the head of the group rode the Duke of York; and close behind him came Buckingham and Bellegarde, both looking as full of excitement as the prince himself.

But the hart ran very fleetly, and soon began to outstrip his pursuers. At first, they thought he was making for the Great Lake, which lay amid the woods on the right, and in the immediate neighborhood of which the ground was marshy and extremely dangerous; but, fortunately, he turned off in a dif-

ferent direction, and led them into a more open part of the forest.

Here the country was beautifully undulating—rising into gentle knolls crowned with trees, or dipping into dells, and everywhere offering charming sylvan prospects ; but the huntsmen, as may be supposed, thought only of the stag ; and as long as they kept him in view, cared for little else.

They had ridden on in this way for two or three miles, and were close upon the confines of Ascot Heath, whither it seemed certain that the hart would take them, when the Duke of Buckingham's charger fell suddenly lame, and prevented him from going on with the hunt.

Bellegarde had no time to express his regret at the accident ; but he cast a look of concern at the duke, as he galloped off with the others.

Buckingham found, on examination, that his horse had sprained a sinew ; but hoping to reach the castle before the poor animal became dead lame, he rode him slowly on.

Naturally, he took the shortest route ; and as more than a mile would be saved by passing through the woods that surrounded the Great Lake, he plunged into them, being tolerably well acquainted with their intricacies.

It has already been stated that, in the immediate vicinity of the lake, there was a dangerous swamp. On issuing from the thicket, the duke came upon this marsh, which did not betray itself in appearance from the solid ground.

No sooner did the unfortunate animal set foot upon the treacherous surface than he was engulfed, and, while floundering about, sank deeper and deeper.

With great difficulty, the duke extricated himself from his perilous position, but he could not save his horse. In a few minutes, the doomed animal, which continued to struggle violently to the last, disappeared altogether.

CHAPTER II

IN WHAT MANNER BUCKINGHAM ENCOUNTERED CLAUDE
DUVAL

Buckingham was standing on the bank of the lake, rooted to the spot, in a kind of stupor, when he heard sounds in the wood that convinced him that horsemen were at hand, and, naturally concluding they must belong to the chase, he called out loudly.

His cry evoked a person who astonished him as much as if the wild huntsman, who once haunted the shores of that gloomy mere, had suddenly appeared before him on his sable steed, and attended by his swart hounds.

A masked horseman, wrapped in a long, black cloak, burst from the wood, and drew up at a little distance from him. The duke knew at once that it must be Claude Duval.

The redoubted robber was not alone, but was attended only by a stripling, who was masked like himself, and equally well mounted. The figure of this youth, well-defined in a picturesque green velvet riding-dress, was of almost feminine slightness and symmetry.

The graceful squire kept close behind his master.

Removing his feathered hat, Duval courteously saluted the duke. Buckingham haughtily returned the salutation.

“The devil, whom you serve, and who has lent you a helping hand, by first laming my horse, and then stifling him in this cursed quagmire, must have brought you hither!” he cried; “you could not otherwise have discovered me.”

“Pardon me,” rejoined Duval, with the marked and peculiar Gascon accent by which his speech was ever characterized; “I did not derive my information from the source you

suppose. I am really concerned to find your grace in this unpleasant predicament, because you may think I am taking an unfair advantage of you."

"No matter what I think," said Buckingham. "You are armed, and on horseback; I am on foot, and without pistols; so there is nothing for it but submission on my part."

"I am glad to find your grace so complaisant," replied Duval; "I was rather apprehensive, from some remarks that have been repeated to me, that I might have been obliged to——"

"No more," interrupted the duke, impatiently. "Here is my purse."

"Well filled, I hope?"

"It ought to contain two hundred pistoles, which I won last night at piquet from the Count de Bellegarde. If the amount is not exact, you must blame the count, not me."

"The Count de Bellegarde is a man of honor," said Duval. "'Tis a paltry sum, but the amount is immaterial. What is important, is the fame that will accrue to me from this encounter with your grace."

At a sign from his master, the youthful squire then rode up, and, with a graceful bow, took the purse from the duke.

"By my faith, a pretty page!" exclaimed Buckingham, struck by the youth's manner.

"I had counted upon the pleasure of hearing your grace's celebrated ballad," observed Duval; "but, under the circumstances, I will not press you to sing it. However, you will now be able to add the final couplet."

"The laugh is decidedly against me," said the duke. "But you ought to give me my revenge."

"*Pardieu!* I am quite ready to do so—in any way your grace may desire," rejoined Duval.

"Accord me another meeting."

"Your grace does me infinite honor. I shall be charmed."

“Do not misunderstand me. This must be a hostile meeting. I shall come to it armed.”

“*Tant mieux!* ’Tis not my fault that you are unarmed at the present moment. If perfectly agreeable to your grace, we will meet, three nights hence, at midnight, on Cranbourne Chase. Your grace shall be at liberty to bring a parrain with you—say Mr. Talbot Harland. I will only bring with me my faithful squire, Léon. But I engage—*foi de Duval!*—that he shall offer no interference whatever. You hear, Léon?”

