THE BAILIFF OF TEWKESBURY.

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BY

C. E. D. PHELPS AND LEIGH NORTH.

Illustrated.

CINCINNATI.
THE EDITOR PUBLISHING CO.
1898.
Second Edition.

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1898.

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THE BAILIFF OF TEWKESBURY.

CHAPTER I.

"Come, shall we go and kill us venison?" — SHAKESPEARE.

It was about eight o'clock on a bright cool October evening some three hundred years ago. The moon, nearly at the full, was cleaving her way upward through a shell of dappled clouds, and throwing tree-shadows across the glades of a park in mid-England. Two young men were seated on the turf beside a recently felled log, not upon it, but crouched in its shade, and still further screened by the long fan-like limb of a young beech which spread directly over their heads. As far as their forms could be distinguished, they were both youths of twenty or thereabouts: one, a stout clownish fellow in leather jerkin, leggings and heavy clouted shoes. Coiled round his arm were two or three horse-hair nooses, and a newly-killed hare lay at his side.

The other, of slighter build, wore the doublet, hose, and boots of a gentleman, though daylight would have shown them grievously soiled and tattered. Over this array, either for the sake of warmth or partial disguise, he had huddled a rough frieze jacket. Apparently, he was less used to weather than his companion, for he fidgeted about, rubbing his hands, shrugging his shoulders, and beating his feet on the ground. At length he rose and began swinging his arms, whereat the leather-clad youth broke silence.

"Thee'd best keep close, Joe Tuff," said he, in drawling dialect. "Keeper'll see thee, sure as death."

"And what care I?" replied Tuff, angrily, after a quick stealthy look around. "This pestilent damp has crept into my very bones. And I'll tell thee somewhat more, Hewlett," he went on.

"First, if the keeper should see me, a word to Sr Thomas would set all right; and in the next place I'll be called *Master* Tuff, an' it like ye. If I *have* come out for a run with you and your company, it makes me not *of* you. As the Latin poet says, 'Odi profanum vulgus.'"

"Thou mayst die at Farnum village, for all I care," returned the other: "'Tis naught to me; and 'tis naught to me either how easy thou canst get off the gaol or the stocks if the keepers take thee; only, an' thou's so great wi' Sir Tummas, I hope thee'll speak a good word for us. But call thee Measter! Thee that ran ragged wi' me about Shottery village, till Sir Tummas took thee up, and put thee to school, and made thee his clerk! Thee, that's wearing t' young squire's cast cloathes at this minute, I'll lay a wager! Noa, noa, we'll ha' no meastering here."

Tuff scowled malignantly, clenching his fist; but as Hewlett sat quite unmoved, he broke into a forced laugh. "'Twas all a jest, Bob," said he. "Canst not take a jest? Come, what hour is 't? And how long have we to bide here yet?"

Hewlett turned his face toward the sky. "Nigh time for 'em," said he. "I bid them meet here when the moon was three hour high. She's near it now."

"And you're sure of them?"

"Sure of Will o' Stratford," replied Bob. "But t' other lad has a good bit to cover. Tewkesbury's five-an'-twenty mile away."

"D'ye mean that he comes from Tewkesbury *to-night!* He must be a brave walker."

Hewlett nodded. "He is that," he answered. "I mind when he were in Shottery ten year agone, not a lad could race again him."

"Shottery? But you said he came from Tewkesbury?"

"Ay, does he. His feyther's a mustard-man there. But when t' sore fever were there ten year agone, his mother died, and he were sent up to 's aunt at Shottery. He bided there a twel'-month, an 's feyther wedded again. But t' owd man holds a bit o' mead here, and Will's sent up to sell t' ricks nigh Michaelmas every year. I took to him wonderful then, though a little chap — he's five year older nor me — and I ne'er miss to see him. And this time, says I to him, 'Doant ye want to ha' a bit o' fun wi' us again?' 'I'm rare and old for it,' s ys he, 'but I'll come for one last bout.' So I set t' night, and spoke to you and Will o' Stratford."

"He's named Will, too, then?" said Tuff. "Two Wills: we'll see which is the stronger. What's his other name?"

Hewlett looked puzzled. "I doant rightly mind; 'tis Kelp, or Sells, or summat like that. I just call him Will. Here comes one or t' other."

A slight crackling sound was heard in the

distance, and Hewlett, taking up a dead stick, snapped it twice across.

"That's t' sign," said he.

