A LITTLE WIZARD

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CHAPTER I.

PATTENHALL.

When the agent of General Skippon, to whom the estate of Pattenhall by Ripon fell, as part of his reward after the battle of Naseby, went down to take possession, he found a little boy sitting on a heap of stones a few paces from the entrance gate. The old house (which has since been pulled down) lay a quarter of a mile from the road and somewhat in a hollow; but its many casements, blushing and sparkling in the glow of the evening sun, caught the rider's eye, and led him into the comfortable belief that he had reached his destination. He had come from Ripon, how-

ever, and the village lies on the farther side of the house from that town; consequently he had seen no one whom he could question, and he hailed the boy's presence with relief, checking his horse, and calling to him to know if this was Pattenhall.

The lad crouching on the stones, and nervously plucking the grass beside him, looked up at the four stern men sitting squarely in their saddles. But he did not answer. He might have been deaf.

"Come!" Agent Hoby said, repeating his question roughly. "You have got a tongue, my lad. Is this old squire Patten's?"

The boy shook his head mutely. He looked about twelve years old.

"Is it farther on?"

"Yes, farther on," the lad muttered, scarcely moving his lips.

"Where?"

Still keeping his eyes, which were large

and brown, on his questioner, the boy pointed towards the tower of the church, a quarter of a mile away.

The agent stifled an exclamation, such as in other times would have been an oath. "Umph! I thought we were there!" he muttered. "However, it is but a step. Come up, mare."

The boy watched the four riders plod on along the road until the trees, which were in the full glory of their summer foliage, and almost met across the dusty way, hid them from his eyes. Then he rose, and shaking his fist with passionate vehemence in the direction in which they had gone, turned towards the gateway as if he would go up to the house. Before he had taken three steps, however, he changed his mind, and coming slowly back to the heap of stones, sat down in the same place and posture as before. The movement to retreat and the return were alike characteristic.

In frame the boy was altogether childish, being puny and slight, and somewhat stunted; but his small face, browned by wind and sun, expressed both will and sensibility. As he sat waiting for the travellers to return, there was a sparkle, and not of tears only, in his eyes. His mouth took an ugly shape, and his small hand found and clutched one of the stones on which he sat.

Agent Hoby had never been more astonished in his life than when he returned hot and angry and found him still there. It was the last thing he had expected. "You little villain!" he cried, shortening his whip in his hand, and spurring his horse on to the strip of turf, which then, as now, bordered the road—"how dare you tell lies to the Commons' Commissioners?"

There was a slender gap in the wall behind the heap of stones, and the lad fell back into this, still clutching his missile in

He turned and rode in.—Page 9.

his hand. "I told no lies!" he said, looking defiantly at the angry man. "You asked me for Squire Patten, and I sent you to him—to the churchyard!"

One of the men behind Hoby chuckled grimly; and Hoby himself, who had ridden with Cromwell at Naseby, and looked the Robber Prince in the eyes, held his hand. "You little whelp!" he said, half in anger and half in admiration. "It is easy to see what brood you come of! I have half a mind to lash your back for you! Be off to your mammy, and bid her whip you! My hand is too heavy."

With that, taking no further notice of the boy, he turned and rode in through the gate. The aspect of the house, the quality of the herbage, the size of the timber, the lack of stock, all claimed at once his agent's eye, and rendered it easy for him to forget the incident. He grumbled at the sagacity of the Roundhead troopers,

who had lain a night at Pattenhall before Marston Moor, and swept it as bare as a board. He had a grunt of sympathy to spare for Squire Patten, who, sore wounded in the same fight, had ridden home to die three days later. He gave a thought even to young Patten, who had forfeited the last chance of saving his sequestrated estate by breaking his parole, and again appearing in arms against the Parliament. But of the lad crawling slowly along the path behind him he thought nothing. And the boy, young as he was, felt this and resented it.

When the party presently reached the house, and the few servants who remained came out obsequiously to receive them, the boy felt his loneliness and sudden insignificance still more keenly. He saw stirrups held, and heard terms of honor passing; and he crept away to the hayloft to give vent to the tears he was too proud to shed

in public. Safe in this refuge, he flung himself down on the hay and showed himself all child; now sobbing as if his heart was broken, and now clenching his little fists and beating the air in impotent passion.

The solitude to which he was left showed that he had good cause for his grief. No one asked for him, no one sought him, who had lately been the most important person in the place. The loft grew dark, the windows changed to mere patches of grey in the midst of blackness. At any other time, and under any other circumstances, the child would have been afraid to remain there alone. But grief and indignation swallow up fear, and in the darkness he called on his dead father and mother, and felt them nearer than in the day. Young as he was, the child could remember a time when his absence for half an hour would have set the house by the ears, and

started a dozen pairs of legs in search of him; when loving voices, silent now forever, would have cried his name through yard and paddock, and a score of servants, whom death and dearth had not yet scattered, would have rushed to gratify his smallest need.

No wonder that at the thought of those days, and of the loving care and gentle hands which had guarded him from hour to hour, the solitary child crouching in the hay and darkness cried long and passionately. He knew little of the quarrel between King and Commons, and nothing of Laud or Strafford, Pym or Hampden, Ship-money or the New Model. But he could suffer. He was old enough to remember and feel, and compare past things with present; and understanding that today his father's house was passing into the hands of strangers, he experienced all the terror and anguish which a sense of home-

lessness combined with helplessness can inflict. Lonely and neglected he had been for some time now; but he had felt his loneliness little (comparatively speaking) until to-day.

Agent Hoby had finished his supper. Stretching his legs before the empty hearth in the attitude of one who had done a day's work, he was in the act of admonishing Gridley the butler on his duty to his new master, when he became aware of a slight movement in the direction of the door. The panelled walls of the parlor in which he sat swallowed up the light, and the candles stood in his way. He had to raise one above his head and peer below it before he could make out anything. When he did, and the face of the lad he had seen by the gate grew as it were out of the panel, his first feeling was one of alarm. He started and muttered an exclamation, thinking that he saw amiss; and that

either the October he had drunk was stronger than ordinary, or there was something uncanny in the house. When a second look, however, persuaded him that the boy was there in the flesh, he gave way to anger.

"Gridley!" he said, knitting his brows, "who is this, and how does he come to be here? Is he one of your brats, man?"

"One of mine?" the butler answered stupidly.

"Ay, one of yours! Or how comes he to be here?" the agent answered querulously, sitting forward with a hand on each arm of his chair, and frowning at the boy, who returned his gaze with interest.

The butler looked at the lad as if he were considering him in some new light, and hesitated before he answered. "It is the young master," he said at last.

"The young what?" the agent exclaimed, leaning still farther forward, and

putting into the words as much surprise as possible.

"It is the young master," Gridley repeated sullenly. "And he is here in season, for I want to know what I am to do with him."

"Do you mean that he is a Patten?" Hoby muttered, staring at the lad as if he were bewitched.

"To be sure," Gridley answered, looking also at the boy.

"But your master had only one son? Those were my instructions."

"Two," said the butler. "Master Francis—"

"Who is with Duke Hamilton in Scotland, and if caught in arms in England will hang," rejoined the agent, sternly. "Well?"

"And this one."

Hoby glared at the boy as if he would eat him. To find that the estate, which

he had considered free from embarrassing claims, was burdened with a child, annoyed him beyond measure. The warrants under which he acted overrode, of course, all rights and all privileges; in the eye of the law the boy before him had no more to do with the old house and the wide acres than the meanest peasant who had a hovel on the land. But the agent was a humane man, and in his way a just one; and though he had been well content to ignore the malignant young reprobate whom he had hitherto considered the only claimant, he was vexed to find there was another, more innocent and more helpless.

"He must have relations," he said at last, after rubbing his closely cropped head with an air of much perplexity. "He must go to them."

"He has none alive that I know of," the butler answered stolidly. He was a high-shouldered, fat-faced man, with sly eyes.

"There are no other Pattens?" quoth Hoby.

"Not so much as an old maid."

"Then he must go to his mother's people."

"She was Cornish," Gridley answered, with a slight grin. "Her family were out with Sir Ralph Hopton, and are now in Holland, I hear."

Repulsed on all sides, the agent rose from his chair. "Well, bring him to me in the morning," he said irritably, "and I will see what can be done. His matter can wait. For yourself, however, make up your mind, my man; go or stay as you please. But if you stay it can only be upon my conditions. You understand that?" he added with with some asperity.

Gridley assented with a corresponding smack of sullenness in his tone, and taking the hint, bore off the boy to bed. Soon the few lights, which still shone in

the great house that had so quietly changed masters, died out one by one; until all lay black and silent, except one small room, low-ceiled, musty, and dark-panelled, which lay to the right of the hall, but a step or two below its level. This room was the butler's pantry and sleeping-chamber. The plate which had once glittered on its shelves, the silver flagons and Sheffield cups, the spice bowls and sugar-basins, were gone, devoted these five years past to the melting-pot and the Royal cause. The club and blunderbuss which should have guarded them remained, however, in their slings beside the bed; along with some show of dingy pewter and dingier blackjacks, and as many empty bottles as served at once to litter the gloomy little dungeon and prove that the old squire's cellar was not yet empty.

In the midst of this disorder, and in no way incommoded by the close atmosphere

of the room, which reeked of beer and stale liquors, the butler sat thinking far into the night. On the table beside him, which had been cleared to make room for it, lay an open Bible; but as he never consulted its pages or even looked towards it, we may assume that it lay there rather for show than use, and possibly had been arranged for the express purpose of catching the eye of Master Hoby should he push his inquiries as far as this apartment.

Heedless or forgetful of it, Gridley now sat staring into vacancy, with a dark expression on his face. Now and again he bit his finger-nails as if some problem of more than ordinary importance occupied his thoughts. His aspect too was changed in sympathy with the dark hours of the night. Fear and anticipation, greed and cunning, peered from behind the mask of sly composure which he had worn in the

parlor. He had now the air of a man who would and dare not, and then again who would not shrink at risks. At last he rose with his mind made up, and creeping to the door secured it. With a stealthy glance round, he next extinguished the light, plunging the room into darkness. After that he was still to be heard shuffling about for some time, but of his actions or the business on which he was bent nothing could be known for certain. Only once a rich ringing sound as of metal on metal surprised the silence, and hanging on the air—for an eternity as it seemed to his alarmed ear—died reluctantly in the hollows of the pewter flagons on the shelf. It was nothing, it was the merest tinkle, it could scarcely have awakened the suspicions of the most critical listener. But the man who made the sound and heard the sound was a coward with an evil conscience; and for a full minute after the

last echo had whispered itself away, he crouched on the floor, with the cold dew on his brow and his hand shaking. After that, silence.

Little Jack Patten, awaking suddenly as the first glimmer of dawn entered his room, found the butler standing by his side. The boy would have cried out, not knowing him in the half light, but Gridley muttered his name, and enjoining silence with a finger on his lip, sat down on the pallet by the lad's side.

"What is it?" Jack said, sitting up. The man's cautious and apprehensive air, no less than the gloom which still filled the room and rendered objects indistinct, scared him.

"Hush!" the butler answered in a low voice, "and listen to me, Jack. I have been thinking about you. You know this house is not yours any longer. It will be shut up, and there will be none but Round-

headed soldiers here, and the man below will be master. You don't want to stay here and eat his bread?"

The boy shook his head. But, even as he shook it, the tears rose to his eyes. For where was he to go? Yesterday's events, his friendlessness and helplessness, recurred to his mind in a rush of bitter memories.

"Would you like to come away with me?" Gridley muttered, keenly watching the effect of his words.

Jack peered at him doubtfully. The butler had not been so kind to him of late as to give this proposal an air of complete naturalness. The manner and the tone of it were strange even in the child's judgment. "Where are you going?" he asked cautiously.

"To my home," said the butler, licking his lips, as if they were dry.

"It is on the moors, is it not?"

The butler nodded.

"Above Pateley?"

"It is many a mile above Pateley—up, up, up; ay, miles above it."

The child's eyes glistened at that. The moors were his fairyland. He had passed many and many a happy hour in dreaming of the marvellous things which lay beyond the purple hills to westward; the rugged broken line behind which the sun went down each day in a glory of crimson or orange. That line, he knew, was the beginning of the moors. The blue distance beyond it he had peopled with his own visions of giants and dwarfs, and witches and warlocks, and added besides all the tales which passed current in Pattenhall and the low country of doings *in t' moors*. He knew the moor people kept to themselves and were wild and savage, inhabiting hills a mile high and valleys miles in depth; and he longed to visit them and

see these things for himself. His eyes dried quickly as he listened to Gridley, and eagerly asked, "Above Pateley?" which was the boundary of his known world, "miles and miles above Pateley, Gridley?"

"Ay, up Skipton way."

"Is that in the heart of the moors, Gridley?"

"There is no other heart," the butler answered gruffly, "unless, maybe, it is Settle. And it is Settle side of Skipton."

"Are you going now?" the lad said impulsively, standing up straight in his bed, with his brown eyes staring and his fair cheeks glowing with anticipation and excitement.

"This very minute."

"I'll come with you! You will let me dress, Gridley?"

"Ay, dress quickly. We must be away before any one is awake."

"I'll be quick!" Jack answered.

He was too young to see anything strange in the hurry and secrecy of such a departure. The troubles of the times had made him familiar with abrupt comings and goings. He trembled, it is true, as he stole down the dark staircase on tiptoe and clinging to the butler's hand; but it was with excitement, not fear. He felt no surprise at finding one of the great plough-horses standing saddled in its stall; nor did the size of the wallets which he saw behind the saddle arouse any doubt or suspicion in his mind. Gridley's haste to be gone, the trembling which seized the butler as they crossed the farmyard, the frequent glances he cast behind him until the road was fairly gained, seemed to the boy natural enough. All Jack knew was that he was leaving his enemies behind him. They had killed his father and exiled his brother. Naturally he feared and

hated them. He was too young to understand that he stood in no peril himself, but that on the contrary his proper disposal had caused Master Hoby the loss of at least an hour's sleep.

Before it was fairly light the fugitives were already a mile away. The boy rode behind Gridley, clinging to a strap passed round the latter's waist; and the two jogged along comfortably enough as far as the body was concerned, though it was evident that Gridley's anxiety was little if at all allayed. They shunned the highway, and went by hedge paths and bridle-roads, which avoided houses and villages. When the sun rose the two were already five or six miles from Pattenhall, in a country new to the lad, though sufficiently like his own to whet his curiosity instead of satisfying it.

"How far are we from the moors, Gridley?" he asked as often as he dared.

for the butler's temper seemed uncertain. "Shall we be there to breakfast?"

"Ay, we'll be there to breakfast," was the usual answer.

And presently, to the boy's delight, the country began to trend upwards, the path grew steeper. The coppices and hedgerows, the clumps of elms and oaks and beeches, which had hidden the higher prospects from his eyes, and almost persuaded him that he was making no progress, began to grow more sparse; until at last they failed altogether, and he saw before him a rising slope of marsh and moorland, swelling here and there into rocky ridges, between which the sycamores and ashes grew in stunted bunches. Above he raised his eyes to a heaven wider and more open than that to which he was accustomed; while lark beyond lark, soaring each higher than the other, seemed striving which should celebrate most fitly the

balmy air and warm sunshine which flooded all.