The youthful squire bowed assent.

“I agree!” cried Buckingham. “On the third night hence—at midnight—I shall look for you on Cranbourne Chase. I will bring with me Mr. Talbot Harland, and will bind him to secrecy.”

“I have one condition to make,” said Duval.

“Name it,” rejoined the duke.

“If I fall, you will not remove my mask.”

“I will not—I swear it!” cried Buckingham.

Here Léon made a movement towards his master; but Duval motioned him back.

“Your grace will aid the poor boy to carry off my body?” he cried.

“Rest easy: your wish shall be fulfilled,” rejoined Buckingham. “What is more, I promise to defer the final couplet of my ballad till after the next meeting.”

“In that case, you may never have an opportunity of finishing it,” said Duval. “I have the honor to salute your grace.”

Next moment, Buckingham was left alone by the side of the lake.

CHAPTER III

LÉON REMOVES HIS MASK

Claude Duval had reached the centre of the thicket, when his course being impeded by underwood, he came to a halt, and perceived that Léon was weeping.

Now that the squire's mask was removed, it could be seen that the features it had hidden were those of an extraordinarily beautiful young woman.

We have already seen that charming face, under more than one aspect.

"In tears, *mignonne!*" exclaimed Duval. "Don't dim those bright eyes. I thought you were laughing at the successful issue of my encounter with Buckingham."

"I can only think of the hostile meeting you have appointed with him," she replied. "I hope it may not prove fatal to you. I have a presentiment of ill."

"Fatal! Ha! ha!" he cried. "Why, I have fought twenty duels, and mean to fight as many more. Buckingham will not harm me, *mignonne*. If you allow yourself to feel any uneasiness, it ought to be for *him*."

"You don't mean to kill him?" she cried, anxiously.

"*Ma foi, non!* But since he has provoked me to the combat, I shall give him cause to remember it. He shall not boast too loudly of his duel with Claude Duval."

"All you say doesn't cheer me," she rejoined, sadly. "What will happen to me if you fall?"

"You must find another lover, I suppose. But I don't contemplate such a catastrophe."

"You seemed to contemplate it just now."

“Pshaw! that was nothing. One must mention such things.”

“You are never serious; but it is a serious matter to me. I wish you wouldn’t meet the duke.”

“I should deserve to forfeit your love if I complied with the request. I cannot retreat. After I have settled this little affair, we will go to Paris.”

“Oh, that will be delightful!” she exclaimed, brightening up at the idea. “But you have talked so often of taking me to Paris, that you must excuse me if I still doubt.”

“I will fulfil my promise now, little sceptic,” he cried. “To confess the truth, I am tired of my follies. There must be an end of them some time. I meant the encounter I have just had with Buckingham to be the last. But he has forced me into a duel, and I cannot avoid meeting him.”

“Why not? He knows you only as Claude Duval.”

“What matter? Claude Duval has his honor to maintain, as well as the Count de Bellegarde. Buckingham shall not come off with flying colors. The final couplet of his ballad shall be descriptive of his own defeat.”

“Heaven grant it may be so!” ejaculated Sabine, fervently.

“Courage, *ma mie!*” he exclaimed, in a voice calculated to banish her apprehensions. “All will be well, rely on it. You will soon see Paris, delicious St. Cloud, and superb Versailles. Meanwhile, let us pass the time merrily. Banish care. I will explain my plans to you as soon as I have definitely arranged them; but whatever I may do, you must not leave Windsor Castle till the evening of the duel.”

“Command, and I will obey,” she rejoined.

“I have no more orders to give just now. Neither must we linger here. Hist! there is some one among the trees. ’Tis Buckingham, I’ll be sworn. Let us haste to the forester’s hut, where I have left my steed, where I can change my attire and my peruke, and do all that is necessary for my re-appear-

ance in my proper character. *Adieu, mon ami Duval ! Soyez le bienvenu, Monsieur le Comte de Bellegarde !*”

And laughing gaily, he forced his way through the wood, followed by Sabine.

CHAPTER IV

BUCKINGHAM'S PURSE IS RESTORED BY BELLEGARDE

Having no alternative but to proceed to the castle on foot, and not choosing to trust himself to the marshy ground near the lake, Buckingham struck into the wood.

But ill luck seemed to attend him. He lost his way, and for more than an hour was involved in the thicket.

As he ascended the long glade leading to the summit of Sion Hill, he looked about in every direction for his companions of the chase, but could see nothing of them.

At length, the trampling of a horse caught his ears, and, turning at the sound, he perceived the Count de Bellegarde galloping towards him.

The count naturally expressed surprise to find the duke on foot, and on hearing what had happened, immediately dismounted, and offered his own horse to his grace. Buckingham, however, declined the obliging offer, and, soon afterwards, was accommodated with a horse by a huntsman who came up. His grace described the accident that had befallen him in the quagmire near the lake, but said nothing about his encounter with Claude Duval.