The branches parted, and a tall, lithe young man stepped out of the shadows. He wore dark green hose, a short tunic of the same color, with a broad leather belt, a cap with a cock's feather on one side, and a bow and case of arrows at his back.

"Well met, Will," said Bob, taking his hand. "This be Joe Tuff. Joe, here's my friend Will o' Tewkesbury. What dost ail, Joe?" For Tuff drew back, and affected a sudden fit of sneezing.

"Chewks — Chewks — Chewkesbury mustard!" he jerked out, with violent contortions.

"I'll try a clap o' the pate to cure thee," said the new comer; and as Tuff doubled up in a fresh paroxysm, he sent him heels over head with a sound box on the ear.

"How now, lad? does Tewkesbury mustard sting?"

Tuff rose, and fell back into the shade, rubbing his ear, and muttering something about not forgetting.

"Here's Will o' Stratford," said Hewlett, and a fourth young man in grey joined the party.

"How goes it, minions of moonlight?" he cried, in a singularly musical and resonant voice. "Shall we be merry? Shall we strike a deer extempore?"

"No such luck," said Tuff. "Bob, here, bears all the game we're like to find. But how hast left wife and child, Goodman Will? 'Tis no safe sport this for a married man."

"Nay," replied the youth, "Nan must take her chance. An' I'm laid by the heels, I trust I shall become the stocks as well as another. But to our gear. Which way, Bob?"

"Over yon, where t' beck crosses path," replied Hewlett. "Come and I'll set ye in place."

They rose and followed Bob along the border of the woods, walking in single file, and keeping in the shadow. The rippling sound of water was soon heard, and after breaking their way through a thicket of alders and willows, they halted where the brook crossed a winding wood road.

"Here ye are," whispered Bob. "Keep close, doant speak loud; y're none so far from t' Hall now. I know where t' deer feed; I'll go about, and drive 'em this way. Wind's in their back, and they'll none see ye till they're right near. Then shoot. Tewkesbury Will, you've bow and shafts I see. Will o' Stratford — eh? What? Naught but a quarter-staff? Well, one good shot's enow. Ye've all knives for flaying — he should fall i' t' beck — and I'll soon be here to help. Eh!" as the moon shone strongly on the young men's faces, "how like you two Wills are to each other! Ye might be brothers. Well, look for t' herd or many minutes." And splashing along the edges of the stream, he was presently lost to view.

The three waited, conversing in low tones.

"He said you two might be brothers," said Tuff, "and no doubt you'll agree like brothers."

"Dost think us like, then," asked he of Stratford, "like as the two wise men of Syracuse?"

"I mind them well," said Tuff, "they fought in the siege, methinks."

"Nay," said the other, "they faced it out well, but fought not. And as we speak of fighting, brother Will, canst draw a good bow?"

"The bow's good enow," said Tewkesbury Will, "but I mistrust the bowman. I ne'er shot yet at deer. Prithee, do thou take it, and prove thy skill."

After a little demur, the Stratford youth took the bow and shafts, giving his staff in their place. And scarcely had the change been effected when a low "Hist!" from Tuff warned them of the deer's approach.

For a few seconds, all were still as stone. The moon, now almost at the zenith, shone brightly down on the mossy road, the gleaming brook, and the three figures — one leaning on his staff, one with his hand on the bowstring, and one crouching low in shadow, clutching at his knife. Then the thud of light hoofs was heard on the turf, and a noble buck dashed round the turn, and bore straight down upon them. Drawing his arrow to the head, Stratford Will let it fly fair at the deer's breast. But at the very instant, checking his speed, the buck lowered his head. The shaft, striking a tine of his antlers, glanced upward into the air, and the deer, snorting with fright, wheeled short to the left, and was in cover ere the archer could seize another arrow.

The baffled poachers looked at each other, but no time was given them for words before two men armed with musketoons sprang from behind a huge tree, and shouting "Stand, ye rogues! Stand, knaves!" rushed in upon them. The foremost discharged his piece at Tewkesbury Will, but missed his aim. Throwing down the weapon he drew a short sword, and aimed a blow at the young man's head, which Will cleverly parried with his staff, only receiving a slight wound on the arm, and dealing the keeper, in turn, a blow on the skull which staggered him. Improving his advantage, Will was about to close, when Tuff caught him by the ankle from behind, and threw him flat on his face. The keeper was on him in an instant, and

holding him firmly down, had his hands bound in a trice. The other keeper, meanwhile, with his musket at Stratford Will's breast, held him at bay till his comrade tied him also.