"Are these the moors, Gridley?" the boy asked with delight.

"These, the moors?" the man answered, with the first smile he had allowed himself that morning. "You wait a bit, and you'll see!"

His tone was not encouraging, but as he hastened to give the lad his breakfast and a drink of beer, Jack passed over the change of manner, and rocking himself from side to side, as far as the strap would let him, went merrily upwards, munching as he rode. Over Pateley Bridge and Pateley moors they went, and upwards still to Bewerley Fell, whence they saw the Riding stretched like a picture behind them. Jack fancied, but that was impossible, that he could see the chimneys and the great oak at Pattenhall. Leaving Bewerley they skirted Hebdon Moor on

the north side, rising here so high that Jack could see nothing on either hand but horrid crags, and ridges of grey limestone and vast slopes of grey rock. Here, too, there was little turf and no heather, but only stone-crop and saxifrages, with cruel quagmires and bogs in the hollows. The very sky seemed changed. It grew dark and overcast, and clouds and mist gathered round the travellers, hiding the path, yet disclosing from time to time the huge brow of Ingleborough or the flat head of Penighent. The wind moaned across the grey steeps, and a small rain began to fall and quickly wet them to the skin.

The boy shuddered. "Are these the moors?" he asked.

"Ay, these are the moors!" his companion answered grimly. "And moorland weather. Yon's the High Moors and Malham Tarn. Your eyes are young. Do you see a grey spot in the nook to the

right, yonder, two miles away! That is Little Howe, and we are bound for it."

"Who lives there?" Jack answered, as he looked drearily over the desolate upland.

"My brother," the butler answered, with a touch of ferocity in his tone. "Simon Gridley, he is called, and you will know him soon enough."

CHAPTER II.

MALHAM HIGH MOORS.

STILL nearly an hour elapsed before the tired horse stopped at the door of the small grey dwelling which Gridley had pointed out. The house, a rough farmstead of four rooms, stood high in a nook of the moor, facing Ingleborough. A few yew-trees filled the narrowing dell behind it with black shadow; a low wall of loose stones which joined one ridge to another formed a fold before it. The clatter of hoofs, as the horse climbed the rocky slope leading to the house, brought out a man and woman, who, leaning on this wall, watched the couple approach.

The aspect of the man was stern, dry, and austere; in a word, at one with the harsh and rugged scene in which he lived. His gloomy eyes and square jaw seemed

signs of a character resolute, narrow, bigoted, and it might be cruel. At first sight the woman appeared a helpmeet well suited to him. Her narrow forehead and thin lips, her pinched nose and small blue eyes, seemed the reproduction in a feminine mould of his more massive features. Despite this, she constantly produced upon strangers a less favorable impression than he did; and though this impression was rarely understood, it lingered long and faded slowly if at all.

The aspect of the two as they stood side by side was so forbidding, that the child, faint with fatigue and disappointment, had hard work to repress his tears. Nor was the uneasiness confined to him only, for the butler's voice, when he raised it to greet his kinsfolk, sounded unnatural. His words tumbled over one another, and he alighted with a fussiness which betrayed itself.

On the other side the most absolute composure existed; so that presently the man's fulsome words died on his lips. "Why, brother," he stammered, with something of a whine, "you are glad to see me?"

"It may be, and again it may not be," the other answered grimly.

"How so?" Gridley asked, changing countenance.

"Have you turned your back on the flesh-pots for good?" was the severe response. "Have you come out of Egypt and away from its abominations? For I will have no malignants here, nor those who eat their bread and grow fat on their vices? If you have left the tents of Kedar, then you are welcome here. But if not, pass on."

"I have left Pattenhall, if that is what you mean," the younger brother answered sullenly.

"And its service?"

"Ay, and its service."

"Who is the lad you have with you?" Simon Gridley asked keenly.

"He is a Patten," the butler answered reluctantly; "but he has neither house nor land, nor more in the world than the clothes he stands up in."

The answer took both the man and the woman by surprise. They stood gazing as with one accord at the boy, who, with his lips trembling, changed feet and shifted his eyes from one stern face to another.

"I have heard something of that," the elder Gridley said, with a stern smile. "He comes of a bad brood."

"Nevertheless, you will not refuse him shelter," his brother answered. "He is a child, and I have nowhere else to take him."

"Why take him at all?" the Puritan snarled fiercely. "What have you to do

with the children of transgression? Have you not sins enough of your own to answer for?"

The butler did not reply, and for a moment the boy's fate seemed to hang in the balance. Then the woman spoke. "Bring him in," she said harshly and suddenly. "It may be that he is a brand snatched from the burning."

She spoke with authority, and her words seemed to be accepted as a final decision. Gridley pulled the child sharply by the arm, and, himself wearing a somewhat hangdog expression, led him across the fold and through the doorway, the others following. The scene outside, the leaden sky and grey moor and falling rain, had reduced the boy to the depth of misery; the interior to which he was introduced did little to comfort him. The hearth was fireless, the stone floor bare and unstrewn. A couple of great chests, a chair and two

stools, formed, with a table, a spinning-wheel, and a rude loom, the only furniture. The rafters displayed none of the plenty which Jack was accustomed to see in kitchens, for neither flitch nor puddings adorned them, but in the window-seat a gaunt elderly man with a long grey beard sat reading a large Bible. He looked up dreamily when the party entered, but said nothing, the rapt expression of his face seeming to show that he was virtually unconscious of their presence.

"Luke is the same as ever?" the butler said in a low voice to his sister-in-law.

"He has his visions, if that is what you mean," she answered tartly. "Same as he ever had, and clearer of late. Set the child there. You are hungry, I dare say. Well, you'll have to wait. In an hour it will be supper-time, and in an hour you will have your supper. But you will get no Pattenhall dainties here."

The elder Gridley went to the loom and began to work, while his brother, repressing a sigh of discontent, sat down and gazed at the hearth, regretting already the step he had taken. Mistress Gridley looked fixedly and with compressed lips at the boy, who sat in the cold chimney corner, too much terrified to cry. The only sounds which broke the dreary stillness of the house were the rattling of the loom and the murmur of Luke Gridley's voice, as his tongue followed the mechanical movement of his finger.

Such was their reception; the child, hungry and fear-stricken, thought with a bursting heart of the home he had left, of the friends and the very dogs of Pattenhall, its trees and sunshine, and warm kitchen. The grim silence of the room, the woman's cruel eyes, the bareness and greyness, seemed to crush him with an iron hand, so that it was only by an effort,

almost beyond his years, that he repressed a scream of passionate revolt.

Nor did he suffer alone. The butler, despite the care with which he hid his feelings, was little more at home in his company. He had no longer anything in common with his kinsfolk. In his heart he cringed before their rugged natures as a guilty dog crouches before its master. But he had thoughts of his own and a purpose to serve; and this enabled him to put a good face on the matter, or at least to endure with a wry smile.

The scanty meal of cheese and oatmeal eaten, and Luke's long extemporary prayer brought to an end, the strangers were taken to one of the two upper rooms. In five minutes the tired child was asleep; not so his companion. Gridley, fatigued as he was, lay and watched the last glimmer of daylight die away, and then, when all the house was dark and quiet, he sat

up and listened. His wallets lay on the floor beside him. He rose and crawled to them, and for a long time crouched on the boards by them, thinking. He wanted a hiding-place—before morning he must have a hiding-place; but the scanty furniture of the room afforded none. This he had not anticipated, and the perplexity into which it threw him was so largely mingled with fear, that he fancied the loud beating of his heart must attract attention even through the walls. After some minutes of misery he made up his mind, and rising from the floor crept to the door and opened it. All was so still in the house that he took fresh courage. He went back to his wallets, and drawing something from them stole on tiptoe down the stairs, each creaking board—and there were many—throwing him into a cold perspiration. When a coward gives himself to wickedness, he pays dearly for his fancy.

The staircase opened directly into the kitchen, where he stood awhile listening on the hearth. Luke, the preacher, slept in the back-room, and the door seemed to be ajar. Gridley felt his way through the darkness to it and softly closed it. Then he peered round him. Where could he hide what he had to hide? Memory, conjuring up the objects round him, suggested one place after another, but in each case he foresaw the possibility of accident. The linen-chest? Mistress Gridley might take it into her head to inspect her store of linen. The under-part of the sink? She might be about to clean it. The dresser was out of the question. He decided at last on the oatmeal chest, and groping his way to it found it, to his delight, unlocked and half full. The objects he had to hide were small; he ran little risk, he thought, if he buried them near the bottom of the meal.

After pausing again to listen and assure himself that he was not watched, he plunged his treasure deep in the soft meal. Then with trembling hands he drew the stuff over it, jealously smoothing and patting the surface in his fear lest daylight should disclose some signs of what he had been about. This done, and as he believed, effectually, he heaved a sigh of relief, and laid his hand on the lid of the chest to close it. At that moment a thin ray of light pierced the darkness in which he stood, and falling across the floor of the kitchen, chilled him to the heart.

Even in his panic he had sufficient presence of mind to close the lid softly, but the act detained him so long that he had no chance of moving away from the chest; and there Mistress Gridley found him when she entered, with her rushlight shaded, and her small eyes gleaming triumphantly behind it.

"Ho! ho!" she said, in a whisper; "I have caught a rat, have I?"

"I was hungry," he stammered, recoiling before her, "and came down to see if there was any porridge left."

"You lie!" she answered contemptuously, pointing to his hands as she spoke. They were covered with oatmeal. "I know you of old. You have been hiding something. Let me see what it is."

For a moment, despair giving him courage, he raised his hand as if he would have done her some injury; but the woman's eyes cowed him. "Hold the light, fool!" she said. "Let me see what you have got here."

She rummaged an instant in the meal, and presently, with an abrupt exclamation, drew out something which glittered as she held it up. It was a small gold cup. As she turned it to and fro, and the light which trembled in the man's craven

hands played quiveringly on the burnished surface of the metal, her eyes glistened with avarice. She drew a long breath. "It is gold!" she muttered wonderingly.

The wretched Gridley murmured that it was.

Glancing at him askance, and still clutching the cup as if she feared he might snatch it from her, she plunged her other hand into the meal, and drew out in quick succession a flagon and a small plate of the same precious metal. Such success, as one came forth after the other, almost frightened her. She gazed at the spoils with all her greedy soul in her eyes. She had never handled such things before, and scarcely ever seen them, but with intuitive avarice she knew their value, and loved them, and clutched them to her breast. "You stole them!" she hissed. "They are from some church. Tell me the truth."

"They have been hidden at the Hall—

since before the Squire's death," he stammered.

She held them out again and looked lovingly at them. When she turned to him again, it was to wave him off. "Go!" she said fiercely, "they are not yours. I shall take them. I shall give them to—"

"Your husband?" he retorted desperately, moved to boldness and action by the imminence of the danger. "Your husband? He would call them the accursed thing, and grind them to powder and strew them on Malham Tarn. What would you gain by that?"

She scowled at him, knowing that what he said was true; and so they stood a moment gazing breathlessly at one another. Before he spoke again their eyes had made an unholy compact. "Let them remain here, and do you play fair," he said slowly, "and I will give you the large one."

"I might take all," she muttered jealously.

"No," he snarled, showing his teeth; "I should tell him."

Her eyes fell at that, so that it scarcely needed the slight shiver which passed over her to assure him that he had touched the right chord. Smooth and hypocritical, and, like all hypocrites, afraid of some one, she feared above all things her husband's stern and pitiless code; knowing that no offence could seem more heinous or less pardonable in his eyes than this dallying with the accursed thing, this sin of Achan.

So the compact was made. The larger vessel was hidden at one end of the meal-tub, the two smaller vessels at the other end. Each accomplice showed the same reluctance to trust the other, the same unwillingness to take leave of the spoil; but at last the chest was closed, and the two

prepared to retire. Then a thought seemed to strike Mistress Gridley. "Why have you brought that brat here?" she whispered, as they prepared to mount the stairs. "Don't talk to me of gratitude, man! Tell me the truth."

He shifted his feet, and would have fenced with her, but she knew him, and he gave way. "Times may change," he said. "The land and the house may come back. Then it will be well to know where the lad is."

"Umph!" she said. "I see."

Perhaps her knowledge of the butler's plan prevented her being actively cruel to the child. On the other hand, neither she nor any one gave him a word or look of kindness. He had no place among them. Luke was wrapt in visions. Simon was too sternly self-contained, too completely under the mastery of his cold and ascetic faith, to give thought or word to the boy.

The other two had the meal chest to guard and each other to watch.

He was left to feel the full influence of the grey moorland life. The dismal stillness of the house, the lengthy prayers and repellent faces, drove him out of doors; the silence and solitude of the fells, which even in sunshine, when the peewits screamed and flew in circles, and the sky was blue above, were dreary and lonesome, scared him back to the house. Once a week the family went four miles to a meeting-house, where Luke Gridley and a Bradford weaver preached by turns. But this was the only break in his life, if a break it could be called. In Simon's creed boyhood and youth held no place.

Rumors of trouble and war, moreover, diverted from the child some of the attention which the elder people might otherwise have paid him. Sir Marmaduke Langdale's riders, scouting in front of the

army which Duke Hamilton had raised in Scotland, were reported to be no farther off than Appleby. Any day they might descend on Settle, or a handful of them pass the farmstead, and levy contributions in the old high-handed Royalist fashion. Simon and Luke, wearing grimmer faces than usual, cleaned their pikes, and got out the old buff-coats which had lain by since Naseby, and held long conferences with their friends at Settle. The boy, aimless and without companions, acquired a habit of wandering in and out during these preparations, and more than once his pale face and dwarfish form appearing suddenly in their midst gave Luke Gridley, who was apt to weave what he saw into the unsubstantial texture of his dreams, a start beyond the ordinary.

"Who is that child?" he said one day, looking after him with a troubled face. "There used to be no child here."

"The child?" Simon exclaimed, glancing at him impatiently. "What has the child to do with us? Let it be."

"Let it be?" said the other, softly. "Ay, for a season. For a season. Yet remember that it is written, 'A child shall discover the matter.'"

"Tush!" Simon answered angrily. "This is folly. Isn't it written also, resist the devil, and he will fly from you!"

"Ay, the devil—and his angels," Luke repeated gently.

Simon shrugged his shoulders. Nevertheless he too, when he next met the lad wandering aimlessly about, looked at him with new eyes. Though he was subject to no active delusions himself, he had a strong and superstitious respect for his brother's fantasies. He began to watch the boy about, and surprising him one day in a solitary place in the act of forming patterns on the turf with stones, noted

with a feeling of dread that these took the shape of a circle and a triangle, with other cabalistic figures as odd as they were unfamiliar. He would not at another time have given such a trifle a second thought. But we see things through the glasses of our own prepossessions. The morose and rugged fanatic, who feared no odds, and whom no persecution could bend, looked askance at the child playing unconsciously before him, looked dubiously at the grey moor strewn with monoliths, and finally with a shiver turned and walked homewards.

CHAPTER III.

LANGDALE'S HORSE.