If any suspicions as to the possibility of the count having personated the gallant robber had crossed him, they were now entirely dispelled.

Bellegarde, by his own account, had seen the stag killed

on Ascot Heath, and had hunted a second hart with the Duke of York, when, having had enough, or for some other reason, he quitted the chase.

“Where his highness has got to, heaven knows!” he cried. “But I think the hart he is now hunting will take him to Bagshot Heath—perhaps to Reading.”

“I thought you were never fatigued, count,” observed Buckingham.

“Rarely,” he replied. “Nor must your grace imagine I am fatigued now. But I have some preparations to make.”

“Preparations for what?” asked the duke, curiously.

“For my journey to Paris. I am going thither to-morrow.”

“Going to Paris to-morrow!” cried Buckingham, in surprise. “I need not say how sorry I shall be to lose you. Have you announced your departure to his majesty? I am sure he will be grieved.”

“I have said nothing about it as yet. In fact, it was only yesterday that I received an order from the Duke of Orleans, summoning me to St. Cloud. I am strongly inclined to disobey the mandate, but I dare not.”

“No; you must go,” cried Buckingham. “But come back soon, or the Duchess of Portsmouth will break her heart. During your exile from court she was inconsolable.”

“You flatter me. But I am not quite so necessary to my fair cousin’s happiness as your grace imagines. She will soon reconcile herself to my absence.”

The foregoing conversation occurred in the Long Walk, at that time bordered by double rows of young trees, planted by Charles, to whom we are indebted for the present magnificent avenue to the castle.

As the interlocutors approached the regal pile, they met the hawking party, with the king and the Duchess of Portsmouth at its head, returning from the Home Park.

His majesty halted, to talk to them; and noticing the sorry

steed on which Buckingham was mounted, inquired whether any accident had happened to him in the chase.

The duke described how he had lost his charger in the marsh, near the lake, and Charles was expressing regret at the occurrence, when a singular smile on Bellegarde's countenance caught his attention. He asked the count why he laughed.

"Not at the duke's misfortune, your majesty may be quite sure," replied Bellegarde. "I smile because his grace has omitted the best part of the story. I have been wondering whether he would relate it."

"Ah! what is it?" said the king, to Buckingham.

"Faith, sire, I have not the least idea," rejoined the duke, evasively.

"Then I must tell it myself," observed Bellegarde. "If any of the details are incorrect, his grace will set me right."

These preliminary observations caused Dorinda Neville and several other fair equestrians to press forward; and a little circle was formed round the count, everybody being curious to hear his narration.

"I had quitted the chase at Ascot Heath," commenced Bellegarde, in the lively manner that peculiarly belonged to him; "and had just entered the wood that bounds the Great Park, when I observed two persons galloping along a glade.

"I ought to mention that I was alone at the time. Thinking the persons I beheld were hastening to join the chase, I halloed to them, and they instantly stopped. I then saw the mistake I had committed. Both were masked."

"Oddsfish! I'll wager this is another story of Claude Duval!" exclaimed the king.

"Both were masked, as I have said," pursued Bellegarde; "and this circumstance roused my suspicions—or, rather, I should say, convinced me that one of them was the audacious rascal whom your majesty has just mentioned. He was

as finely dressed as any of your train, and attended by a youthful squire.

“Well, they both rode towards me. Not expecting such an encounter in the park, and being unarmed, while I remarked that Duval had pistols in his holsters, my first impulse was to gallop off; but having very little to lose, I remained stationary.

“As Duval came up, he bowed very politely, and, of course, I returned the salute. ‘*Bon jour*, Monsieur Duval,’ I cried. ‘I am rather surprised to see you here in his majesty’s park in broad daylight.’

“‘I don’t know why you should express surprise at seeing me, Monsieur le Comte,’ he rejoined. ‘You are aware of my intention to rob his Grace of Buckingham. I have waited for an opportunity, and it has at last presented itself. Only a few minutes since I succeeded in my design.’

“‘What!’ I exclaimed, in amazement. ‘Have you really dared to rob the duke?’ ‘My master has just taken this from him,’ said the squire, exhibiting a purse to my view. ‘And did his grace offer no resistance?’ I asked. ‘I had him at a disadvantage,’ replied Duval. ‘He was unhorsed, and without arms.’”

“The rascal spoke truth,” remarked Buckingham. “I had just lost my horse in a quagmire. But proceed, count.”

“I hope I shall not offend your grace by what I am now about to mention, but I could not help asking the rascal whether you had favored him with your ballad. ‘I want an explicit answer,’ I said; ‘because I have a wager depending upon the point.’ ‘Had he been on horseback,’ rejoined Duval, ‘I would have compelled the duke to sing it, but under the circumstances, I excused him.’”

The count was here interrupted by loud laughter from the king, in which the Duchess of Portsmouth, and all those around, joined.

“What more have you to tell?” asked Buckingham, rather angrily.