"A good haul," said the taller, most active, and evidently superior keeper, taking off his hat, and rubbing his smarting crown. "A good haul. But where's t' other fellow, Dick? Methought I saw three."

"So did I, Master Powdrell," replied the underling, "but he's none here. He mun ha' run for 't."

"Well, well," answered Powdrell, "belike 'twas a stump. But we mun get em up to Hall or Sir Tummis is abed. Gi' me thy musket, Dick. Take up his bow and bolts. Move on afore, ye knaves, and mind ye, no running, or I'll scatter the little brains ye have."

They turned up the road, and were presently joined by a third keeper, dragging with him the luckless Hewlett. No words were exchanged by the captives, and few by the keepers, until after skirting a high wall for some distance, they entered a gateway, and saw before them the long brick front of Charlecote Hall.

CHAPTER II.

"Where should a father be so well
As in the bosom of his family?"
— *French Song.*

Sir Thomas Lucy sat at supper with his family. The Squire of Charlecote was but recently returned from a long day's hunting, as his huge bespattered boots, rusty spurs, and the riding cloak hung on his chair back, testified. His doublet, shaped and stiffened with buckram almost into the similitude of armor, rose closely under his pointed beard and long iron-grey hair, the ruff, then a usual complement of male or female costume, having been laid aside as unsuited to the exigencies of the chase. Jovial by nature, he was now in extremely good humor, for a fresh fox's brush against the chimney-piece showed that the gallant knight had that day been first in at the death. The remnants of a large pasty, a round of beef, and a dish of eels, indicated the proverbial appetite of the hunter, who was now applying himself to the flagon, and between draughts relating the adventures of the day to an audience of three.

Lady Joyce Lucy, a mature but still comely matron, sat at the board head, regarding her lord's potations with some anxiety, and lending an attentive but uninterested ear to his discourse. Her ladyship wore a half-round farthingale and bodice of dark satin over a petticoat of murrey-colored cloth. Her coif, pinners and ruff were of finest lace, but save a single ring, she wore no ornaments. Sir Thomas' son and heir, a young man somewhat over twenty, who had followed the chase

with him all day, sat on one side of the table. The youth had changed his riding gear for a suit of grey velvet, but, quite overpowered by the exercise which had only invigorated his sturdy sire, nodded and blinked behind a half-emptied cup, wearily awaiting the sign of dismissal.

But Sir Thomas had at least one enthusiastic hearer. Fronting the young squire, but with her face turned towards his father, her eyes shining like stars, her cheeks glowing, and the teeth just seen through her parted lips, sat Mistress Dorothy

Lucy, a distant cousin of Sir Thomas, though commonly called his niece. She was a girl of about fifteen, habited in a peach-colored gown, slashed on neck and sleeves to show the white lining. A knot of blue ribbon, just matching her eyes, held back her short, brown curls, and two pearls set in gold, her greatest treasures, dangled from her small ears. She was now intent on the narrative of her uncle, whom she firmly believed to be the greatest, wisest, and bravest of men.

"So, as I said," went on Sir Thomas, "the first fox gave us a quick run, but got to earth ere long. We next beat Chelmsley Wood, and soon started another. And which hound of them all, d'ye think, first hit off the scent? — Another cup of sack, Andrew. — Why, Ajax here. Thou knowest Ajax, my lady?"

"The black dog, is 't not, Sir Thomas?" answered Lady Lucy, scanning the group of hounds before the great fire.

"Nay, nay," replied Sir Thomas, testily. "I had thought thou knewest some of them, Dame. I'll be bound Dorothy could pick him out. Canst tell us, Doll?"

"In sooth I can, Uncle," replied the girl. "The spotted one with the torn ear is Ajax: and the black one is Neptune, his brother — the grooms call them Jack and Nipper — and the others are Juno and Tray. Then, besides"—

"Peace, child," interposed Lady Lucy. "Thy uncle is answered."

"Well done! well done, wench!" cried Sir Thomas. "We'll make a huntress of thee soon. I've my eye on a palfrey for thee, and shalt go with me some fine day next month. And I warrant 'twill not be long ere every young fellow

round will risk his neck to be first to bring the brush to Mistress Dorothy, and win a smile — "

"Truly, Sir Thomas," said his lady, "you do great wrong to put such thoughts in Dorothy's head. She is yet but a child."