It was well he did so, for the fiery cross had chosen that moment to arrive; Simon found his household waiting for him at the foldgate, and with them a red-faced man from Settle, who had ridden across the fells with the news that Langdale's people were harrying the place. Before the messenger had had time to come to details, the Puritan was himself again. The light of battle gleamed in his sober eyes, his face grew hard as his native rock. Knowing that he was looked for with anxiety, and that at the rendezvous few would be more welcome, he lost not a moment, but quickly, yet without hurry, fetched his pike and coat, girt on his pistols, and filled his bandoliers. Luke, who had had some minutes

the start of him, and whose eyes burned with a sombre enthusiasm, showed himself equally forward. When the two stood ready at the gate, then, and then only, they discovered that the third brother had no intention of accompanying them. He stood back on the inner side of the wall with a frown on his pale face, his attitude a curious mixture of shrinking and resolution.

"Come, man, be quick!" Simon cried sharply. "What are you waiting for?"

"I'm not coming, Simon," was the reply.

"Not coming?"

"Some one must stay and take care of the place," the butler answered, wiping his forehead. "I'll stay. Your wife will need some one."

"Fool! what can one man do here?" the Puritan retorted fiercely. "Come, I say. This is no time for loitering when the work calls us."

Gridley shook his head and moistened his lips with his tongue. "I'm not a fighting man," he muttered feebly.

For a moment the elder brother glared at him, as though he were minded to cross the fence and strike him down. Fortunately, however, Simon found a vent for his passion as effectual and more characteristic. "If you do not fight, you do not eat," he said coldly. "At any rate in my house. Mistress," he continued to his wife, "see that my orders are obeyed. Give that craven neither bit nor sup until I come again. If he will not fight he shall not feed!"

And with that he went.

When little Jack came back to the house an hour later, and crept shyly into the kitchen, as his manner was, he found it empty. The light was beginning to wane, and the coming evening already filled the corners of the gaunt, silent room, in which

not even a clock ticked, with shadows. The boy stood awhile, looking about him and listening in the stillness for any movement in the inner room, or on the floor above. Hearing none, he went outside in a kind of panic; but there too he found no one. Still, the light gave him courage to re-enter and mount the stairs. He called "Gridley!" again and again, but no one answered. He tried Luke's room; it was empty. On this the lad was about to fly again in a worse panic than before—for the loneliness of the house might have appalled an older heart than his—when the sound of footsteps relieved his fears. He stole to the window, and saw the butler and Mistress Gridley come round the corner of the house, the former carrying a spade on his shoulder.

Jack wondered timidly what they had been about with the spade, and where Simon and Luke were; but naturally he

got no explanation, and was glad to escape from the grim looks with which they greeted him. It was time for the evening meal, and the woman set it on, and gave him his share as usual. The butler, however, he saw with surprise took no part in it, but sat at a distance with a scowl on his face, and neither ate nor drank. On the other hand, Mistress Gridley ate more than usual. Indeed, he had never seen her in better appetite or spirits. She rallied her companion, too, on his abstinence so pleasantly and with so much good-temper, that the child was quite carried away by her humor, and went to bed in better spirits than had been his since the beginning of his life at Malham.

In the morning it was the same, with the exception that Gridley looked strangely pale about the cheeks. Again he took no share of the meal, but in the middle of breakfast he came up to the table in an

odd, violent fashion, falling back only when Mistress Gridley snatched up a knife, and made a playful thrust at him. She laughed at the same time, but the laugh was not musical, and the child, detecting a false note in it, grew puzzled. Even for him the scene had lost its humor. The man's face, as he retired cowed and baffled to the window-seat, where the side light brought out all that was most repulsive in his craven features, told a tale there was no mistaking. The child stayed awhile, fascinated by the spectacle, and saw the woman take her seat on the meal chest and spin, smiling and patient, while Gridley gnawed his nails and devoured her with his eyes. But the longer he watched the more frightened he grew; and at last he broke the spell with an effort, and fled to the purer air outside.

He was wise, for the morn was at its best. It was the most perfect morning of

the year. Ingleborough had no cap on, Penighent stood up hard and sharp against the blue sky. The summer sunshine, unrelieved by a single cloud or so much as a wreath of mist, fell hotly on the open moor, where the larks sank and the bees hummed, and the boy's heart rose in sympathy with the life about him. Feeling an unwonted lightness and cheerfulness, he started to climb the fell at the back of the house, following the right bank of the hollow in which the yew-trees grew. This hollow, as it rose to a level with the upper moor, spent itself in a dozen fissures, which, radiating in every direction, drained the moss. Some were three or four feet deep, some ten or twelve, with steep and everhanging edges.

Presently the boy found his progress barred by one of these, and peeping into its shadowy depths, which a little to his left melted into the gloom of the yew-trees,

grew timid and stopped, sitting down and looking back the way he had come, to gain courage. For a while his eyes dwelt idly on the sunny slope. Then on a sudden he saw a sight which he remembered all his life.

A quarter of a mile below the house, a road crossed the moor. On this a solitary horseman had just appeared, urging a piebald horse to a tired trot, while continually looking back the way he had come. The boy had scarcely remarked him and the strange color of his steed, when a second rider came into sight over the brow, with a man running by his side and clinging to his stirrup-leather. To him succeeded two more horsemen, trotting abreast and spurring furiously; and then while the lad wondered what it all meant, and who these people were, a single footman topped the brow, and after running a score of paces—but not in the direction the others had

Flung himself on his face among the bracken.—Page 59.

taken—flung himself down on his face among the bracken.

He had scarcely executed this manœuvre, when a party of six men, three mounted—the boy could see them rising and falling briskly in their stirrups—and three running beside them, appeared above the ridge, and quickening their pace followed with a loud cry on the others' heels. The cry seemed to spur on the fugitives—such he now saw the first party to be—to fresh exertions, but despite this, the two horsemen who brought up the rear were quickly overtaken by the six. The lad saw a tiny flash and heard a faint report. One of the two threw up his arms and fell backwards. The other made as if he would have turned his horse to meet his pursuers; but it shied and carried him across the moor. Two of the six rode after him, one on either side, and the lad saw the flash of their blades in the sunshine as they rained

cuts on his head and shoulders—which the poor wretch vainly strove to shield by raising his arms—till he too sank down, and the two turned back to their comrades, who were still following after the three who survived.

The boy, sick and shuddering, and utterly unmanned by the sight he had seen, hid his eyes; and for a time saw no more. His very heart melted within him for terror and for pity. Sweating all over, he rolled himself into a little hollow beside him where the ground sank, and lay there trembling. By-and-by he heard a scream, and then another, and each time he drew in his breath and closed his eyes. Then silence fell again upon the moor. The bees hummed round him. A peewit screamed and wheeled above his head.

He plucked up heart after a while to peep fearfully over the edge of the little basin in which he lay, and saw that the

six men were retracing their steps, but not, as they had gone, in a body. They were now beating the moor backwards in a long line, each man a score of paces from his neighbor. The lad, after watching them a moment, had wit enough to understand what they were doing, and from his elevated position could see also their quarry, who had lost no time in removing himself from the spot where he had first thrown himself down in the fern. He was half way up the fell now, on a level with the farm, and a hundred paces above the uppermost of his enemies. Apparently he was satisfied with his position, or despaired of bettering it, for he lay still, though the searchers drew each moment nearer.

Jack could see their flushed cheeks and streaming brows as they toiled along in the sunshine, probing the fern with pikes and going sometimes many yards out of the way to inspect a likely bush. He felt his

heart stand still when they halted opposite the man's lair and seemed to suspect something; and again he felt it race on as if it would choke him, when they passed by unnoticing, and began to quarter the ground towards the farm.

Their backs were scarcely turned before the man, whose conduct from the first had proved him a hardy and resolute fellow, moved again, and crawling stealthily on his stomach, as the ground afforded him shelter, began to make his way up the hill. The lad, lying still and fascinated, watched him; forseeing that the fugitive's course must bring him, if pursued, to the hollow in which he lay, yet unable to move or escape. It seemed an age before the man reached the mound, and wriggling himself up its least exposed side, pushed his head cautiously over the rim, and met the boy's eyes.

Both started violently; but whereas

Jack saw before him only a swollen, blood-stained face, white and haggard with fatigue, and half disguised by a kerchief which covered the man's brow and came down to his eyes, the man saw more—much more.

"Jack!" he muttered, the instinct of caution remaining with him even in his great astonishment. "Jack! Why, don't you know me, lad? It is I, Frank."

"Frank?"

"Ay, Frank! You know me now."

The boy did know him then, more by his voice than his face; and broke into a passion of weeping, holding out his hands and murmuring incoherent words. The fugitive whom chance had brought to his feet was his brother! the brother whom he had not seen for more than a year, of whose misfortunes and misdeeds he had dimly heard, the brother whom he had mourned as dead!

Twelve months of hardship and danger and rough companionship had changed Frank Patten much, inwardly as well as outwardly; but they had not sapped the the family tie nor closed his heart against such a meeting as this. He crept into the hollow beside the child with every nobler feeling in his nature aroused, and with one eye on the moor below and one on him strove to comfort him.

Courage is contagious. The elder brother possessed it in a peculiar degree, uniting the daring of youth to the hardihood and resource which as a rule come only of long experience; and Jack was not slow to feel his influence. The boy quickly stilled his sobs and dried his tears. In such crises resolutions are formed rapidly, the impulse to help is instinctive. In a few moments he was back in the old place, watching the moor; while Frank, whose bandaged head was so much more likely to

catch the eye and attract attention, lay resting in the lap of the hollow.

"Do you see them now?" Frank asked presently, when he had somewhat recovered his breath and strength.

"They are standing in front of the farm," Jack answered. "Now they are beating the ground towards the further brow."

Frank nodded. "They think I must have doubled back," he said coolly. "It was a narrow squeak, but I am all right as it is, if I can get three things."

"What are they, Frank?" Jack asked timidly, gazing with awe and admiration at the ragged, blood-stained, sinewy figure beside him.

"Water, food, and a hiding-place," his brother answered tersely; "but first, water. The sun has burned me to a cinder, and I am parched with thirst. I little thought when I rode gaily into Settle yes-

ter-even that this would come of it. But the game is not fought out yet."

"Have they not beaten you?" Jack ventured to ask.

"Not a bit of it!" his brother answered with a reckless laugh. "'Twas only an affair of outposts, lad. In a week, Duke Hamilton will be at Preston with thirty thousand gallant fellows at his back. It will not be a handful of disbanded troopers will scatter it. But I thirst, Jack, I thirst."

Jack slid back into the hollow and sprang to his feet. "There is a spring at the back of the house," he said eagerly. "I can go to it through the yew-trees, Frank, and be back in five minutes, or ten at most. But I have nothing to carry the water in, and the pitcher is kept in the house."

In a trice Frank pulled off one of his long boots. "Take that," he said. "It is

as nearly water-tight as awl and needle and good leather can make it. Many a man has used a worse blackjack. But can you go and return unseen, lad?"

"Trust me," said Jack, bravely, taking up the boot. "You shall see."

He had just bethought him of the fissure in the moss which had set a limit to his explorations. It ran athwart the slope a few paces behind the hollow in which he lay, and seemed to promise safe and secret access through the yew coppice to the rear of the house where the well was. Nodding confidently to his brother, he crawled back to the rift; then dropping into it where it grew shallow, a little to the right, he turned down it and followed it until it presently opened into the dell in which the yew-trees grew. Their cool shadow no longer terrified him, for he was thinking of another, and had a purpose; two things which form the best of armor against

empty fears. Carrying the boot with caution, so that it might not be seen easily or at once were he surprised, he plunged into the gloom under the trees, and creeping along, presently reached the spring, which lay a few paces only from the back of the house.

It was clear of the trees, and here he had to venture something. He waited and listened, and presently heard Mistress Gridley's voice. She was on the farther side of the house talking to some of the Puritan troopers, who had dismounted at the wall of the fold, and were discussing their victory. Taking his courage in his hand the boy advanced to the spring, and dipping the boot, staggered back with it into the shelter of the trees, where he lay a moment under cover to assure himself that he had not been observed. Quickly satisfied on this point, and the more quickly as he discovered that the boot leaked a little,

he lost no more time, but hastening back the way he had come, in three or four minutes reached the surface of the moor, and had the satisfaction of seeing his brother plunge his burning face into the boot and quench his thirst with water of his providing.

Never had the boy known so proud a moment. It was an epoch in his life. He was athirst himself, his lips were parched and his mouth was burning, but he would have suffered a hundred times as much before he would have taken a drop. He looked on, glowing with happiness: fear and weakness, heat and thirst all forgotten. For he had done a man's deed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEAL CHEST.

It was high noon, and the sun shone hotly on the hillside where the two lay. The rim of the hollow which sheltered them from hostile eyes kept off also such light breezes as were blowing, and served to collect and focus the burning rays. Jack panted and fanned himself, longing for shade and water, and cool sounds. But no thought of deserting his brother occurred to his mind. When Frank looked up at last, after drinking three long draughts from his queer blackjack, he found the lad had gone bravely back to his post of espial, and was searching the moor with diligent eyes.

Wonder and astonishment stirred afresh in the hunted man's breast. "Why, Jack,

lad," he said, gazing at him as if he now for the first time comprehended the full strangeness of his presence; "how come you to be here? I thought you were safe at Pattenhall, thirty miles off."

"Gridley brought me," Jack answered, lowering his voice cautiously.

"Old Gridley! He did, did he! He is a rogue if ever there was one. But why did he bring you? And why here?"

Jack explained, as far as his knowledge went; which was not far. Frank's worldly wisdom, gained in a hard school, helped him to the rest.

"I see," he replied, nodding darkly. "The old schemer had his own reasons for a sudden flitting. And he thought it a fine stroke to get possession of you, in case our cause and his Majesty's should come uppermost again—as, please Heaven, it will now. But you had better have stopped at Pattenhall, Jack," Frank continued

gravely. "Those crop-eared knaves must have done something for you. They don't fight with children, to do them justice."

"Still, I am glad I came, Frank," Jack said softly.

"So am I, lad," his brother answered. "That water and you saved my life. I could not have held out till night, and I should not have known where to turn for it myself. But we are being scorched here, and the buzzing of the bees goes through my head. You said something of a yew wood? It sounds better. Could I crawl there without being seen, think you?"

Jack told him, sliding down eagerly, how he had come and gone, and described the position of the fissure in the moss.

"The very thing!" the fugitive cried, his face lighting up. "I know the kind of thing. There are no better hiding-places. They turn and twist and throw off a dozen branches. And the nearer the

house, if these Gridleys are Parliament men, the better. They will not be suspected of hiding malignants. Is the coast clear?"

Jack answered in the affirmative, and eagerly led the way, his brother crawling after him, through bracken and under gorse-bushes, and over hot patches of turf where the sun grilled them, until the edge of the rift was safely gained. Here Frank fell over at once into the cool depth, and then standing up helped Jack down. The shade and the feeling of moisture which prevailed in this under-world were so welcome that for a moment the two stood leaning against the dark wall, the overhanging edge of peat effectually protecting them from the sun's rays. The chasm at this point was about eight feet deep and six wide; the bottom of a dull white color, with water percolating over it. Away to the right it grew more shallow, and after

throwing out numerous channels, rose at last to the level of the moor it drained. To the left it grew deeper, attaining a depth of twelve or fourteen feet where it opened on the ravine behind the house.