“Not much,” replied the count. “Fancying the rascal meant to rob me next, I was preparing to empty my pockets, but he stopped me. ‘Monsieur le Comte,’ he said, ‘I have simply a favor to ask of you. I am persuaded you will not refuse it. Oblige me by restoring the purse to the Duke of Buckingham.’ ‘With much pleasure,’ I replied. ‘I cannot sufficiently applaud your conduct, but permit me to observe that it is somewhat inconsistent with your character.’ ‘I perceive, count, that you understand very little about my character,’ he rejoined.

“He then signed to his squire, who handed me the purse. ‘No need of explanation,’ cried Duval. ‘His grace will perfectly comprehend why I cannot keep it.’ Without a word more, he and his squire galloped off, leaving me in a complete state of bewilderment. As requested, I now restore the purse to your grace.”

And taking it from his pocket, he delivered it to Buckingham, amid general laughter.

“How comes it that you did not mention this incident to me before?” demanded the duke.

“I am sure your grace will forgive me when I say that I purposely reserved it for his majesty’s amusement,” replied the count.

“I would not have lost it for the world,” cried Charles.

He had not ceased laughing as he passed through the gates of the castle.

CHAPTER V

THE DUKE OF ORMOND IS AVENGED BY HIS SON

Blood was not amongst the king's retinue at Windsor Castle. His duties detained him at Whitehall.

Of late, he had become sullen and morose, and began once more to rail bitterly against the Duke of Ormond, hinting darkly at some fresh design that he had conceived, of which his grace was to be the victim ; but his followers urged him to abandon it, and told him frankly they would have no hand in it. Be his project what it might, it was never consummated. The hour of retribution was at hand.

Montalt had paid several secret visits to the Tower, and on most of these occasions he had enjoyed an evening walk on the ramparts with Edith.

For some reason, however, for which he could not account, the fickle damsel began to cool in her manner towards him, and at last told him, in plain terms, that she could meet him no more.

Distracted by this heartless determination, Montalt flew into transports of jealous rage ; and, convinced that he had been supplanted, swore with a tremendous oath that he would find his rival out and slay him.

The malicious little coquette laughed at his passion, and frankly admitted that he was right in his conjecture ; but she added, with a peculiarly arch smile, that his rival was quite out of his reach.

This was enough for Montalt. Seeing in a moment how matters stood, he became as humble as he had just been violent.

Edith liked him much better in this mood ; and being

softened by his humility, consented that their intimacy should not wholly cease. She even agreed to meet him next day in St. James's Park.

"To-morrow afternoon," she said, with a captivating look, "I shall take an airing with my mother on the Mall. Most likely we shall ramble on to the long canal; and if you should happen to be there at the time, I shall not be very much offended if you join us."

"A thousand thanks for the permission!" cried Montalt, kissing her hand rapturously. "I have acted very foolishly; but I will behave better in future. There are some rivals with whom it would be absurd to compete. I am content to wait."

"With such a disposition, there may, possibly, be a chance for you," said Edith. "But mind, you must not come again to the Tower."

"Not till you invite me," he replied.

Each afternoon, Blood walked with his followers in St. James's Park. His insolent deportment on the Mall, and the defiant glances he cast around, provoked many an indignant remark; but the favor he enjoyed at court, and his own evil reputation, generally secured him from insult in return.

On the afternoon on which Montalt hoped to meet the bewitching coquette, Blood walked forth as usual. Those who encountered him on the Mall, and knew him, remarked that his manner was fiercer than usual. He scowled angrily when regarded too closely, and would have picked a quarrel, if any one had been willing to humor his inclinations.

Montalt had not informed him of his appointment, and being anxious to get away, was seeking for an excuse, when the colonel quitted the Mall, and took the direction of the long canal.

Seated on a bench opposite the Decoy, they discovered Edith and her mother. The golden-haired damsel was very becomingly dressed, and looked remarkably well. Between

her and her mother sat a plainly-attired, middle-aged person, of very quiet manner, who was no other than the king's confidential valet, Chiffinch.

Whatever proposal Chiffinch was making to the enchantress, seemed to be very favorably entertained—at least Montalt thought so. Her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks flushed, as she listened to the words of the tempter.

All this was quite as intelligible to Blood as to Montalt, and occasioned him no surprise, but it immediately suggested the course that ought to be pursued. No time ought to be lost in paying court to the new royal favorite.

Changing his manner with marvellous celerity, and calling up his most insinuating smiles, he made his bow, and paid her some high-flown compliments.

Chiffinch, having risen at his approach, he at once took the place vacated by the valet, and dividing his attention between mother and daughter, succeeded in pleasing both.

Having accomplished his object, he surrendered his seat to Montalt, who he saw was dying to obtain it; and taking Chiffinch apart, held a brief conference with him. For what he then learnt, he congratulated himself on his discernment.

Proposing to return presently to the ladies, he quitted Chiffinch, and walked on with Flodoard and Mandeville by the side of the canal.

He had not gone far, when two very distinguished personages were seen approaching from the opposite direction.

Both were richly attired, their bearing lofty, while the strong personal resemblance between them, coupled with the difference of age, proclaimed them to be father and son. Such, in fact, was their relationship. They were the Duke of Ormond and his son, the Earl of Ossory.