Sir Thomas made a grimace, and took a long draught. "Where was I?" said he. "Ay, ay. The fox went straight away to the south, through Hopton hills, and over the heads of Nen Water. More than one lay wallowing in the ditches or we got through. We killed at last near Guest Farm — a run of two hours good — and thy old uncle was in at the death next to the huntsman. — Andrew, another cup of sack."

"Niece Dorothy," said the lady of the house, "'tis time thou and I went to our oratory." And she rose from her chair.

Andrew stepped to the door, and opened it for his lady's passage; but finding some one without, parleyed with him a minute, and then returning addressed Sir Thomas. "Please your Worship, Powdrell and the other keepers are here wi' three porchers they ha' just ta'en in the park; and will your Worship be pleased to see them now, or shall they put them in ward till morn?"

Sir Thomas turned himself impatiently. "Poachers? Plague on't! a man has no rest! Bid Powdrell put them in the strong room over night; I'll have this evening to myself. — Nay, stay. I had forgot: I sit at assize to-morrow with Sir John Dempster. Have them up to the hall; mayhap I can despatch the business now. Bring my furred gown, Andrew; and send Master Tuff down with all speed."

The servant bowed and departed. Sir Thomas took another draught, and rose reluctantly from

his chair. He was just leaving the room, when a sudden whim seized his fancy, and he turned to his niece and son, who, having risen, respectfully awaited his departure.

"Niece Doll," said he, "thou hast never yet seen me in the judgment seat: wilt go now, and hear me give sentence upon these rogues?"

"Nay, Sir Thomas," remonstrated his lady, "methinks it ill becomes a young damsel of her breeding to be in presence with such rude fellows, and at this hour."

The girl hung back, looking anxiously from one to the other.

"What say'st, wench?" asked Sir Thomas. "Wilt go, or no?"

"Prithee, good aunt — if my uncle will have me, I would fain go — I will take my muffler, and stand quiet as any mouse behind his chair," faltered Dorothy.

"It were more seemly that she abode here with me," urged her aunt, sternly.

"Tush, tush!" replied Sir Thomas, "she shall take no harm. Tom, fence thy cousin on t' other side. Come with me, both." And taking his niece's hand, he led her from the room, his son bringing up the rear. Lady Lucy looked after them for a moment with an expression of grave displeasure, and then swept away to her own apartment.

CHAPTER III.

"Drest in a little brief authority." — SHAKESPEARE.

SIR THOMAS paused a few moments on the threshold of the hall to adjust his gown, a delay which gave Dorothy time to send a maid, who stood near, for a muffler, wherewith she veiled her face, after the manner of a modern oriental female.

The apartment they now entered was the largest in the house. At one end was a dais, upon which gave the inner door. Here stood the Justice's chair, with a table before it, on which two wax candles flared in the draughts which played through the long and lofty room. In front were a desk and stool. On one side a servant was replenishing the fire in the great chimney; along the opposite wall torches in iron branches alternated with, and flashed upon stands of pikes and halberds, corslets and helmets, some of which had done service under Cœur de-Lion. Near the outer door stood the keepers with their prisoners, and as the great man entered all louted low.

"Set yonder joint-stool for Mistress Dorothy, lads," called Sir Thomas authoritatively, as one or two men servants came forward, "here — at my right hand. Son Thomas, stand close beside her with thy sword. Where is Master Tuff? I bade thee fetch him, Andrew."

"Please your Worship," replied the man, "I sought in his closet, and then below stairs, and none had seen him."

"Go look again, send more," commanded the Justice, who felt himself at a loss without his

quick-witted clerk. "He is ever to seek when needed. Powdrell, put these fellows forward, that I may fetch their misdeeds to the light."

The three poachers were accordingly brought nearer the dais, and Sir Thomas entered on an exordium calculated to impress both them and his niece.