"Good!" Frank said, looking round him with sombre satisfaction. "I can find a dozen hiding-places here, and lie as snug and cool in the meantime as a nymph in a grot. The rogues are lazy, or they would have climbed the brow an hour ago. They will not do so now. One thing only remains, and that is the question of food."

"I will fetch some!" Jack cried impetuously.

"Yes, but softly," his brother answered, laying his hand on his arm, and restraining him. "It is past dinner-time, and you will have been missed, my lad. There will be strange eyes in the house, and you will not find it so easy to slip away again unnoticed. Whatever you do, bide your time.

I shall not starve for a bit; but if I am taken—and a careless word or a hasty step may bring these gentry upon us—they may give me quarter; and little gain to me!—a drum-head court-martial for breach of parole will do the rest."

His face grew hard, and instead of meeting the boy's eyes he looked downward and moodily kicked a lump of peat with his foot. Jack longed to ask the meaning of that phrase "breach of parole" which he had heard so often of late in connection with his brother's name. He did not dare to put the question, but his patience was presently rewarded, for Frank began to speak again, not to him, but to himself.

"A promise!" he muttered, his face still dark. "A promise under compulsion is no promise. If I promised not to bear arms for the king again, it was a promise made to rebels, and against my duty and theirs, and was null and void from the be-

ginning! Who shall say it was not, or that my honor was concerned in it? Still, these Roundheads, if they catch me, will fling it in my face! And Duke Hamilton looked coldly on me. I would, after all," he added, in a voice still louder, "that I had not taken Goring's advice."

What Goring had advised was so clear, though Frank said no more, that Jack looked at his brother with his eyes full of sympathy. He saw, with the astonishing clearness which children possess, that Frank's conscience was ill at ease—so ill at ease that the mere thought of his broken parole, now it was too late to undo the wrong, brought all that was hard, and fierce, and desperate in his nature to the surface, mingling a kind of ferocity with his native courage, and converting hardihood into recklessness. Comprehending this, the lad gazed at him with a face full of timid sympathy; until Frank, awaken-

ing from his absent fit, glanced suddenly up and met his look.

"What! have you not gone?" he said roughly, and with a reddening cheek. "You do not help me by staring at me like a dead pig! If you can get food, no matter what it is, don't bring it here. You may be followed. Lay it down at the opening of this rat-run, where you enter it from the house. I shall find it when the coast is clear."

His manner was changed, and Jack would have been more than mortal if he had not felt the change. It hurt and disappointed him sorely; coming just when he had done all he could. But he hid his chagrin, and, turning obediently away, set off without a word down the rift, and thence through the wood of yews, where the sheltering gloom was now as welcome to him as it had been before alarming. As he approached the house, however, and the

immediate necessity of facing Mistress Gridley and the brothers with an unmoved countenance forced itself upon him, he paused involuntarily, trembling under the sense of sudden fear which beset him. The horrible events of the morning, the cries of the men whom he had seen cut down on the moor, his brother's danger, and the consequences of a hapless word, all rushed into his mind together, and for the moment, if the word may be used of so young a child, unmanned him. Clutching the trunk of the last tree he had to pass, he leaned against it in a very ague of terror; afraid to go forward, shaking at the very thought of going forward and facing those unfriendly eyes, yet knowing that if he would save his brother, if he would not shame his blood and breeding, he *must* go forward.

While he stood in this agony—for it was nothing less—butler Gridley, loitering

He leaned against it in a very ague of terror.—Page 78.

about the back-door with thoughts and for a purpose of his own, espied him; and with a stealthy foot and a glance in the direction of the house, made towards him. The least observant eye must have detected the boy's terror, or seen at least that he was laboring under some strange emotion. But Gridley's eyes were not observant at all; they were only hungry. He had fasted against his will for twenty-four hours, and his plump cheeks were pallid. He had a wolf within him that demanded all his attention. He saw in the boy only a means of satisfying his craving.

"Jack!" he whispered, with his lips almost at the boy's ear and his eyes devouring his face, "I have always been good to you. I want you to do something. It is a little thing," he repeated feverishly. "It is a nothing. Just——"

He had got so far—and alas! for him, no farther—when a harsh, discordant laugh

behind him caused him to straighten himself as if an unseen hand had propelled him. "Let the child alone!" Mistress Gridley cried from the door; "do you hear me? I will have no plotting and colloguing in my house! And do you, Jack, come here!"

There was a world of sarcasm in the woman's gibing tone; and it cut the butler like a knife. He crept away with a savage glare in his eyes. The boy went slowly to the door with thoughts happily diverted from the weighty issues which had a moment before overburdened him. The incident was, indeed, his salvation; for, though the woman could not fail to remark his embarrassment, she naturally set it down to the wrong cause, supposing merely that the butler had been trying to corrupt him.

"Where have you been all day?" she cried roughly, hustling him into the house

—so violently that he stumbled on the threshold. "You don't deserve your food either," she continued, shaking him fiercely, "playing truant all day! But you shall have it, if only to tantalize that craven fool yonder. Where have you been, eh? You will stop at home in future, do you hear? This is your place—inside these four walls—until this business is over. You remember that, my lad, or it will be the worse for you!"

Simon Gridley and two men, whom the boy did not know, were in the kitchen, sitting dour and silent over the remains of a meal. They looked up on the boy's entrance, but took no further notice of him. The woman set food before him, scolding all the while, and then went off to her work in the back premises. The boy had little heart to eat; but presently he found occasion while Simon was talking to the two strangers (who were brothers, of the name

of Edgington, ex-troopers and weavers of Bradford) to secrete part of his meal inside his jacket. Mistress Gridley, when she came back, looked sharply at what he had left; but the boy had eaten so little that her suspicions were not aroused, and she flounced away with the platter, bidding him remain indoors and sit where he was.

She had scarcely gone when Luke entered and joined the party by the window, and there ensued much solemn jubilation over the morning's work and the peculiar judgments vouchsafed to the neighborhood; and particularly over the reported arrival at Ripon of Lieutenant-General Cromwell, with forces which might be trusted to give a good account of the Scotch army. Jack, sitting trembling on a stool in a corner of the fireless chimney-place, heard their sanguine predictions and shuddered. He knew Cromwell by name, and dimly associated him with Marston

Moor, and the sad night which had seen his father ride home to die. The kitchen grew to the lad's eyes as he listened full of dark shadows and forebodings of fate. The men who loomed between him and the window seemed to increase in size. Only the purpose he had in his mind, and the necessity of action if he would pursue it, saved him from breaking down and bursting into childish weeping.

By dint of fixing his mind on this, however, he steadied himself; and by-and-by, choosing a moment when the talk was loud, stole across the room to a tub in which the oatcake was kept. Ordinary the lid lay loose upon it: now, to his huge disappointment, he found it locked! Baffled, and more than half inclined to cry, he wandered back to his place and resumed his seat on the floor, affecting to be engaged in playing with two billets of wood. In reality his thoughts were keenly at work.

The cheese and cake he had secreted were scarcely worth carrying to his brother. Where could he get more?

It occurred to him at last that, failing everything else, raw oatmeal might be of use. Inspired by the thought, he rose and sauntered round three sides of the room until he reached the chest. Pretending to play about it he presently tried the lid, and to his joy found it unfastened. He raised it cautiously an inch or two, and thrusting his hand in found the wooden bowl which was used for measuring the meal. He filled this, and withdrew it successfully. Then he let the lid fall without noise.

He had still to escape unseen with his plunder, but the men were so busily engaged in talk that he feared no interruption from them, and Mistress Gridley was neither to be heard nor seen. He moved towards the back door, opened it, and slipped

outside, holding the bowl under the skirt of his jacket. The afternoon sun shone in his eyes, and for a moment he stood blinking like an owl in the daylight, so great was the change from the cool, sombre kitchen. Softly he advanced a step. Before he could take another, a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and Mistress Gridley had him in her clutch.

"You little thief!" she screamed, her voice shrill with savage triumph, "I have caught you, have I? You thought to deceive me, did you? To deceive me, you little ninny? What is this, eh? Whose is this?" she repeated, grasping the child's wrist, and forcing him to hold up the little bowl of meal which his fingers still gripped mechanically. "Whose is this, eh? Is it yours? This way, my little thief; this way!"

She dragged him into the kitchen, and exulting in her own sharpness, told the

men, who had risen at the sound of her outcry, how she had caught him. "He thought himself clever," she continued, shaking him to and fro without mercy, "but he was not clever enough for me!"

"What did he want with the meal?" one of the strangers asked suspiciously. "It looks to me very much as if——"

"What?" Mistress Gridley asked rudely.

"As if the malignant who gave us the slip this morning were hid here, and had employed this boy to get him food."

The woman sniffed contemptuously. "Stuff and rubbish!" she said. "The meal is for the cowardly sneak who brought the boy here. He is outside, on short commons," she continued, laughing without mirth.

"I met him going down to Settle," Luke said briefly.

"Ay, but the child did not know he was

gone," she answered with confidence. "The child did not know it, do you see? But I will make him know enough not to steal again, the little thief!"

The men nodded in stern approval. "Open me that closet door," Mistress Gridley continued, pointing with her unoccupied hand to a cupboard made in the thickness of the wall beside the chimney, and used in winter for storing wood. "I will lock him up there for the present. It is nice and dark. He may keep the oatmeal, and when he has finished it, but not before, we will see about finding him some other food. In with you!" she continued, dragging the boy forcibly to the place; "the beetles will keep you company!" and pushing him in, she closed the door and locked it upon him.

So far the boy had neither spoken nor resisted. But finding the door closed on him inexorably, and the horrors of the

black closet round him—horrors which a child alone can thoroughly comprehend—he flung himself, shrieking loudly, against the door. He beat on it with his hands, he kicked it, he cried frantically to be let out. The woman listened and laughed cruelly. "It is as good as beating him, and less labor," she said. "Take no heed of him, and he will soon tire of shouting."

The men laughed too—the boy was a thief—and went back to their talk, while the woman sat down to her wheel. The child's cries were music to her ears; and yet she was ill at ease. The butler had gone down to Settle, had he? What if he had visited a certain place among the yew-trees before going, and dug a little? She did not think he would have had the courage to play her such a trick. Still it was possible—it was possible, and she longed for night that she might go to the place and have the assurance of her own eyes.

For a time the boy raved and beat the door, his fear increased by that sense of physical oppression which children, and many who are not children, experience when shut up in a confined space without the power of freeing themselves. By-and-by, however, as the woman had predicted, he grew calmer. He had a talisman which availed, when the first paroxysm had spent itself, to keep selfish terrors at a distance; and that was the thought of his brother. In proportion as his sobs grew feebler his brain grew clearer. Anxiety on Frank's account took the place of fear for himself. Crouching beside the door with his ear laid against it, he drew such comfort from the murmur of voices and the thin line of light which marked the threshold, that he grew almost content with his position. He was safe from further punishment. Only there was his brother. He pictured Frank waiting and looking for him, wait-

ing and looking in vain for the food which did not come! And this fancy causing his tears to flow again, in the middle of a stifled sob he fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

TREASURE TROVE.

When he awoke and found himself in darkness, he could not for a time understand where he was. The line of light which had comforted him was gone, and with it the homely sounds of kitchen life. He stretched his sore limbs in the darkness and shivered, looking timidly for the outline of a window. Finding none, he put out his hand to feel for his bedfellow, and lit instead on the rough surface of the door, against which he had sunk down in his sleep until only his head rested upon it.

The touch recalled everything to the boy's mind. With a low whimper of alarm he sat up, and crouching against the door, which seemed some kind of company, listened, holding his breath. All was still in

the house, and he presently comprehended that it was night and that the family had gone to bed, leaving him there.

Use and sleep had rendered him in a way familiar with his prison, and he did not on making this discovery break into any loud wailing. Instead, he huddled himself with a moan into as small a space as possible, and not daring to put out his hand again lest it should rest on some horror, some crawling thing or clammy hand, he tried with all his might to go to sleep. He was dozing off and had almost succeeded, when a slight noise aroused him. In a moment a light shone under the door.

He scrambled eagerly to his feet, and tapped softly. "Gridley!" he whispered, "Gridley! Is that you?"

No one answered, but the bearer of the light seemed to pause in the middle of the floor as if struck by a sudden thought.

Then Jack heard the bolts of the outer door withdrawn, and even in his closet felt a rush of cold air. Some one was going out!

"Gridley! Gridley!" he cried desperately. "Let me out, will you? Please let me out."

But Gridley, if Gridley it was, took no heed. The light disappeared, and Jack heard the door close as softly as it had been opened.

He sat down, whimpering and wondering. The use of candles was so uncommon in that house that he could not remember to have once seen one lighted, though he knew that a lanthorn hung behind the kitchen door. Who then was this who used them, and went in and out by night with a foot fall which scarcely broke the stillness? The lad felt his hair move and his skin creep as he crouched trembling in the darkness. Then, on a

sudden, he heard the door creak afresh and the footstep return—the same stealthy, cautious footstep, it seemed to him, which he had heard before. But this time there was no light.

None the less was he sure that some one was now standing in the middle of the floor, within a yard or two of his place of confinement. His ears, strained to the utmost, caught the sound of hurried breathing close to him, and besides he had that ill-defined sense of another's presence which we are all apt to feel. Terrified as he was, he still clung desperately to the idea that it was Gridley, and he called the man's name again, his voice shaking with fear. To his surprise he this time got an answer.

"Hush!" some one muttered in the darkness. "Who is that?"

"It is I—Jack," the boy cried joyfully "Please to let me out."

"Where are you?"

"I am locked in the closet by the fireplace, Gridley."

"Hush! Is the key in the door?"

"I think so!" Jack answered desperately. "Oh, please, please let me out."

There was the sound of a hand being passed over the door, as if some one unacquainted with it, and uncertain on which side it opened, were groping for the fastening. It seemed an age to the boy before the key grated suddenly in the lock and the door yielded, and he felt the cold air rush in. For a moment he still hung back.

"Is it you, Gridley?" he whispered timidly, putting out his hand and trying to pierce the darkness, which was scarcely less dense in the kitchen than in the closet.

"No, it is I—Frank!" his brother's voice answered. And thereon a hand seized him roughly by the shoulder and drew

him out. "I must have food—food!" the voice hissed in his ear. "Don't waste a moment, lad, but tell me where it is kept. The woman is outside digging among the trees—heaven knows on what witch's errand! She may return at any moment. Where is the food kept?"

The harsh, fierce note in his brother's voice did more than any words to persuade the boy of the necessity of haste. Collecting his senses as well as he could, he answered, "Will oatmeal do, Frank?"

"Better than nothing," was the answer. "Where is the tub? Lead me to it."

Jack felt his way to the chest, and found it; to his joy it was still unfastened. His brother rapidly took out several handfuls and thrust them into his pouch. "Have you no cheese, oatcake, nothing else, lad?" he muttered.

Jack remembered the scraps of cheese and cake which he still carried in the

bosom of his jacket, and gave them into the other's hand. "Now I am off," Frank muttered on the instant. "I can do with this until to-morrow night. If the woman finds me here I must do her a mischief, and I do not want to. So good-night, lad!"