Blood knew them at once; and the sight of the Duke of Ormond rekindled in an instant all his smouldering hate. His hand involuntarily sought his sword.

On his side, Ormond had recognized his intended assassin,

and the Earl of Ossory had made the same discovery; but they would have passed him with dignified scorn, had not Blood, as if possessed by madness, planted himself in the duke's path.

"Again we meet, but not for the last time," cried the frantic miscreant, shaking his clenched hand at him. "I shall yet hang you at Tyburn."

Disdaining to make any answer, Ormond seized his son's arm, who was about to chastise the insolent ruffian, and forced him away.

Astounded at Blood's insane conduct, his followers dragged him off.

But the affair was not destined to end thus.

Ossory had not gone far, when, foaming with rage, he broke from his father.

"Leave the law to punish him," cried Ormond.

"The law!" exclaimed his son. "There is no law in England, when robbers and assassins can stalk abroad thus. I will punish him myself."

Disregarding the duke's entreaties, he ran after Blood, who, hearing his footsteps and shouts, likewise burst from his followers, and faced him.

"Cut-throat and robber!" cried the young noble; "I will not sully my steel with the blood of a wretch so vile, but thy insolence shall not pass unpunished."

With his cane he struck Blood several severe blows on the head and shoulders, knocking off his hat and peruke.

Staggered for a moment by the attack, Blood presently recovered, and with a roar like that of an enraged lion, plucked forth his rapier, and made a desperate lunge at Ossory.

The gallant young noble saved himself by leaping backwards, and then flinging away his cane, drew, and engaged his furious adversary.

Blood was a consummate master of fence, and possessed

immense strength of wrist, but blinded by rage, he fought wildly.

After the exchange of a few rapid passes, he made a deadly thrust, which Ossory dexterously parried, and returning it with the rapidity of lightning, his point passed through his adversary's heart, the sword-hilt striking against his breast.

Blood fell into the arms of his followers, who had kept aloof during the fray, but now flew towards him.

He almost instantly expired.

His last vindictive look was fixed on the Duke of Ormond, who had hurried to the spot, and witnessed the tragical close of the conflict.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE COUNT DE BELLE-GARDE AND THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH

The gaiety of the court was somewhat damped by the announcement made by the Count de Bellegarde of his immediate departure for Paris.

The king was sorry to lose him, and did not know how to supply his place. No one possessed such unfailing good spirits as the count—no one was so pleasant a companion—no one related such diverting stories. The loss of his society was, therefore, a real deprivation to his majesty.

But if Charles was grieved, the Duchess of Portsmouth—as Buckingham had foreseen—was in despair. To her, Achille was indispensable. He was her confidant and counsellor—not, perhaps, the wisest and best; but, at any rate, she consulted and trusted him.

She sent for him to her boudoir, to talk to him privately,

and try to dissuade him from going ; but all her efforts were fruitless.

"You have some motive that you do not care to avow for your sudden departure," she said, angry that he would not yield to her importunities.

"You are right, sweet cousin. I know you won't betray me. 'Tis absolutely necessary for me to leave the country for a short time."

"What have you done?" she said, looking at him fixedly.

"Nothing very dreadful," he replied, with a smile.

"Have you lost money? If so, I will assist you. I know you have been unlucky at play lately."

"True! The jade Fortune has turned her back on me latterly, but I don't want funds."

"Can I relieve you from any other embarrassment? You may command all my influence with the king."

"I know it, sweet cousin. But this is an affair—However, I cannot explain," he said, stopping short.

"I feel very much disposed to prevent your departure, Achille," she observed, shaking her head. "A word to his majesty will do it."

"You will throw no obstacles in my way, I am sure, Louise, when I tell you that my honor is concerned in the affair. Question no more, if you love me. I promise to return without delay, if I can. Should you not hear from me within a week, conclude——"

"Conclude what, Achille?"

"That I cannot write," he rejoined, gravely.

"You alarm me. You are bound on some mad enterprise. You shall not go."

"I must, Louise. If we meet no more, cherish the memory of the cousin whom you loved, in spite of his follies."

"Achille, this is serious! I must have an explanation. You know how attached I am to you."

“I require no assurance of your regard, Louise. Will it surprise you to learn that I am tired of life?”

“You tired of life, Achille? Impossible! I hope you do not meditate any sinful act?”

“I will never raise my hand against myself. Be sure of that.”

“But do not throw your life away.”

He was silent for a moment, and then said, with deep but suppressed emotion :

“If anything should happen to me, a letter will be delivered to you. By all the love you have ever borne me, I implore you to fulfil my last request.”

“I will—I promise it solemnly.”

He pressed her hand gratefully, and was again silent for some moments.

Rousing himself at last by a powerful effort, he cried :

“Before I go, I should like to do a good turn to Talbot Harland.”

“This is very generous of you, Achille. I have always looked upon you as Talbot’s rival. You know how I took you to task formerly for your attentions to Dorinda Neville.”