"Fellows, ye stand before me as infringers of more laws than one — the *lex sobrietatis*, or law of temperance, for I warrant ye had well drunken ere ye set forth to rob — the *lex læsæ majestatis*, for what saith the poet, 'Non equitem invideo, miror magistratus,' which is, being translated, 'I respect a knight, and still more a magistrate', and both these dignities have ye dishonored in my person — lastly, the *lex silvæ*, or forest law — how, ye know best. And what color of excuse have ye, forsooth? Have not I, myself, rebuilt Charlecote Manor, that 'tis an honor and a glory to the country side? Have I not enlarged and beautified the park, planted it with goodly trees, and forbidden a right of way therein to none (by day at least) save manifest and sturdy rogues? Nay, have I not, even within the last few years, brought in, at great charges to myself, a breed of deer, which, if unharmed, cannot fail to increase and multiply wondrously? All this I have done, like a good landlord and master, who considers not himself; and yet iniquity doth so abound that a sort of losels stick not to enter in, robbing me of the fruit of my labors, bringing discredit on the name of — that is, on the county of Warwick — and — "

Here the Squire, whose eloquence had begun something to fail him, was interrupted by his delinquent clerk, who burst into the room as

though pursued by witches. A very hasty toilet had not obliterated the traces of his flight through the park, and his soaked boots and briar-torn hands might have told a tale to sharper eyes than the knight's.

"What means this, sirrah?" asked Sir Thomas, turning a gloomy brow toward his subordinate. "Is it fitting that justice, in her very seat, should wait on the pleasure of a scrivener?"

"I humbly crave your Worship's pardon," replied Tuff, bowing down to the ground. "I knew not that your Worship was returned from the hunt; and I had leave from her ladyship to go see my mother, who is grievously ill."

"Dost love thy mother?" asked his employer.

"She is most dear to me, your Worship," answered Tuff, who even then could not refrain from a sorry play upon words.

"Well — go to —" replied Sir Thomas, "get thy ink-horn and make ready to take down the testimony and names: and let neither slumber nor sick-beds keep thee again from thy duty."

Tuff, once more bowing low, drew the stopper from his ink-horn, took a pen from above his ear, and kneeling at his desk, for want of the stool which Dorothy occupied, prepared for his work. Meanwhile a little by-play went on behind him.

"Sir," said the domestic, who had been sent for Tuff, to the young squire, "my Lady would speak with you."

In truth, the good lady had been so disturbed in mind at the thought of her niece in such company, that she finally sent for her son, resolved even to risk her lord's displeasure by recalling the damsel, if she seemed in the way of harm.

"Have I your leave to depart, Sir Thomas?" asked the youth.

"How? speak with thy lady mother? Ay: she still fears for Dorothy, I trow. Go thy ways; tell her the maiden is safe as in Warwick Castle. Leave Andrew in thy stead, till thou come again."

The young man departed; but, finding his mother's fears not readily soothed, did not return for some time.

Meanwhile the one keeper testified to taking Hewlett with the hare in his possession, and the others related how they had lain in ambush by the brook. Sir Thomas listened composedly until he heard of the shot at the deer, when he blazed up into sudden anger.

"The buck, say'st thou? the five-tined buck? The very one I had marked for my own coursing next season! Dick, go forth instantly, come not back till thou find him. By my faith, it shall go hard with these fellows if he be hurt to death. And 'twas you lad in grey drew the bow, and ye have it there? Nay, I must sort ye. What's thy name, sirrah?" inquired the Squire (who, as will be observed, had somewhat inverted the usual order of proceedings), turning to the nearest culprit.

"Bob Hewlett, your Worship."

"And thine?" to the youth in green.

"Will Helpes."

"And thine, my brave bowman?"

"William Shakespeare."

That name, now heard with veneration throughout the civilized world, produced very different effects three centuries ago in the Warwick justice-hall. The Squire started up, purple with fury.

"What's this?" he roared, with a hearty imprecation. "Shakespeare? I marvel I knew thee not sooner. Why, thou frontless rogue, thou hast

been here once, yea, twice, before, and I let thee go with a warning, for the sake of thy father and family. Ay, and I'll be bound 'twas thou writ yon scurril ballad on me, and pinned it on my park gates, where thou deservest to be hanged thyself. Was't not so? Hast naught to say? Speak up, knave, and look me in the face, if thou darest!"

Slowly Shakespeare raised his head, and looked full at his judge with those wondrous eyes — the brightest, deepest, wisest, that ever shone under mortal brows. The effect was magical. Sir Thomas sank into his chair, the torrent of invective stayed on his lips, and the angry flush dying from his cheeks, while Dorothy half rose, the muffler falling back, and her face irradiated as with sunrise.

A few seconds passed. Then Shakespeare dropped his eyes again, and Sir Thomas, with a gasp like a spent diver's, drew himself up.

"Master Tuff," said he, in steady but guarded tones, "make out an order for the committal of William Shakespeare to Warwick gaol. Powdrell, see that the gyves be ready, and a cart to take him thither; put him into the strong-room for the night. Son Thomas, art there? Lend me thy arm."