He glided hurriedly away, leaving the child standing in the middle of the floor. Jack heard him go, and heard the door open and shut; and still stood listening, wondering whether it was all a dream, or his brother had really been and was gone. Assured at length that he had had to do with reality, he wondered what course he ought to take himself. He had no mind to go back to his former prison, in comparison with which his hard bed upstairs seemed the height of comfort; and so he presently crept to the closet door, and turned the key, and then felt his way up to his room. Gridley was not there, but this troubled him little.

He threw off his clothes in a hurry, and in a moment was in bed, where he lay listening with all his ears. He heard Mistress Gridley come back, and detected the sound of the key as she turned it in the outer door. He trembled lest she should come up to look for him, but nothing of the kind happened; and while he still listened, the fatigues of the day proved too much for him and he fell asleep.

It was broad day, and the sun had been up for hours, and the house astir as many, when he awoke in his bed and found three people gazing at him. Instinctively at sight of their faces he began to cry, expecting a blow, or to be roughly plucked up and upbraided for his laziness. But no blow came, nor did either of the three persons who looked at him with eyes of such astonishment and perplexity offer to touch him.

"You are sure that the door was really

locked?" one of the men was saying when he awoke.

"Am I sure that you stand there?" the woman answered tartly. "Am I one to make a mistake of that kind?"

Simon Gridley shook his head. "I remember now," he muttered, "that I tried the door myself. It was locked sure enough."

"And it was locked this morning," Mistress Gridley added.

Luke's eyes, always wild, glittered with excitement. It was difficult to believe that he saw or could see anything except helplessness in the child who quaked and shrank before them: but so it was. "There are those whom locks will not bind, but they shall be bound on the Great Day!" he said in a hollow voice; "of such it is written, 'These sholl ye make to cease from the earth!'"

"Tut tut!" Simon answered sternly

"This is folly. What does the lad say himself? Who let him out?"

"Ay, who let you out, you imp of Satan?" the woman cried fiercely.

But the boy discerned that, with all her fierceness, panic and terror possessed her; and it was this evidence of an evil conscience which inspired him to answer as he did, "A woman came down stairs with a light in a lanthorn," he said.

The men stared and waited for more, but the woman recoiled with a pale face. "You little liar!" she cried hoarsely. "What woman? What woman is there here?"

The boy shook his head. "I did not see her face," he said, "but she came down with a lanthorn."

Mistress Gridley gasped. The boy knew something, but she could not tell how much. And then beyond this doubt lay the mystery, which was as much of a mystery to her as to the others, how he came

to be here instead of in the locked cupboard.

"Bring the lanthorn!" Simon Gridley exclaimed on a sudden. "We can see if it has been lately used, at any rate; and so far test his story."

His wife went for it. When she returned with it, it was empty. "There is no candle in it," she said sullenly. "The boy is a liar."

Simon took it from her hand and thrust his nose into the opening. "Softly, woman," he said. "It has been used within the week. Come, boy," he continued sharply, "who opened the door for you?"

"I saw no one," the child answered with tears. "There was a woman with a lanthorn. But I saw no one when the door was opened!"

Simon glared at him impatiently, and raised his hand as if he were minded to try

if a little correction would not render his account more intelligible; but Luke, breaking in with one of his fierce rhapsodies, called off his brother's attention, and the three, without further questioning, went downstairs to discuss the matter there. Simon alone, however, was able to do so with any degree of coolness and judgment; for though the woman did not altogether agree with Luke's interpretation, or find his gloomy fancies convincing, she had more substantial reasons than either of the others for fearing and hating the child: and no more notion than they had how he had contrived to free himself from the closet in which she had placed him. That riddle she could not read; and the longer she considered it, the darker grew her thoughts and suspicions, until nothing, not even Luke's sombre theory, seemed too strange or too improbable for belief. Conscience makes not only cowards

of us all, but the most credulous of cowards.

Jack would scarcely have escaped further examination but for the return of the butler; who brought such news as not only broke up the family council, but caused the bearer to be taken back into fellowship. The main road westward to Clitheroe and Preston crossed the moor not far from the house. He came to say that the advanced guard of the Parliamentary army was even then passing along it. Simon and Luke, with the Edgingtons, who arrived at the moment, hurried off on the instant to a sight than which none could be better calculated to fill their stern breasts with joy. This left Mistress Gridley and the butler together, and they had so much to say to one another that the boy, stealing timidly downstairs, found himself ignored, and, seizing the opportunity, slipped out on his own account at

the back of the house. Taking every precaution he could think of to avoid notice, he passed through the yew-trees, and reached the mouth of the rift in safety.

Here he waited a little, sitting on the ground, and presently Frank came to him. "Are you quite sure you are not followed, lad?" he said, glancing warily round.

Jack replied that he was, and brought out a little food which he had managed to secrete. Then he told his brother what he had heard about the march of Cromwell's army. "They say the main body will pass to-morrow," he added.

"Preston way, do you say?"

"Yes."

Frank's face grew dark and thoughtful. "If he is in strength he will take them by surprise," he muttered. "What does he number, I wonder? Has he got only Ashton and the western Presbyterians, or is

his southern army with him? If I knew, I would get across the moors at all risks, and take the news. But it would not do to go with wolf in one's mouth, and be called a fool and a croaker for pay!"

"They talk of twenty-five thousand men passing to-morrow," Jack said.

"If that be true, and the Duke be marching, as he was marching three days back, with his head a score of miles from his tail, he will be cut in two as surely as he lives!" Frank cried with an oath. He started up and began to pace the hollow, three steps this way and three that, while Jack watched him eagerly. Four-and-twenty hours of skulking had not improved the fugitive's appearance. He was hatless and had lost his sword. His face was caked with dust and sweat, his clothes were frayed and stained with blood. He had torn off part of one sleeve to bind his head, and this, with his unshaven chin and

haggard eyes, contributed to his wild and desperate appearance.

Yet the boy looked at him with pure admiration. The lad felt himself a man by reason of the share he had in his perils. The younger brother longed to help the elder. "You can see the road from the lower moor," he said eagerly; "that is no more than a mile from here. Could you not go there and see them pass, Frank, and then go to the Duke?"

"Could I see them pass in these clothes?" Frank answered, with a bitter smile. "True, I am not much like a cavalier, but I am not much like a Parliament man either! I should have the cry raised on me before I was a mile across the moor."

"I forgot that," the boy said despondently. "Yet it would be a great thing to warn Duke Hamilton, Frank, would it

not? Do you think he will be beaten if you cannot reach him?"

The elder brother nodded gloomily, standing still and gazing at the ground. The sides of the rift rose high above them, for the place where Jack had seated himself to wait lay close to the yew wood, where the fissure at its first starting from the ravine was deepest. They had little to fear from observation; and familiarity with danger so early breeds contempt that Frank fancied he had been in hiding here a week instead of a day, and felt a proportionate confidence in his lurking place. The sun lay hot on the moor: the shadow where the two stood was cool and pleasant.

"I suppose I could not do it," Jack said at last, humbly, and as one expecting a rebuff. "I am afraid I could not count well enough, Frank; but I will try, if you like."

His brother looked at him with a sudden

light in his face. "You?" he said. "I never thought of that!"

But he began to think of it; and as he thought, his face bore witness to the struggle which was passing in his mind. The lad beside him was a mere child; the risk to which he would expose him was such that a grown man might shun it without shame. And the boy was not a child only, but his own brother—one who had a claim upon him and a right to expect at his hands peculiar care and protection.

He knew, in a word, that he was not justified in exposing the child to the risk he meditated. But on the other side lay inclination and more than one cunning argument. The prospect of turning defeat into victory, and building on misfortune a claim to gratitude shone brightly before him. He saw himself the saviour of the army, thanked, honored, and exalted by men who had lately looked coldly

But he began to think of it.—Page 108.

on him. And then again was it not the duty of every subject, young and old, to dare all for the King; to think nothing which aided him dishonorable, nor any danger by which he might profit excessive? In some such creed he had been brought up, and it came to his help at this moment.

"I do not see why you should not do it," he said slowly and thoughtfully. "You would run less risk after all than a grown man, and be subject to less suspicion."

"Only I don't think I could count—not thousands," said Jack despondently.

"That is easily managed," Frank answered with a slight frown. "But you had better not do it if you are afraid."

"I am not afraid," Jack said, with a flushed face. "It is only the counting, Frank."

Frank nodded and stood awhile in doubt,

twisting a bit of fern to and fro between his fingers. "If they caught you doing it they might—I do not know what they would do to you, Jack, lad," he said at last.

"I do not mind," the boy cried bravely. "It is for the King, is it not, Frank?"

"Of course it is."

"It might put him on the throne again, might it not, Frank?"

"It might," said Frank. "But——"

"What?" the boy asked, his face falling at the word.

Frank did not answer. The child's loyalty and courage touched him almost to the point of giving way. For a moment it was on his tongue and in his mind to refuse the offer. But then his own past error stepped in his way. The temptation to turn the tables by a dazzling success on those who had blamed him for his breach of parole—the still greater temptation to

justify the breach by showing, at least, that he had not sinned in vain, overcame him.

"You think you could do it, lad?" he said at last—instead of that which he had meant to say.

"I am sure I could—if I could count," Jack answered eagerly.

"Well, then, look here," Frank said. "Or wait a moment."

He began to search up and down the rift until he came upon two pieces of wood, one a foot long or something less, the other half as long. He trimmed them with his knife, and then cutting off one of the points which fastened his breeches at the knee, tied the two sticks together with it in such a way that they became a rude cross. He put it into Jack's hands, and gave him his knife also. "Now," he said, "look here! The thing I want you to notice first and foremost, lad, is the num-

ber of guns. For every cannon, Jack, cut a nick on this long piece. Do you see, Jack? For a regiment of foot cut a notch on the right arm. They will pass by in regiments, probably with a space between, for they have discipline enough to suit old Leslie, and so you will have no trouble with them. The horse you will not count easily, and may not be exact with them. Still, notch them on the other arm as well as you can, troop by troop. If you get the cannon and foot regiments right, I shall be able to guess the horse pretty nearly."

"And then shall I bring it to you?" Jack said, gazing with childish pleasure at his new plaything.

"Yes, as soon as you think that they have all passed. But do not be in a hurry. When you come, if you do not find me, leave the cross on the bank here under the moss. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand," said Jack.

"It will not be the only thing hidden here," his brother continued. "Look, lad, what do you think of that?"

He displaced some overhanging moss with his hand, and Jack, looking into the crevice thus revealed, fairly gasped with surprise. "Why, they are——"

"They are the gold vessels from Pattenhall Church!" Frank exclaimed, in a tone of triumph. "I have despoiled the spoilers! The woman who came out with the light last night had them buried under yonder tree—the one you can see at the end here. Come this way, and I will show you! When I slipped out, fearing she might surprise me, I found her at work covering something up with a spade. I watched her go, and then as soon as it was light I tried my luck there. I found these little matters tied up in a napkin."

"And you took them?" Jack said.

"Took them? Of couse I took them. I put three stones in the napkin in place of them, and filled up the ground neatly. And one of these days some one will be disappointed."

"Hush!" said Jack, raising his hand quickly. "What is that?"

CHAPTER VI.

DEAD SEA APPLES.

THE two had advanced without thought to the foot of the tree which Frank had indicated, and in doing so had quitted the shelter of the rift, from which an open space a dozen yards in width now separated them. The deep shade of the yew-tree which stretched its arms above them still afforded some protection, the glare of the sun on the moorland intensifying its gloom and blackness. But such protection was partial only; it could not avail against persons approaching the tree closely.

The horror of the two may be imagined, therefore, when they awoke suddenly to this fact, and to the conviction that some one was approaching—nay, was already near. Before Jack's muttered warning

had well been uttered, the sharp crack of a stick, broken under foot, and the tones of voices drawing each moment nearer placed the danger beyond dispute.

For a moment the brothers stood as still as stones, the man's face growing hard and stern as he listened and comprehended too late the reckless folly he had committed in leaving a secure hiding-place at that time of the day. His eyes traveled from the boy's, in which he read a pitiful alarm more overmastering if less intense than his own, to the space which separated him from the rift and from safety. Alas! he measured it with a despairing eye. A moment before he could have passed that interval at a bound, and at will; now he recognized with an inward groan that the attempt was hopeless. A single step in that direction must place him at once in full view of those who were approaching.

Would they stop short of the tree which hid him? That seemed his only chance. He set his teeth together, and gripped Jack's shoulder hard as he listened, and heard them still come on—come on and come nearer. His brain sought desperately for some way, some plan of escape. At the last moment, when all seemed lost, and less than a score of paces now lay between him and the newcomers, he hit upon one which might possibly help him.

"It is that woman!" he hissed in Jack's ear. "Lie down and pretend to be asleep! Take their attention for a moment only, and I may slip round this tree and reach another."

Jack, poor lad, was almost paralyzed with terror, but he understood; and he found one part of his instructions easy enough to execute. His knees were already so weak under him with fear and

excitement that he sank to the ground under the pressure of his brother's hand, with scarce any volition of his own; and crouching in the shadow with his knees drawn up to his chin, remained motionless with dismay.

For a moment after reaching the spot, Mistress Gridley and the butler did not see him. The boy sat deep in the shadow, and the sun shone in their eyes as they crossed from one tree to another, and from that one to the farthest of all. The butler had even begun the argument afresh—they had been disputing about the removal of the treasure—and had stuck his spade into the ground that he might lean upon it while he talked, when he espied the pale face shining in the gloom beside the trunk, and started with affright. "Ha!" he exclaimed in a high tone, "what is that?"

The woman started too. Her mind was

"Ha! what is that!"—Page 118.

ill at ease; and it was strange that the child should have chosen that particular square yard of ground to sit upon. But she recovered herself more quickly. "You little brat!" she cried, peering at him with her eyes shaded, "what are you doing here? Be off! Go to the house, and stay there till I come, do you hear?"

The child did not move.

"Do you hear, you little booby?" she repeated angrily. "Get up and be off before I give you something to remember me by!" As she spoke, she advanced a step nearer to him and raised her hand to strike him.

Still the child did not move: and the woman's hand fell harmless by her side. The peculiar pallor of the boy's face, a pallor heightened by the shade in which he sat, his immobility, the strangeness of his attitude and position, above all the fixed glare of his eyes, had their effect

upon her, scared and impressed as she already was by his unexplained delivery from the closet. She hesitated and fell back a step.

The butler, who knew nothing of the closet episode, attributed the move to prudence. "Soft and easy," he muttered approvingly, "or he may suspect something. It is odd he should be here."

"Suspect!" the woman answered with a shiver; for when a strong nature gives way to panic, the rout is complete. "I doubt he knows. The child is not canny," she added, staring at him in an odd, shrinking fashion.

The butler was at all times a coward, and without understanding the woman's reasons he felt the influence of her fear. "Not canny!" he said uneasily; "why, what is the matter with him? Hi, Jack, my boy, what are you doing here?" he continued, addressing the lad with a poor

attempt at good-fellowship. "Are you ill, or what is it?"

The boy did not move.

Gridley advanced gingerly towards him, as a timid man approaches a strange dog. When he came near, however, and saw that it really was the boy, little Jack Patten whom he had known from his birth, the assurance made him laugh at the woman's fears. "Come, get up, lad," he said roughly; "get up and go and play!"