“There is no longer any rivalry between us. Besides, Dorinda only pretended to encourage me, in order to plague Talbot, as I soon discovered. But I like them both, and it would give me real pleasure to be instrumental in bringing about their union. You can easily accomplish it, if you are so disposed.”

“I think the matter is pretty nearly settled,” replied the duchess, with a smile. “The question, I fancy, was put at the hawking-party, this morning; and, judging by Talbot’s looks, he was not reduced to absolute despair by the answer he received. I have not yet spoken to Dorinda on the subject; but I will let you know her decision at the ball this evening. You will attend it?”

“Of course,” he replied. “My preparations are nearly made.”

“Ah, Achille!” she exclaimed; “if we should never meet again after to-night, I shall often think of you.”

“You have made me easy by the promise you have given me, and which I know you will keep religiously. My fate may be a mystery to all the world; to you it will be none. You will learn the secret.”

He kissed her hand respectfully, and retired, leaving her full of gloomy apprehension.

CHAPTER VII

DORINDA'S PORTION

Though decidedly out of spirits, the Duchess of Portsmouth was present at the grand banquet in St. George's Hall, and afterwards at the brilliant ball given in the magnificent dancing-saloons.

Before his majesty sat down to the banquet, Chiffinch arrived at the castle, and gave him details of Blood's death by the hand of the Earl of Ossory.

Charles was not painfully affected by the news, and perhaps thought himself well rid of an attendant whom he had already begun to find troublesome. But his valet had some other intelligence respecting a certain golden-haired damsel that unquestionably delighted him.

Whatever Bellegarde might have felt on hearing of Blood's death, he manifested no outward emotion. The Duchess of Portsmouth, who knew he was playing a part, wondered how he could get through it so well. To see him in the dance, or watch him in the card-room among the punters at basset, one would have thought him the gayest of the gay.

Early in the evening, he had encountered Talbot Harland in the ball-room, and ascertained from him that, contrary to the Duchess of Portsmouth's impression, Dorinda's answer had not been given, the fair damsel declaring that the king's consent must first be obtained.

"Have you spoken to his majesty?" inquired the count.

"Not yet," replied the other.

"Well, that point shall soon be settled. Engage Lady Muskerry for the first country-dance, and as soon as it is over, take her ladyship to the Duchess of Portsmouth, whom you will find with his majesty in the small saloon. Leave the rest to me. I undertake that the result shall be perfectly satisfactory to you."

Thanking the count warmly, Talbot immediately went in search of Lady Muskerry, who did not require to be asked twice. Half the company stood up on the occasion, and amongst the dancers was Dorinda, her partner being the Count de Bellegarde.

The dance seemed interminable to Talbot; but when it was over, in accordance with his instructions, he led her ladyship, who was full of excitement and delight, to the small saloon.

There they found the Duchess of Portsmouth and the king, no one being with them except the Duke of Buckingham.

They had only just made reverence, when Dorinda entered the saloon, attended by the Count de Bellegarde.

As the fair damsel drew near, the Duchess of Portsmouth stepped forward to meet her, and led her towards the king, who arose at her approach.

Seeing that Dorinda was in some confusion, Charles said, in the most gracious tones imaginable, "The duchess tells me you have a little request to make."

"Pardon me, my liege," she replied, blushing deeply; "I have nothing whatever to ask of your majesty."

“Do not mind what she says, sire,” observed the duchess. “She *has* a favor to ask.”

“Oddsfish! I will spare her blushes,” cried the good-natured monarch. “You desire my consent to your marriage with a very worthy young gentleman, whom I see before me. You have it. Approach, sir,” he added to Talbot, who delightedly obeyed the mandate.

“Take her,” pursued the king, placing her hand in that of the young man. “May your union be crowned with happiness!”

They kelt before him at the words, and Talbot faltered out his gratitude.

“I have not done,” continued Charles, raising Dorinda graciously. “Your bride,” he added to Talbot—“and no man ever won a lovelier bride—will have a portion of ten thousand pounds.”

“Oh, sire! this is too much!” exclaimed Dorinda.

“Your husband will not think it so,” observed Charles, laughing. “I hope the marriage has your ladyship’s approval?” he added, playfully, to Lady Muskerry.

“It is sufficient for me that it has received your majesty’s sanction,” she replied. “Without that, it would never have received mine.”

“You cannot do better than follow my example in *everything*,” observed Charles, significantly.

“Such is my intention, sire,” she returned. “And I will therefore add another ten thousand pounds to the marriage-portion which you have bestowed on Dorinda.”

“Just what I expected from your ladyship!” cried the king, approvingly.

Here the Duchess of Portsmouth embraced Dorinda; and kissing her on both cheeks, offered her her warmest congratulations. “I congratulate you also,” she added to Talbot.

“How much I am indebted to your grace!” cried the young man, earnestly.

“You are more indebted to the Count de Bellegarde than you are to me,” she replied.

“I can accept no thanks, for I do not deserve them,” said the count. “But I wish you all possible happiness, and I am sure you will have it.”