"Please your Worship," said Powdrell, as the squire was about to leave the room, "shall we lock 'em up all three?"

"Let the others go — let them go — what care I?" said Sir Thomas impatiently. "Here, ye knaves — ye see the example of your fellow — be warned — I promise ye he shall suffer — go your way. Lock him up safe, Powdrell, give him no meat to-night; his stomach must come down." And the Justice departed with his niece and son, while the offenders were led in the directions he had indicated.

"Alack!" murmured Sir Thomas, as he laid his head on his pillow that night, "I would I had the trick of that Shakespeare's face. Could I but look out of his eyes, I might be Lord Keeper ere I die!"

CHAPTER IV.

"The fountains of my daily life
Are through thy friendship fair."
— EMERSON.

WHEN the heir of Charlecote left the hall at his mother's summons, after traversing a passage or two, and ascending the wide stairs, he stopped before a door and scratched thereon with his nail, a classic fashion then revived. At the answer, he raised the latch and entered. Lady Lucy, her coif removed, and her abundant hair, scarcely touched by time, falling over her shoulders, was seated in an elbow chair by the fireplace. One small square of carpet, then a costly rarity, lay at the side of the great canopied bedstead, but otherwise the boards were bare.

"Son," asked his mother anxiously, "dost think Dorothy is safe below? I seldom speak my word against thy father's, but I like not to have her sit there, with no woman near."

"Rest you easy, Madam," replied the young man, "the princess is quite safe from the salvages." There was a covert sneer in his voice.

"Nay, nay," said Lady Lucy, "speak not thus. 'Tis a dear sweet girl, and I would have thee love her as a sister. We must never show them how we care for them, but I feel moved at times to kiss her, and call her some pet name — which were a sad weakness, and would be her ruin. Hark! is not that thy father's voice in anger? Go down, Tom, thou may'st be needed. Heaven keep us all from harm!"

The youth left the room, but, by no means hastening his steps, only arrived just as the court broke up. The hour was late, and Charlecote Manor was soon wrapped in silence.

But silence means not always slumber, as one inmate of the Hall was proving. Midnight had passed, and still Dorothy Lucy leaned from her casement, despite the chill autumn air, while memories and fancies chased one another through her brain.

"Who can he be?" she thought. "Is it some knight in disguise? Nay — my uncle knew him, and spoke his name. Sure, I have heard it before. Shakespeare — Shakespeare — yes, they dwell in Stratford. But how came he by such a look? He is like Apollo, in the book my aunt chid me so for reading. And he must go to one of those fearsome gaols, perchance be hanged, and all for shooting at a deer. It must not be!" She started up and walked to and fro. "But what to do? Shall I go down and seek for the strong-room key? But my uncle would be angered, my aunt call me unmaidenly —"

She turned to the window, and again looked forth. Suddenly she caught a murmur of voices in the shrubbery, and, stretching further out, presently saw a female figure come hurrying from the shadows across the gravel path, and disappear under one of the back entrances. Stepping from her door, Dorothy passed into the large upper hall, just as light feet came creeping up the back stair, and by the moonlight which streamed through the high western window she recognized one of the housemaids.

"What dost thou here, Cicely?" said she. "I feared some one had broke in."

"Is't thou, Mistress Dorothy?" replied the girl, suppressing a scream. "I did but go down to fetch a pitcher o' watter fro' t' kitchen."

"Cicely," said Dorothy, gravely, "tell me no falsehoods. I saw thee on the path without but now."

"Nay, Mistress," answered the maid rudely, "happen thou did'st see one o' Nan laundress' clouts flap o' the drying lines. There are o'er many heads i' this hoose for one poor wench to please 'em all." And adding under her breath something about "prying and spying," she was making at the garret stair.

"Why dost flout me thus, Cicely?" said Dorothy. "I never was aught but kind to thee. An' thou wilt say no more, my Lady must hear of this."

The girl fell on her knees, and burst into smothered sobs.

"Oh, Mistress Dorothy," she choked out, "forgi' me. I mind how thou broughtst me drink last year, when 'twas thought I had t' plague, and none would come nigh me. I'll tell thee all. I did but goo down to moder's t' see poor broder Robin, as has listed for a sodger, and goos away by daylight; and as I fared back through park — but ye'll none believe me —"

"Go on, Cicely," said Dorothy.