He seized Jack by the collar and raised him to his feet. "Jump, lad, jump!" he said. "Be off! You will get the ague here. Go into the sun and play!"

The boy had shaken off his first terror. Frank, he thought, must be safe by this time. He kept his feet therefore, but hesitated in doubt what to do; standing, to outward view a sullen pale-faced child, beside the dark trunk of the yew. Gridley noticed that he kept his one hand closed,

and acting on a momentary impulse asked him roughly what he had there. The boy, without answering, opened his fingers mechanically, disclosing three tiny whinberries which he had picked while he talked with his brother in the rift, and had involuntarily retained in his hand ever since. The butler struck them out of his little palm with a disappointed "pish!" and turning him round by the shoulder sent him off with a push. "There, go and pick some more!" he said. "Be off! Be off!"

The lad obeyed slowly, and with apparent reluctance. When he was out of sight, Gridley, who had stepped a few paces from the tree that he might watch him the better, returned and picked up his spade. "There, he is gone!" he said, with an inquisitive look at the woman, whose mood puzzled him. "And if you will have the things up, it must be done. Let us lose no more time."

He struck the spade into the ground, and began to dig, while his companion watched him. But her face betrayed none of the greedy excitement which had always marked it before when the treasure was in question. Instead, it wore a look of dread and expectation. Something like grey fear lay like a shadow upon it, and left it only when the man stopped digging, and throwing down his spade, dragged a small white bundle from the shallow hole he had made.

Then she showed at last some animation. "They *are* there," she muttered, her eyes beginning to burn. "I fancied——"

"Oh, they are here," he answered, chuckling as he stooped to unfasten the napkin. "They are here, never fear! Safe bind safe find, you know, my lady."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, however, when he fell back pale and trembling. A hideous look of disap-

pointment and dismay took in a moment the place of the gloating smile which had before distorted his features. The napkin being untied disclosed three stones; no gold, no cups, no treasure, but only three stones!

For a moment the two stood silent and thunderstruck, gazing at the pebbles, which in their perfect worthlessness seemed to mock them. Then the man turned swiftly and suddenly on the woman, rage and suspicion so transforming him, that he did not look like the same person. "You hag!" he cried, with lips which writhed under the effort he made to control himself. "You thieving witch! This is your work! Where is my gold? Where is my gold, I say?" he repeated wildly. "Tell me, or I will murder you!" And he advanced upon her, his hands opening and shutting on the empty air.

His frantic gestures and the passion of

his manner might have appalled even a brave man. But the woman, who had evinced less surprise and more fear on making the discovery, waved him back with the purest contempt. "Fool!" she hissed, with a flash of scorn in her eyes, "do you think that I should have played this farce with you?"

"But the gold?" he cried, cowering away from her in a moment like the craven he was. "It is gone, woman! It is gone, you see! If you have not taken it, who has? For heaven's sake, say you have taken it, and hidden it somewhere else!"

She looked darkly at him, and the look did more to persuade him she was innocent than any words. He wrung his hands and all but wept. "Some one has taken it," he moaned. "It is gone, and I shall never see it again!"

"What brought the boy sitting here?" she muttered on a sudden.

"Jack Patten?"

Mistress Gridley nodded with a strange look in her eyes. "Ay, little Jack. And he had three whinberries in his hand," she continued in the same hushed tone. "Look about, if you are not afraid. Find the whinberries, and something may come of it!"

He did not understand, but he saw she was in deadly earnest; and he was a coward, and afraid of her. "The whinberries?" he stammered, edging a pace away from her. "What of them?"

"They are our gold cups," she muttered between fear and rage. "The child has bewitched them."

Gridley cried out "Nonsense." But all the same he looked quickly over his shoulder. The sun was high and gave him courage. "The child?" he said; "why, I have known him from his birth!"

"Find the whinberries!" was all the answer she vouchsafed. And she pointed

imperatively to the ground. "Find them, I say, if you are not afraid, man."

He went down on his knees and began to search. But the earth he had thrown out of the hole lay thick on the ground, and he failed to find even one of them. He rose, and told the woman so; and she nodded as if she had expected the answer.

He shuddered at that. He saw her afraid, and he knew she feared few things. Besides, she had all the influence over him which a strong mind is sure to possess over a weak one. Seeing her afraid he grew fearful also. Though he did not believe, he trembled. He remembered how strangely the boy had looked at him, how obstinately he had refused to speak, what an odd persistence he had shown in clinging to that spot. Yet how had the boy known? How had he found the place?

Doubtfully he put that thought into words, and got his answer. "How did he

get out of the wood closet when I locked him in last night?" Mistress Gridley asked contemptuously. "I left the door locked when I went to bed, and the boy inside. I found the door locked this morning, but the boy was in his own bed. That is not canny."

"He may have taken the cups without —without that," said the butler, glancing round him with a shiver.

"Then where are they?" the woman retorted swiftly. "Or do you mean that he took them and hid them, and then came again and sat on the place for us to find him? I tell you the lad can go through locked doors."

The butler was not convinced, but he trembled. He stood gnawing his nails with a gloomy face, one thing only quite clear to him; that whether the child possessed the power which the woman attributed to him or not, it was certainly he who

had taken the treasure. This excited such a degree of rage in Gridley's mind as fear alone kept within bounds. He longed to follow the child and force the secret and the gold from him, and only the dread which the woman manifested kept him from doing this on the instant. As it was, he stood undecided, turning over in his mind all the stories he had heard of strange powers and weird possession—stories which then filled all the country-side, especially in lonely and ill-populated districts—and striving to recollect whether anything in little Jack's history seemed to bring him within the scope of these marvellous narratives.

Mistress Gridley watched him for a time, but presently her patience gave way. She bade him, fiercely, pick up the spade and come to the house; and together the two returned, each hating the other as the cause of a fruitless and unprofitable sin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOODEN CROSS.

RELEASED in a manner so much beyond his hopes, Jack lost no time in betaking himself to the house, where he found all quiet and himself alone in possession. He had every reason to congratulate himself on the success of his scheme; yet he knew he was not out of the wood. Child as he was, he saw that the woman, finding herself robbed in that place, must lay the blame on him; and in his dread of what would happen when the pair returned, he found it impossible to remain still a moment, but wandered from front to back, and kitchen to stairs, expecting yet dreading the first sound of their approach. When it came he crouched in the chimney corner and held his breath, waiting for the storm to break.

And there the woman found him when she entered. She had not expected to see him, and she started violently, for nothing her companion had urged had availed in the least to shake her belief in the child's dark powers. His pale face and huddled form and his odd and elfish position, as she came upon him, in the shadowy corner only served to confirm and support it. She shrank away without a word, and busied herself at the back of the house, until the boy finding himself free from attack took heart of grace, and little by little emerged from his retreat.

He could not understand how he had escaped suspicion and punishment, but the fact was enough, and his spirits soon rose. He wanted no reasons. Assured of his brother's safety, and delighted to think that he had contributed to it, he could scarcely restrain the impulse that would have had him hunt Frank out and share

his joy with him. Fortunately, he did restrain it, however; for during the rest of the day he was the unconscious object of the strictest watchfulness. Wherever he went and whatever he did, his steps were dogged and his actions noted, though he did not perceive it himself. The woman, by an immense effort, hid her fears, while Gridley, balanced between terrors and fits of rage which became at times ungovernable, had the prudence to shun the object of his hatred, and leave the task of surveillance to her.

Accordingly, the child remained in perfect ignorance. He went about his small and—to the adult mind—incomprehensible employments in his own small fashion; playing here and there, and presently rendering the woman's task more easy by the completeness with which he gave himself up to rehearsing the morrow's plan. Mistress Gridley found him continually

slipping away, and as often stalked him into corners, where she soon learned that he had something hidden about him—something which he took out when he was alone, and put away stealthily on her approach.

The woman's covetous spirit took fire afresh at this discovery, and for the moment overcame her fears. Her eyes began to burn, her cheek grew hot. When he sauntered away again, she watched him secretly, and by-and-by marked him down in a corner of the fold where the wall was highest. There she saw him sit down with his back to the house and his face to the wall, and, taking something, which she could not see, from his clothes, begin to toy with it, stooping over it, and caressing it with the utmost devotion.

She did not doubt that the thing he fondled in this strange fashion was the treasure of which he had robbed her by his

arts; and in a transport of anger she slipped out of the house by the back door, and, making a circuit, stole up to the corner, keeping on the farther side of the wall. When she reached the place she paused and listened, crouching low that he might not see her. The child was muttering softly to himself—muttering some monotonous unintelligible jargon, which in her ears could be nothing but a charm. The woman shuddered at the thought, but still she persisted. Cautiously raising her eyes above the level of the wall, she got a sight of the object he was crooning over. It was neither gold nor cup nor treasure, but a strange-looking cross of wood!

Mistress Gridley shrank away, trembling in every limb. The sight confirmed all her apprehensions. She hurried back to the house. But in the excitement of the pursuit she had not noticed the change in the sky, which had grown in the last

few moments dark and overcast. The first peal of the tempest, therefore, surprised her as she retreated. Startled and affrighted, she looked up and saw the black canopy impending over her head; with a cry, she crouched still lower, as if she might in that way escape the wrath she had invoked. Her nerves were so shaken that she never doubted the child had brought this sudden storm upon her, and even when it did her no harm, when it resolved itself into the most ordinary phenomenon and descended in sheets of rain, while the mountains clothed themselves in mist, and the moor streamed at a hundred pores—even then, though she had seen such a storm a hundred times and knew its every aspect, she still quailed. A terror of great darkness was upon her. She dared no longer meet the child's eyes, but sat in the farthest corner of the room, furtively watching him; while the eaves

dripped outside, and the cold light of a wet summer evening stole across the moor.

When he was gone to bed and his eye withdrawn from her, she felt more at ease. But her discomposure was still so great that Simon and Luke must have remarked it when they returned, if they had not been themselves full of an anxiety which occupied their minds to the exclusion of everything else.

"This rain!" Simon cried, as he shook out his dripping cloak on the floor and turned to take a last look through the open door. "Who would have foreseen it? Who would have foreseen it, I say, this morning? Never did sky look better. Yet if it goes on through the night they will scarcely get the guns over the hills by this road. The General will be late."

"It grows more heavy," Luke answered moodily, looking out over the other's shoulder.

"Ay, and the clouds are low," Simon assented. "I never knew rain more sudden in my life, nor, surely, more untimely. There is many a man will be damp to-night and march the slower to-morrow. Heaven grant it hinders the malignants also!"

"The wind is westerly," Luke answered shrewdly. "I doubt it."

Simon shrugged his shoulders as sharing the doubt, and would have closed the door. But at that moment his wife, who had already risen from her seat, laid her hand on his arm. The hand trembled. The woman's eyes were glittering, her cheeks white. "Simon!" she said, peering into his face, and speaking in a tone of suppressed excitement, "what is it—this storm? Whom does it hinder? What does it matter? What was it you were saying about it?"

"What does it matter, and whom does it

hinder?" the man answered fiercely. "It hinders the Lord's work, woman! It matters to all Christian men! It hinders guns and horses, men and wagons, that should be at Preston to-morrow to cut off the malignant Hamilton and his brood. In twelve hours, if this rain continues, the road to Preston will be a quagmire, and the Philistines will laugh at us. But we must rest content. It is the Lord's doing!"

"It is *not* the Lord's doing!" she answered in a tone of surprising emotion. "It is not his doing! It is Satan's!"

"Tush!" said her husband, harshly; but he started nevertheless at her tone. "You rave, woman!"

"I do not rave!" she answered, throwing up her arms wildly. "I tell you this tempest, that you talk of—I saw it raised! This hindrance—I saw it begotten! I—I, Simon Gridley! There is one here who

"It is not the Lord's doing!"—Page 138.

can brew the storm and hush the whirlwind! There is one here beside whom your General is powerless!"

"Then he must have the devil's aid indeed!" Simon answered, with a grim chuckle. "But softly, wife, what is this?"

In rapid, hurried words, rendered weighty by the terror and belief which were in her, the woman detailed what she had seen the boy do, and how the storm, of which the heavens had given so little warning, had followed immediatately thereon. She could not tell them all the bases of her belief; she dared not mention the gold vessels, or the strange scene under the yew-tree. But belief in such things is infectious. The mystery of the locked door was still a mystery unsolved and inexplicable. That they all knew; and nothing in the solitary life these people had led among the fells, nothing in the harsh, narrow creed they professed, or in their

custom of literally applying the Scriptures to everyday events, was at odds with the conclusion that the child was possessed by an evil spirit. No one in that day was so bold as to doubt the existence of the black art. And if at the first glance this helpless child seemed the most unlikely of professors, the discovery that his powers were being used against the cause which they believed to be the cause of heaven, furnished a probability which enabled them to dispense with the other. The men looked in each other's faces uneasily. The light was waning, the corners of the room were full of shadows. Those who felt no terror felt wrath, which was near akin to it. For the woman, her eyes flickered with hatred; which was only more intense because it was held in check by abject fear.

At length Simon, whose bold and hardy spirit alone accepted the idea with any real

reluctance, rose; they had long ago formed themselves into a council round the table.

"Hush!" he said, raising his hand. "The rain has stopped. What do you say to that?"

They listened and found that it was so. The eaves no longer dripped.

"If he is a wizard, he is a poor one," Simon continued, with a little contempt in his tone. "But if you will have it so, see here, we will watch him. There is a power greater than his, and in the strength of that I do not fear him."

The woman shuddered, while Luke, who was for immediate action, replied in a wild rhapsody, quoting the priests of Baal and the witch of Endor, the order of the law respecting magicians, and the fate of Magus. But Simon was firm; he was not to be moved, and in the end his proposal was accepted. The matter was thought so momentous, however, that it was de-

cided to consult the Edgingtons next day, and bring them into the affair.

When all was settled Simon rose, and went to the door and threw it open. He knew that, within a circuit of a few miles from where he stood, thousands upon thousands of soldiers were at that moment lying under the bare heavens, without so much as a tree to cover them ; and he had a soldier's feeling for their distresses. He saw with satisfaction, therefore, that though the clouds still hung low, in one quarter there was a rift in them, through which the full moon was shining out of the blue black of heaven. "It looks better," he said, as he came in again. "It will be fine to-morrow. And there is no great harm done yet."

But, to all appearance, more rain fell during the night, for when the household rose at daybreak, the hills were running with water, and every little streamlet was

musical. A fine drizzle filled the air, and obscured even the nearer surface of the moore, while fog veiled the mountains and hung like a curtain before the distant prospects. The boy eating his porridge with the others, unconscious of the strange glances and suspicious shrinkings of which he was the object, looked through the window and wondered how he was to manage his counting, and whether it would be possible to tell horse from foot. From this his thoughts strayed to Frank. Frank must be suffering horribly in this weather, with no roof over him, and no cloak, and no sufficient food. At the thought Jack felt his eyes fill with tears, tears which he would fain have hidden; but he found Simon's harsh glance upon him, and whichever way he looked he could not escape it. He grew hot; he changed color and trembled in his seat, and presently, feeling his position in-

sufferable—for he longed to think, and could not do so under eyes which seemed to read his secrets—he rose suddenly, and sidled from the room. He went, as he supposed, unnoticed, and without a thought of evil seized his cap and left the house.