Dorinda, as may well be supposed, did not return to the ball-room. Indeed, she was much overcome; and after reiterating the expression of her gratitude to his majesty and the duchess, she retired with her aunt.

Talbot, however, was in too joyous a mood to quit the festive scene; and the Count de Bellegarde betook himself to the card-room, where he won some money.

He was among the punters at the basset-table, when he heard the Duke of Buckingham talking to Talbot Harland. The duke spoke in a low voice; but by slightly shifting his position, he caught what was said.

“I have a little affair on hand, at which I want your company,” observed Buckingham. “It is not an ordinary duel, so you need have no scruples at disobeying his majesty. You are only required to see fair play.”

“If that is all, your grace may command me,” replied Talbot. “I would not for the world offend his majesty after his great generosity to me. When does the meeting take place?”

“On the third night from this, on Cranbourne Chase, at midnight,” replied Buckingham.

“On Cranbourne Chase at midnight!” exclaimed Talbot, surprised, and half repenting the promise he had given. “’Tis a mysterious meeting, indeed.”

“No more now,” said the duke. “I will tell you all about it to-morrow.”

“He will come,” thought Bellegarde.

CHAPTER VIII

ON CRANBOURNE CHASE AT MIDNIGHT

The Count de Bellegarde had taken his departure from Windsor Castle, leaving behind him a blank that could not be easily filled up.

He did not trust himself to another private interview with the Duchess of Portsmouth, though she desired it; but sent his excuses.

On taking leave of the king, he said, with a surprisingly grave countenance, "I fear I must bid your majesty a lasting adieu."

"Why so?" asked Charles.

"I have some idea of shutting myself up in the monastery of La Trappe."

"To practise penitence for your past life, ha!" cried Charles. "You have much to repent, no doubt. But think twice before you turn monk. Severe discipline won't suit you, my friend. There is no joking, believe me, in those gloomy cells."

"It will be a change. If your majesty does not see me again within a month, you may be sure that I have turned Trappist."

"Heaven forbid! But should such a dreadful misfortune happen, may you rise to be an abbot. Farewell, most holy father! Come back soon to give me your benediction."

Charles thought the count was jesting; but he afterwards viewed the matter in a very different light.

The appointed night arrived.

A night well fitted for such a meeting—bright and calm. Fleecy clouds covered the sky, and a full moon poured down

its radiance upon the towers of the castle, and silvered the pompous woods of the Great Park.

Although it wanted nearly an hour to midnight, Claude Duval and his squire were riding slowly and silently towards the place of rendezvous. They had come from the forester's hut, and had tracked a narrow road that led through the thick woods then clothing the summit of Snow Hill.

From this eminence, the view of Windsor Castle is superb; and on such a lovely moonlight night as we have described, the beauty of the scene was enhanced.

On issuing from the sombre thicket, Duval halted to gaze on the splendid prospect spread out before him. His eye ranged over the rich woodland tract, and rested long on the grand pile towering in the distance.

What thoughts occupied his mind at the time, we shall not inquire. Folding his hands upon his breast, he fell into a profound reverie, from which he was at last aroused by Sabine.

"Why do you look so scared?" he asked.

"I have just seen my father," she rejoined.

The answer startled him.

"Seen your father?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I saw him standing yonder, beside the wood. I saw him as plainly as I behold you now. Death-pale his countenance, and its expression very mournful.

"Fear made me dumb, or I should have called out to you. He pointed to the wood, near the lake, and beckoned me to follow. Then I missed him.

"After this warning, will you go on to meet certain destruction?"

"If I am doomed, I am doomed," rejoined Duval, shrugging his shoulders. "Your superstitious fears, and nothing else, conjured up this phantom."

Though he said this in an incredulous tone, he was evidently impressed, for he presently remarked, "I have some-

thing to add to the instructions I have already given you. Here is a letter, which you must deliver to the Duchess of Portsmouth. She has promised me, solemnly, to attend to my request. She will be your friend."

"I shall want no friend if I lose you," she cried, in a despairing voice.

"Do as I enjoin you," he said, authoritatively.

"Oh, if my fears are realized, I shall die!" she exclaimed.

"Sabine, cast off this weakness, and be yourself! You will unman me, and my honor is at stake!"

"You shall not hear another murmur," she rejoined, submissively.

They rode down the woody slopes, and startled a herd of deer couched beneath the oaks at the foot of the acclivity.

As he cantered across the broad plain, Duval, with characteristic levity, began to hum a light French romance. His companion made no remark, though her heart was like to break.

A distant bell tolled the hour of midnight. At the same instant, as if summoned by the strokes, two horsemen appeared on the part of the chase that was nearest the castle.

"Yonder they are!" cried Duval, almost joyously.

"I see them," she replied, with a shudder. "Have you aught further to say to me?"

"Only to bid you adieu, in case of the worst," he replied.

She pressed the hand he extended to her lips, and her tears fell on it.

"You are forgetting your promise," he cried.