"I met wi' a tall strappan' lad, as I knew for one o' th' porchers as his Worship let goo last night. I saw 'em then, as they past the scullery hatch. I were for showin un' a clean pair o' heels, but a' spoke me fair and bid me stop. An' what think ye he axed me for? Not a kiss, nor none such folly, but if I could na' find strong-room key, an' put him in place o' t' other lad, — Chake — what did keeper say were his name?"

"Shakespeare."

"Ay, so."

"And what didst thou say?" queried Dorothy.

"Whoy, I bid un hold's prate, or I'd call Hugh gardner, an' loose t' mastiff; so I coom'd away."

"Cicely, Cicely," said Dorothy, hurriedly, "lose not a moment, come with me quickly!"

And seizing the girl by the arm, she hastened her down to the garden door. With some help from the staring and astonished maid, she drew the bar from its mortises, slid the bolts, and they stood looking out from a small porch which had been built into an angle of the structure.

"Now, Cicely," said Dorothy, "if thou lov'st me, speed. Find the youth thou wast speaking with — I will stay here, and call help, should he mean harm — bring him hither — show him the little window of the strong-room — get the ladder, if thou canst — let him save his friend."

"But, Mistress," stammered the girl, overborne by Dorothy's impetuosity, yet doubting the attempt, and fearful of consequences, "why should us try — what be t' good? Sir Tummas 'ull be mortal angry."

"Fear nothing," said Dorothy, "do as I bid thee. I will bear thee out with Sir Thomas, and take the blame, if blame there be."

Cicely, with a bewildered air, hastened toward the shrubbery, and was seen ere long returning with a tall young man, to whom she was apparently explaining her sudden change of purpose. Leading him round an angle of the house, they passed under a wall so thickly overgrown with ivy that only by close scrutiny was a small window to be discovered some twelve feet from the ground among the clustering leaves.

"That's t' hole," whispered Cicely, "but there be two bars across. I'll look for ladder. Gardner were pruning a tree here to-day." And she began peering among the bushes.

"It shall not need," said the youth, whom we have seen appear in the last chapter as Will of Tewkesbury.

Taking the quarter-staff, which had been returned to him on leaving the hall, he retreated a few paces, made a short run forward, and setting the pole in the ground, with a powerful spring heaved himself high into the air, timing his leap so well that the staff fell lightly against the wall, while he remained clinging with both hands to the upright stanchion of the window. Breaking away, with a few strong jerks, the transverse bar, which was old and rusted, he forced himself through the aperture. Cicely, returning to her mistress, reported the success of the enterprise thus far, and then went back to await its completion.

The young man, meanwhile, hanging from the stanchion on the inside, as far as he could reach, called in a low voice, "Have a care," and dropped lightly to the floor beside the prisoner.

"How now?" asked Shakespeare, "com'st thou from the clouds, on a moonbeam ladder?"

"Nay," answered the other, "I am he shall be thy ladder. Mistress Dorothy, whom thou sawest in the hall, got speech of me through her maid, and showed me the way hither. Change jerkins with me, get on my shoulders, and draw thyself out of this hole."

"But there is no way to draw thee after."

"Nay, I will stay here to answer Sir Thomas."

"What, run away, and leave my friend to pay all? Not so, I fear naught the Justice can do to me."

"Will," said the rescuer, taking his friend's hand, "be ruled. I am here now, and but one can get out. Thou hast wife and child, I have none. I am the elder and should have kept thee hence. The bow was mine, and I lent it thee, or they had charged me with the shot. Sir Thomas will ne'er know me from thee, and I will seek bail from my father. Thou seest thus that my fault is the heavier, and that my blame will be lighter. And were it otherwise, I were no true friend if I would not dare the worst for thy sake. Come, time presses, up and away."

"Thou art well styled," said Shakespeare, "for thy name is Helpes, and so is thy nature. But methinks 'tis cowardly thus to steal off."

"Not a whit, not a whit!" replied Helpes, removing his coat, and urging his companion to do the same. "'Twill soon be over for me. Speed thou to London — I have oft heard thee say thou wouldst be with the players there — and I warrant thou couldst write with the best of them. Go — be a great man — but forget not thy old fellow."

"Thou art the best of friends," said Shakespeare, "and I'll remember thee while memory lives."

The youths embraced, and then Helpes, raising his friend on his shoulders, lifted him within reach of the window, and still further facilitated his egress by pushing under his feet. Next moment Shakespeare dropped to the ground, and stood by Cicely's side.