Never had the moor looked more desolate; more sad and dreary and grey-colored. Here and there a stone stood upright, peering boldly through the rain; and here and there, where the fell rose, a whirl of mist floated above the surface as the fog thickened and broke before a puff of wind. The child shivered as he looked about him; and an older heart might have quailed. But shiver or quail, he held on. He had a purpose, and he clung to it. He knew the way to the high road, which passed over the moor half a league from the house, and he pressed on bravely towards it, thinking of his brother and the King, and the service he was about

to perform, until, despite the rain, his puny frame glowed all over. The thoughts in his mind were childish enough, the ideas he entertained of men and things as shadowy and unreal as the fog about him. But the spirit and self-denial which supported him were as real as any which animated the greatest man who that day marched or fought for his cause.

Even the passage of an army with horse and foot and great guns could not in such a district draw together any large number of spectators; and the boy, saved from immediate pursuit by the fog, found himself free to choose his position. Avoiding a group of countryfolk who had taken possession of a hillock which would otherwise have suited him well, he made for a second mound that rose a hundred paces farther on, and seemed also to overlook the road. Climbing to the top of this, he sat down in the damp bracken to wait for the troops.

A sutler or two passed presently below him, some straggling horsemen, a few knots of yokels bent on satisfying their curiosity. But the day was four hours old before the measured tramp of hoofs and the murmur of many voices, the clang of steel, and hoarse cries of command thrilled the child with the consciousness that the time was come. Trembling with excitement, he peered over the edge of the mound. The rain had ceased for a while. There was some show of clearing in the air. The sun which had broken through the clouds struck full on the head of the column, as it came on slowly and majestically, in a frame of steaming mist; cuirass and helmet, spur and scabbard, flashing and sparkjing in the white glare.

These were the horsemen who had stemmed the pride of Rupert and shattered the Cavaliers. The boy looked and looked at them, looked until the last man—a

grave sergeant with a book at his belt—had ridden by him. Then he remembered himself with a sigh, and quickly drawing out his cross, cut six nicks upon it, for the six troops of horse which had formed the column.

After these, three regiments of foot passed; stern, war-worn men, muddy and travel-stained, in buff coats, and with long pikes trailing behind them. Then more troops of horse, whom he duly nicked, and then some tumbrils, which at first the boy took for guns, but afterwards perceived to be laden with ammunition. On all these the sun shone, not cheerfully but with a stern glare, which seemed confined to that part of the moor, so that they passed before the boy in a vision as it were, and he notched them off in a dream. It was strange to stand so near these thousands of marching men, to hear the murmur of their multitudinous voices, and the tramp

of their feet, and yet to be apart from them and unheeded by them. For they passed in perfect order, no man stepping out of the ranks; so that at last the boy took courage and rose to his feet under their eyes.

When the tumbrils had passed the sun went in, and three regiments of musketeers came up, marching on one another's heels, with the rain and storm gathering about them, and the men grumbling at the weather. The boy notched them off, and watching for the great guns (of which none had passed), walked from end to end of his little platform, scanning the road. More than one of the men who plashed along beneath him noticed the strange figure of the boy moving against the sky.

For the fog, through which he loomed larger than life, distorted his gestures. He seemed at times to be cursing the men below him, and at times to be raising his

hands to heaven in their behalf. The troopers who remarked his strange figure perched above them, looked on indifferently, neither heeding nor understanding. Not so all who had their eyes at that moment upon him. The watcher was also the watched; and presently, when the rain had set in steadily once more, and the mist had grown so thick that he despaired of finishing his count where he was, and thought of descending into the road, a sudden end was put to his calculations. Something rose up behind him and dashed him violently to the ground. Stunned and terrified, the child clung, even in his fall, to the precious cross; in a moment it was wrenched from him. He cried out wildly for help, but instantly a cloak was flung over his head, and blind, and breathless, he felt himself raised from the ground. Some one tied his hands at the wrists and his feet at the ankles; then he felt himself

carried hastily off. He could scarcely breathe, he could not struggle, he could not see. He could not even guess what had happened to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE TRIAL.

For some distance he felt himself carried across a man's shoulder. Then another man took him up and carried him on more briskly. His head hung down, the cloak covered his face tightly; he felt himself at times far on the way to suffocation. But, gagged and bound as he was, he could neither cry out nor help himself.

The shortest journey taken under such circumstances must needs seem endless, and so this one seemed to the child. He long remembered it; but at last it did come to an end, with all its misery and terror—things not to be described in words. His bearer stopped. He heard voices, and the hollow sound of steps on a stone floor. He was set on his feet, and the cloak roughly removed from his head. He

looked about him dazed. To his intense surprise and astonishment he found himself standing in the middle of the kitchen at the farmhouse. There was the settle; there was the table at which he had eaten his morning porridge!

For a moment the sight filled him with excess of joy. In the instant of recognition the familiar surroundings, the things and faces to which, meagre and harsh as they were, he had grown accustomed, brought blessed relief to the child's mind. He uttered Gridley's name with a sob of joy, and tried to move towards him. But his hands and feet were still bound, and he lost his balance and fell forward on the floor.

Simon Gridley, amid perfect silence, advanced and took him up and set him in a chair. The other five, four men and a woman, stood round the table looking at him. Each held a bible.

Between fright and perplexity, and the hurt of his fall, the boy began to cry. Still, no one spoke to him. He stopped crying.

Then at last the strange way they looked at him, the strange silence they kept, went to the boy's heart. He cried no longer, but he looked from one to the other, terrified by the fierce glare in their eyes. "Gridley," he said faintly; "Gridley, what is it, please?"

The butler, at the sound of his voice, sank down pale and trembling on the meal chest. The woman shrank before his eye. But the four men met his look with stern, pitiless faces and set lips. It was Simon who spoke. "We have taken him in the act," he said, in a low, impassive voice. "What shall we do with him?"

"Ye shall make him to cease!" Luke answered, in the monotonous tone of one repeating a form. "He comes of an accursed brood, and he is in league with the

father of curses, whose child he is! He would have bewitched the Lord General and his army with his enchantments. We have seen it with our eyes. What need have we of further evidence?"

But Simon Gridley thought otherwise. "Stand forward, woman," he said, disregarding his brother's last remark. "Say what you saw yesterday."

The woman, amid that strange silence, began to speak in a low voice. The rain was still falling, and the eaves dripped outside. The cold light which found its way into the room showed her white to the lips. But she told without faltering her tale of the storm which had fallen on the moor when the child rubbed the cross; and no one doubted it, any more than, to do her justice, she doubted it herself. For was she not confirmed by the presence of the cross itself, which lay in the middle of the table for all to see! They looked at it

with horror, never doubting that the knots were devil's knots, that the wood of which it was formed came from no earthly tree.

Meantime the child, terrified by the stern, harsh faces and the glances of unintelligible abhorrence which met him wherever he looked, had no wit to understand the charge made against him. He knew only that the cross had something to do with it—that it was the cross at which they all looked; and he supposed from this that his brother was in danger. For his simple soul this was enough. He seemed to be in a dreadful dream. He cried and trembled, sobbing, while they spoke, like the child he was. But his mind was made up. He would be cut to pieces, but he would never let Frank's name pass his lips.

Hence, when one of the Edgingtons, who had met Master Matthew Hopkins, the great witch-finder, and would fain have

probed the matter further with such skill as he fancied he had acquired, adjured him solemnly to speak and say where he got the cross, the child was silent; so obstinately silent that it was plain he could have told something if he would.

"He is mute of malice," Simon said.

"He is mute of the devil!" Luke answered fiercely. "What need of talk when we saw him with our own eyes rule the storm? And it rains still. It rains, and will 'rain,' until his power is broken."

This monstrous idea seemed to his hearers in no way incredible. The belief in witchcraft and in demoniacal possession of every kind had reached its height in England about this time, when men's minds, released from the wholesome leading-strings of custom and the church, evinced a natural proneness to run into all manner of extremes. Had the child been a woman, his fate had been sealed on the spot, the

He is mute of malice.—Page 156.

popular fancy attributing the black art to that sex in particular. But the fact that he was a boy was so far abnormal, that it stuck in the throat of the Edgington who had spoken before. "Has he any mark upon him?" he asked.

The woman replied, almost in a whisper, that he had a black mole on his left shoulder.

"Is it a common mark?"

She shook her head without speaking.

Luke waited for no more. "This is folly!" he cried wildly. "What need have we of signs? We have seen. Bolts and bars will not hold him, nor will water receive him."

"That is to be seen!" Edgington answered quickly. "There is a pool below. Let us make trial of him there, Master Gridley. If the lad sinks, well and good. If he will not sink, well and good also. We shall know what to do with him."

Simon nodded sternly. "Good," he said; "let it be so."

But this the boy had still the sense to understand. A vision of the dark bog pool sullenly lipping the rocks which fringed its shores flashed before his childish eyes. In a second the full horror of the fate which threatened him burst upon him, and those eyes grew large with terror. The color left his face. He tried to rise, he tried to frame the word Gridley, he tried to ask for mercy. He could not. Fear had deprived him of the power of speech, and he could only look. But his look was one to melt the heart of any save a fanatic.

Gridley the butler was no fanatic, and though he was a bad man he was not inhuman. Something in the boy's piteous look went straight to his heart. He alone of those present, though he never doubted the existence of witchcraft, doubted the boy's, guilt, for he alone had known him

all his life, and could see nothing unfamiliar in him. He remembered him a baby, prattling and crawling, and playing like any other baby; and despite himself—for there was nothing noble or brave in the man—he stepped forward and interposed between Simon and his victim.

"I have known the child all his life," he said hoarsely. "He has been as other children, Simon."

His brother looked at him coldly. "Is he as other children to-day?" he said, and he pointed to the cross on the table.

The butler, thus challenged, made as if he would take up the talisman. But at the last moment, when his hand was near it, his heart failed him. He doubted, he was a coward, and he drew back. "He was always as other children," he muttered again, hopelessly, helplessly. "I have known him from his birth."

"Very well," Simon answered, with

pitiless logic. "We shall see presently if he is as other children now. The water will show."

He stepped towards the boy as he spoke, but Jack saw him coming, and reading his fate in the grim, unrelenting looks which everywhere met his eyes, screamed loudly. The child was fast bound, and could not fly, but bound as he was he managed to fling himself on the floor, and lay there screaming. Simon plucked him up roughly, and looked round for something to muffle his cries. "The cloak!" he said hurriedly—the noise discomposed him. "The cloak!"

Luke went to fetch it from the dresser on which it had been laid, but before he could bring it, the boy on a sudden stopped screaming, and stiffened himself in Simon's arms. "I will tell," he cried wildly. "Let me go! Let me go, and I will tell."

The man was astonished, as were they

all. But he set the boy back in the chair, and took his hands off him, and stood waiting, with a stern light in his eyes, to hear this devil's tale.

For a moment the boy lay huddled up and panting, with his lips apart, and the sweat on his flushed brow. He had said—with the man's hands, on him and the black water before his eyes—that he would tell. But as he crouched there, getting his breath, and looking from one to another like a frightened animal, thoughts of his brother whom he must betray, thoughts of devotion and love, all childish but all living, surged through his brain. The men and the woman waited, some sternly curious, and some in fear; but the boy remained dumb. He had conquered his terror. He was learning that what men suffer for others is no suffering.

Simon lost patience at last. "Speak!" he cried, "or to the water!"

The boy eyed him trembling, but remained silent. "Give him a little more time," said one of the other men.

"Ay, hurry him not," said Luke.

"He has had time enough," Simon retorted. "He is but playing with us."

Yet he left him a little longer, while all stood round and looked, greedy to hear with their own ears one of those strange confessions of witchcraft, which, whether they had their origin in delusion or in some interested motive, were not uncommon in the England of that day. But the child, though his breath came quick and fast, and his heart throbbed like the heart of a little bird, and he feared unspeakably, remained obstinately silent.

"Enough!" Simon cried at last, his patience utterly exhausted; "he is dumb. We shall get nothing from him here. Let us see what the water will do for him. Luke, the cloak!"

Jack controlled his fears until the man's hands were actually upon him. Then instinct prevailed, and in despair he gave way to shriek upon shriek, so that the house rang with the pitiful outcry. "The cloak!" Simon cried impatiently, looking this way and that for it, while the butler turned pale at the sounds. "That is better; now open the door."

One of the Edgingtons went towards it, but when he was close to it, stopped on a sudden and held up his hand. The gesture was one of warning, but it came too late; for before those behind could profit by it, or do more than surmise what it meant, the door shook under a heavy knock, and a hand outside lifted the latch. The neighing of horses and the sound of hoofs trampling the stones of the fold gave the party some idea what they had to expect; but late also, for ere Simon could lay down the child, or Edgington move

from his position, the door was thrown wide open. Half a dozen figures appeared on the threshold, and one detatching itself from the crowd strode in with an air of sturdy authority.

The person who thus put himself forward was a middle-aged man of good height, strongly and squarely made. His reddish face and broad, massive features were shaded by a wide-leaved hat, in the band of which a little roll of papers was stuck. He wore a buff coat and breastplate, and a heavy sword, and had, besides, a pistol and a leather glove thrust through his girdle. For a second after his entrance, he looked from one face to another with quick, searching glances which nothing escaped. Then he spoke.

"Tut-tut-tut-tut!" he said. "What is this? Have we honest, God-fearing soldiers here, halting by the way, whether such halting is in the way or not, or in the

morning orders? Or have we ramping, roystering, babe-killing free-companions? —eh, man? Speak!" he continued rapidly, his utterance somewhat thick. "What have you here? Unfasten this cloak, some one!"

Thunderstruck, and taken completely by surprise—for the doorway was filled with faces—the party in the room fell back a step. Simon mechanically laid the boy down, but still maintained his position by him. Nor did the Puritan, though he found himself thus abruptly challenged by one who seemed to be able to make good his words, lose a jot of his grim aspect. He was aware of no wrong he had done. His conscience was clear.

"They are not soldiers, your excellency," one of the persons in the doorway said briskly. "Four of them live here, and the other two are honest men from Bradford."

"That man has worn the bandoliers," the first speaker retorted, in a voice which brooked no denial. "Sirrah, find your tongue," he continued sternly, bending a brow which was never of the lightest. "Have you not served?"

"I was in the forlorn of horse at Naseby," Simon answered sullenly

"In what troop?"

"Captain Rawlins's."

"Is it so?" his excellency answered, dropping his voice at once to a more genial note. "Well, friend, you had for commander a good man and serviceable. You could no better. And who are these with you?"

"Two are his brothers," the voice in the doorway explained. "They were very forward against Langdale's horse in the skirmish at Settle three days ago, your excellency."

"Good, good, all this is good," Crom-

well answered briskly ; for that redoubtable man, Lieutenant-General at this time of the armies of the Parliament, it was. "Then why were you backward to answer my questions, friend, being questions it lay in me to put, I being at the head of this poor army and in authority? But there, you were modest. Here, Pownall," he continued, "lay the maps on the table. We can examine them here in shelter. 'Twas a happy thought of yours. And let the prisoners be brought here also. Yet, stay," he added, facing round once more, his brow dark. "Methinks there comes a strange whimpering from that cloak! Is 't a dog? To it, Pownall, and see what it is."