Having adjusted his mask, he galloped towards his adversary, who, with his second, was now riding quickly to meet him.

As he galloped on, Duval resumed his romance, and sung it so loud and blithely, that it reached the ears of his antagonist.

"Hark! he is singing," observed the duke to Talbot Har-

land, who was riding by his side. "'Tis almost a pity to kill so gay a galliard."

"I hope it may not be needful to kill him," replied Talbot.

Presently, Duval changed his melody, and began to sing a couplet of the duke's famous ballad.

"Does your grace hear that?" cried Talbot, laughing.

"Ay," replied the duke. "I like his humor amazingly."

When within fifty yards of each other, the adversaries drew in the rein, advancing at a footpace, till they met.

Duval then uncovered, and bowed gracefully to the duke, who returned the salutation with lofty courtesy.

Throughout the conversation that ensued, Duval spoke with the peculiar Gascon accent that he occasionally assumed.

"Your servant, Mr. Talbot," he said, bowing to him.

"'Tis not the first time we have met."

"But it will probably be the last," rejoined Talbot, gravely.

"Perhaps so," said Duval, in a careless tone. "To business!"

"Before proceeding, I have an observation to make," said Talbot.

"I am all attention," replied Duval, bowing politely.

"His grace the Duke of Buckingham is here, ready to fulfil his engagement," pursued Talbot. "But I have to state, on his grace's part, that, as he has no real animosity towards you, and as he has, however, reason to believe that your exploits have been intended as practical jests, he is willing to forego the combat, provided you will make an admission to that effect."

"I will make the admission for him," cried the squire, pressing eagerly forward. "All his exploits were practical jests—all!"

"Back, Léon!" cried Duval. "Pardon this interruption, Mr. Harland," he continued, as the squire dejectedly retired. "Have you more to add?"

"Only one thing, to which I trust you will see no objection," replied Talbot. "The duke will require you to unmask."

"Unmask? Ha!" cried Duval, sharply. "His grace has no right to make any such demand. With his first requisition I might have complied. Indeed, I will admit that all the feats which he has done me the honor to record in his matchless ballad were practical jests."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Talbot. "After this frank admission——"

"Hear me out!" cried Duval. "I peremptorily refuse to unmask. This discussion is idle, and must cease. The duke of Buckingham has challenged me, and now he seeks to avoid the combat. I insist upon its taking place."

"I avoid the combat!" exclaimed Buckingham, with a disdainful laugh. "By St. George, that shall never be said!"

A half-stifled cry burst from the squire, but it passed unheeded.

"Are you prepared?" demanded Talbot, as each adversary drew a pistol from his holster.

"Prepared!" they responded, as with one voice.

"Ride off in opposite directions till I bid you stop. Return slowly, and fire when I give the word."

The injunction was obeyed. Each rode slowly off, till Talbot called out "Stop!" and then turned back.

Not till they were within thirty yards of each other was the signal given.

Both fired together.

Duval discharged his pistol in the air, but the duke took deadly aim. The bullet lodged in his adversary's breast.

Duval uttered a cry, and fell back slightly; but he almost instantly recovered himself. With a wild shriek that betrayed her sex, Sabine flew towards him.

At the same time, Talbot and the duke pressed forward, eager to render aid.

“Off!” she cried, fiercely, and presenting a pistol at them as she spoke.

“He shall not be unmasked while I have life. Your grace will not break your plighted word!”

“No,” replied the duke, drawing back, while Talbot followed his example.

“I am mortally hurt, but have enough strength left for flight,” groaned Duval. “Keep close beside me.”

“Fear no pursuit from us,” cried Buckingham.

The duke and Talbot watched them as they flew with lightning swiftness across the plain. Each moment the lookers-on expected to see the wounded man drop from the saddle. But, to their infinite surprise, he held on. He mounted the sides of Snow Hill, and disappeared with his companion in the wood on its brow.

“He will die in the thicket,” observed Buckingham.

But the duke was mistaken. Duval still clung to the saddle.

“Oh, that we could reach the hut!” exclaimed Sabine.

“Not there,” rejoined Duval. “Your father’s spirit pointed towards the lake. Take me thither—to the morass—you understand.”

She divined his terrible purpose, but did not attempt to oppose it. She led him down the long sweeping glade, along which they flitted like phantoms.

She guided him, swiftly and unerringly, through the thick woods encircling the lake, and brought him to the borders of the morass.

“Now leave me. Farewell for ever!” he cried.

And with a last effort, he forced his horse into the fatal swamp.

Sabine remained looking on in a state of stupefaction.

When all was over, she prepared to follow.

“Leave you! Never!” she exclaimed. “I am yours in life, as in death!”

And she plunged in after him.

The morass willingly offered them a grave in its oozy depths, and kept their secret well.

A miserable pretender afterwards appeared as Claude Duval. With him we have nothing to do. He was very deservedly hanged.

The Count de Bellegarde appeared no more at Whitehall ; and the king, though amazed at his folly, never doubted that he had become a monk of La Trappe.

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