The officer he addressed sprang zealously forward, and whipping up the cloak disclosed the child lying bound on the floor. Terror and the exertion of screaming had reduced the boy to the last stage of con-

sciousness. He lay motionless, his face pale, and his eyes half closed; his little bound hands appealing powerfully to the feelings of the spectators. Even the presence of so many strangers failed to rouse him, or move him to a last appeal. He appeared to be unconscious of their entrance, or of any change in his surroundings.

The sight was one to awaken indignation in a man, and Cromwell was a man. "What!" he exclaimed roundly, and with something like an oath; "what is this? Why have you bound him? Who is he? Is he your son?"

"No," Simon answered, scowling.

"Who is he?"

"His name is Patten."

"Patten, Patten, Patten? Where have I heard the name?" Cromwell answered. "Ho, I remember! There is a young malignant of that name on the black list, is there not? For this county, too!"

An officer replied that there was; adding that the young man was supposed to be in Duke Hamilton's army.

"Very well! We will deal with him when we catch him," Cromwell answered sharply. "But, in the name of sense, what has that to do with this boy? Why, 'tis a child! His mother's milk is hardly dry on his lips! Why have you bound him, man?"

Simon Gridley strove to give back look for look, and to make the outward countenance answer to the inward innocence. But the General's sharp questions, and the astonished and indignant faces which filled the room, made this difficult. A sudden doubt springing up in his own mind, thus untimely, lent additional gloom to his manner, as he answered: "He is no child. He is a witch!"

"A witch!" Cromwell cried, his voice drowning a dozen exclamations of astonish-

ment. "Why, mercy on us, a witch is a woman! And 'tis a boy!"

"Ay, but 'tis a witch too," Simon answered stubbornly.

CHAPTER IX.

HIS EXCELLENCY'S JUDGMENT.

If Duke Hamilton had suddenly appeared in the room and surrendered himself without terms—a thing beyond doubt unlikely to happen as long as that gallant gentleman had thirty thousand men at his back—those present could scarcely have looked more astonished. Not that they, or the majority of them at all events, doubted the existence of witchcraft. On the contrary; but anything less like the common idea of a witch than this helpless child it would have been difficult to conceive. Respect for their chief did indeed silence the laughter which the man's answer would otherwise have caused, but it could not still the murmur of amazement and ridicule, or the hum of indignation which rose to their lips.

"The man is mad!" cried one by the door, a person privileged.

"Silence!" Cromwell answered sharply. "And do you, sirrah," he continued to Simon, "explain yourself at once, or I will find means to lash sense into you. What has the boy done?"

Before Simon could answer Luke interposed. The enthusiast could restrain himself no longer.

"What has he done?" he cried. "He has sold himself to do evil and stint not. Why do our horses fail and the wheels of our chariots drive heavily, so that the work is not done, nor the task accomplished? Because of the learning of the Egyptians which he has learned, and because of the witchcraft of Jezebel which he has practised, that the people may remain in bondage and our leader fall and rise not. Be warned, O Joshua, and hear reason, O

deliverer! It rains, and will rain in the land until——"

"Tie up the knave's mouth, some one!" thundered Cromwell. "And do you," he continued, addressing Simon, "who seem to have some wit in your madness, answer me briefly, what has the child done?"

But Simon's answer was destined to be again interrupted; this time by the arrival of the officer in charge of the prisoners, who came in to learn whether the General would examine them in the house. Cromwell gave the order, and the men, two in number, were accordingly brought in and made to stand by the door. This caused a momentary delay and commotion; but, so great was the interest taken in the child, who had been by this time raised from the floor and relieved of his bonds, that scarcely any one turned to notice them. The moment the stir ceased, the General nodded to Simon.

"The boy has a spell," Gridley answered, getting speech at last. "He has a charm, and when he rubs it, it rains. He brought the rain yesterday, and brought it again to-day."

"Tush, man!" Cromwell said contemptuously. "You play with me."

"You do not believe me?"

"No, in faith I do not," the General answered darkly.

"Then here is the proof!" the fanatic cried, in a voice of triumph. And he pointed to the wooden cross which lay on the table. "There is the charm! There, look at it, touch it, handle it; tell me what it is, if you can!"

"A child's toy," Cromwell answered scornfully, as he stepped forward and without hesitation took up the implement. "Well, man, I see it," he continued, turning it over in his hand. "What of it? Be brief with your madness, for I have

larger fish to fry to-day. Be brief, I say."

"I will," the Puritan answered, undaunted. And therewith, beginning with the story of the strange evasion from the closet, he told the tale, so far as he knew it, of Jack's mysterious proceedings and powers. For a while, Cromwell listened or appeared to listen with half an ear only, his attention divided between the speaker and a map which the obsequious Pownall had placed on the table. But when Simon came to the boy's singular proceedings on the hillock above the road, and described, with some advantages which his imagination lent the narrative, the manner of the boy's behavior while the army passed below him, Cromwell's attitude underwent a sudden change. He closed the map with a quick gesture, and for a moment gazed full at the man from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Umph! And so you think that caused the storm, Master Numskull?" he rapped out, when Simon had come to an end. "Where is this cross?"

It had been passed from hand to hand, but was at once brought back to him. "Here, Hodgson," he said sharply; "what do you make of it?"

The officer to whom he appealed turned the thing over and over in his hands, but could make nothing of it. Cromwell watched him with a sparkle in his eye, and at length snatched it from him. "Chut!" he said—but although he scolded, it was evident he was well pleased—"you are as big a fool as Master Numskull there! Didst never see a tally, man?"

"A tally, your excellency?"

"Ay, a tally, a tally, a tally!" replied his excellency, impatiently. "A thing, I tell thee, that was known in this England of ours, and in the exchequer, when rogues

were fewer and thy ancestors were hung without benefit of clergy! This is a tally if ever I saw one. To take an honest tally for a witch's broomstick? But softly! Said I an *honest* tally?" he continued, looking suddenly about him, while his voice grew hard and stern. "Pownall! count those notches."

The officer obeyed. "There are twenty-three, your excellency," he said, when he had accomplished the task.

"And how many troops of horse have gone by to-day?"

"Twenty-three, your excellency," was the answer, given with military brevity.

A murmur of intelligence passed round the circle of officers. The clue once found by Cromwell's sharp eye and strong common sense, the secret became an open one, patent to the dullest intellect. When further examination showed that the number of notches on the other arm of the

cross corresponded with the number of foot regiments which had passed that morning, even Simon Gridley began to understand that here was no question of the supernatural, but of some human agency equally hostile to the good cause. Only Luke Gridley remained unconvinced. "Bolts and bars could not hold him," he murmured, "nor——"

"We will come to that by-and-by," Cromwell answered. "Let the boy stand forward. Where is he?"

Some one thrust Jack forward into the middle of the room, where he stood exposed to the full brunt of Cromwell's formidable gaze. The shock through which the child had passed had left him dazed and weak; his color came and went, his legs faltered under him, and he trembled perceptibly. But his heart was stout, and his breeding stood him in good stead at this crisis. Barely understanding what

had passed, or the steps by which his plan had been discovered, on one point he was still clear, steadfast, and resolute: and that was, that come what might, he would not betray his brother!

But for the moment Cromwell said nothing about that. The question he put to him took all present by surprise. "Who let you out of the closet, my lad?" he said, in a tone of rough good-nature.

"A man," the boy muttered, with dry lips.

"Was it one of the men in the house? No? Then how did the man get into the house? Tell us that."

Jack looked about him like a trapped animal. He did not know which questions he ought to answer and which he ought to refuse to answer. Confused and terrified by the gaze of so many men and the possession of a secret, aware only that he must keep back his brother's name and

hiding-place, the instinct of a drowning man led him to give up all else. After a moment's hesitation he muttered: "His wife," pointing to Simon, "went out in the middle of the night. She left the door open, and the man came in."

"Very good," Cromwell answered. "That is clear and explicit. And now, my man," he continued, turning suddenly upon Simon, who stood silent and confounded, "what do you say? More seems to go on in your house than you wot of. Let the woman stand out."

Gridley the butler, sitting doubled up on the meal chest, where his brother's figure sheltered him, almost fell forward with terror. He saw his crime on the point of being discovered, and all his craven soul was in alarm. Were attention once drawn to him, were he once challenged and bade to stand forth, he knew that no power could save him. In the absence of evi-

dence he would infallibly betray himself. The dreadful tremors, the sickening apprehension, which he had felt during the first part of his flight from Pattenhall, when he had the damning evidences of his crime upon him, returned upon him now, and bitterly, most bitterly, did he regret that he had ever given way to temptation.

He came near to swooning when he heard the woman called out, for he thought it a hundred chances to one that she would falter, and in a moment weave a rope for his neck. The sweat ran down his face as he strained his ears to catch—he dared not look—the first syllable of accusation.

But Mistress Gridley, though she had had scant notice of the occasion, was of a harder kind. Relieved of ghostly fears, her mind quickly regained its balance, and instinctively took refuge in the falseness which had become second nature. Her shrewdish face wore a flush as she came for-

ward, and there was a flicker of secret fear in her eye. But the tone in which she denied that she had ever left her house on the night in question was even and composed, and "As for a man," she added scornfully, "what man is there within three miles of us?"

"The man who taught this lad to spy!" Cromwell retorted, swiftly and severely. "That man, woman! Do you know him?"

She could say No to that with a good conscience, and she did so.

Cromwell signed to her stand back. "Very well," he said, "then the boy shall tell us." He turned to Jack, and after glaring at him for a moment, cried in a loud voice: "Hark ye, sirrah! who gave you this cross? What is his name, and where is he?"

That voice, at which so many men had trembled and were to tremble, made the very marrow in Jack's bones quiver. That

fierce red face with its fiery eyes seemed to grow before Jack's gaze until the child saw nothing else save that and a dancing haze which framed it. "Hark ye, sirrah!" He heard the words repeated again and again, and his soul melted within him for fear. But he remained dumb.

"Come!" Cromwell said grimly when he had thrice bidden him to speak in vain. "This is what I expected. But I will find a means to open your lips. Pownall, bid one of the guard bring a rope!"

A movement in the room seemed to indicate that the order caused emotion of some kind, and Captain Hodgson, a bluff North-countryman, high in the General's favor, stepped forward as if to interpose. But apparently he thought better of it, and in a moment a rope was brought. "Now," Cromwell thundered, "will you speak?"

But Jack, whose white face and strain-

ing eyes, as he stood alone in the middle of the kitchen, a child among men, were pitiful to behold, remained silent. Only one idea, and that was rather an instinct than a conscious determination, remained with him—to shelter Frank.

"Tie him up!" said Cromwell, in a hard voice. "Sergeant," he continued, "take two files and the boy outside, and if he does not speak in five minutes, string him up." No one spoke or interposed, and the child, half led and half carried by the burly sergeant, had almost reached the threshold, when a voice close by exclaimed suddenly: "Enough, you cowards! Shame on you! Let the child go!"

"Who spoke?" Cromwell cried, wheeling round from the map he was scanning.

"The man you want!" was the reckless answer. "Take him, and let the child go!"

There was a brief commotion at the

door, which ended in one of the prisoners being thrust forward until he stood face to face with the General. "So, so!" said Cromwell, eyeing him with a frown. "Who are you?"

"I have told you!" the man answered flippantly, though the perspiration stood in beads on his brow, and behind that brave face which he showed the crowd was a human soul sick with fear of that which all men fear. "I am the man you want. The boy is my brother, and I told him what to do. He is a mere baby."

For the speaker was Frank Patten. There was a stir among the officers round the door, but Cromwell remained unmoved. "Where was this fellow taken?" he asked, looking him over critically.

"Between here and Settle, your excellency," Hodgson answered. "The scoutmaster found him loitering on the road and seized him on suspicion."

"He is a zealous man," Cromwell answered. "Let a note of it be made, Pownall. For you, fellow," he continued, addressing the prisoner, "say what you have to say. Your time is short."

"I have only one thing to say," the young man answered coldly—and few among the many who admired his self-control marked the tiny pulse beating madly in his cheek. "There is some gold plate hidden hard by. My brother knows where it is. It was stolen by that craven hound yonder, and buried by night by that lying shrew there. Perhaps the man who recovers it will have a care of the child until something fall out for him. That is all."

"Wait!" said Cromwell. "Let that man stand out. Is this the man?"

But Gridley the butler saved Frank the trouble of answering. With a moan of terror he flung himself on his knees on

the floor, and with tears flowing down his pale, fat face, uttered such abject entreaties for mercy as shamed the very men who heard them. Punishment had indeed fallen on the wretched creature, for while he lay there, now excusing himself and now accusing the woman—who stood by, dark and unrepentant, her face full of impotent spite—he tasted the bitterness of death a dozen times over.

"Faugh!" Cromwell exclaimed at last, spurning him from him with his booted foot; "take him away. Let him run the gauntlet of whatever regiment is first in quarters to-night! And see they lay on roundly, Hodgson. For this lying woman, your wife, man——"

"She is no longer wife of mine!" the Puritan answered, so grimly that more than one shuddered. "She shall cross my threshold once, and never again. She has sinned; let her starve."

General Cromwell shrugged his shoulders and stood a moment in thought. Then he turned to Patten. "For you," he said harshly, "you are a soldier, and know your sentence. You can have an hour's grace. Sergeant Joyce, retain four files, and see the sentence carried out. Or stay, I will reduce it to writing. The boy may be with him."

The voices of the General's staff, as they mounted and rode briskly away at his heels, had long died away, and only the sobbing of the child as he lay in Frank's arms broke the silence of the ill-fated house. The guards left in charge, grave stalwart men, not without bowels of compassion, had retired outside the door and left the two to pass these last moments together; with an intimation that when the hour was up they would call their prisoner. All things, even the ray of golden light

which presently pierced the window, as if to warn Frank to look his last on the sun, combined to heighten the stillness and peace, if not the solemn resignation, of this last hour. But alas, the approach of death withers life itself. The young man's blood curdled and stood at the thought of it, so that at last the moments slowly passing in that silence grew intolerable. An hour? It seemed to him that he had sat with the child in his arms for thrice that time. When would they come?

He grew so desperate at last that he set the boy down, and with a parting passionate embrace hurried to the door; the sooner it was over now, the better. Desperately he opened the door and stepped out into the daylight.

For a moment after he had done so he stood confounded, staring about him with wild eyes. Before him lay the moorland, half in sunshine, half in shadow. Above

him the clouds had parted, and the infinite expanse of heaven lay open to his view. But nowhere was a living creature in sight. The troop-horses, whose bits he had heard jingling a few minutes before, were gone; the troopers had melted into thin air!

He clapped his hand to his forehead, and stood awhile battling to control himself. Was this a trick? If not—and then his eye, travelling dizzily round, lit on a piece of paper which some one had nailed to the outside of the door with a knife. He bent his head, and peered at it, and read:

"*To Sergeant Joyce.—Half an hour after my departure you will let the prisoner, Francis Patten, go free. And this shall be your authority.*

"*Oliver Cromwell, Lieutenant-General.*"

THE END.

He bent his head and peered at it.—Page 190.

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