"Prithee, good maid," said he, "bring me to thy lady. I would fain kiss her hand, and thank her for her help."

"Thou kiss her hand!" ejaculated Cicely. "Dost mind she's a Lucy of Charlecote?"

"Faith, I know it," replied the youth, "and bravely she becomes the name. But an' she were the queen, worse than Will Shakespeare kiss *her* hand each day."

He stepped toward the porch, Cicely beside him. Dorothy, greatly agitated, still stood in the doorway.

"Gentle lady," said he, doffing his cap, "I would pay my thanks for the debt of my safety."

"I hope, sir," said Dorothy, "I shall ne'er regret what I have done."

"In truth thou shalt not," he replied, and dropping on one knee, he pressed his lips to her hand.

"There, measter," exclaimed Cicely, "ne'er forget thou'st kissed t' hand of a Lucy!"

"It shall be well remembered," answered the youth: and next moment he disappeared in the shadows.

CHAPTER V.

"The crooked stick and the grey goose wing,
Without them England were but a fling."
—*Anon.*

PERHAPS the soundest sleeper in the Hall for the rest of the night was William Helpes. Wearied in body by his long journey and the exciting vigil which had followed, relieved in mind by the knowledge of his friend's escape, he lay coiled up on a heap of straw, his knees drawn up to his chin, his hands clasped over the back of his neck, wrapped in such profound repose that the unbarring and opening of the door did not rouse him, and it was only when Powdrell stirred him with his foot, and roughly shouted, "Come on, I tell thee!" that he arose.

The keeper bore in one hand a bunch of keys, and in the other a rusty pair of fetters, with chain attached, which he was about to fit on the young man's ankles. But Will drew back.

"Did Sir Thomas order thee to iron me?" he asked.

"Ay, marry, did he," replied Powdrell.

"I prithee, friend," said Helpes, "let me go unbound. I promise thee not to flee."

"Promises are sooner broke than leg-bolts," returned the other, "but come before Sir Tummas as thou art, and unless he says otherways, thou shalt be shackled, willy nilly." And, indicating the way, he closely followed his prisoner into the hall. Here the other keepers were in waiting, and Sir Thomas presently appeared with his clerk.

"Hast found the buck?" was his first query.

"Ay, your Worship," replied Dick, "and he is safe and sound as heart could wish."

"'Tis well — very well, though no thanks to this Shakespeare. And hast the cart and mare without?"

"Ay, your Worship."

"Give me yon warrant, Master Tuff," said the Justice. And taking a pen, he proceeded to affix his sign-manual. Meantime, the culprit kept his face turned toward the ground, in some fear of detection.

"And now," commanded the knight, "let my horse be ready saddled in half an hour. I'll break my fast the while. Have the fellow away."

"Ben't we to iron him, your Worship?" asked Powdrell, approaching with the fetters.

"Surely," said Sir Thomas, "but stay," looking more closely at the youth, "hath he much hurt?"

And indeed, the slight wound which he had received from Powdrell's sword the evening before, aggravated by his efforts at the window, had bled not a little during the night, and conspicuously stained his sleeve.

"'Tis naught — naught, your Worship," said Helpes, looking up involuntarily.

"Ha!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, glancing more keenly at him, "what was that? Look at me, and speak again."

"I said that my hurt was naught, your Worship," returned Helpes, feeling that evasion would do him no good, and looking steadily but respectfully at the Squire.

Slowly and falteringly Sir Thomas raised his eyes to the prisoner's. But his air of apprehension almost instantly disappeared. The clear and honest orbs which looked back into his were not those of the mind-king.

"*Thou* art not Shakespeare!" exclaimed the Justice. "Where is he? Powdrell, go bring him in."

"If this be not Shakespeare, your Worship, I know not where he is," replied the man. "There was none else in the strong-room."

"Where is Shakespeare? and who art thou? and how cam'st thou here?" demanded Sir Thomas, turning on the prisoner.

"Your Worship," answered Helpes, "Shakespeare is, I trust, well forward on the London road. I am Will Helpes, of Tewkesbury, whom your Worship was pleased to let go last night, along with Bob Hewlett; and I came here by taking my friend's place in the strong-room."

"How? Through the keyhole?"

"Nay, your Worship; through the window, which is something larger than a keyhole. I clomb up by help of my staff, tore out one bar, dropt in, and pushed him out."

"But wherefore?"

"I had been his friend for ten years, your Worship," replied Helpes.

"And when camest thou from Tewkesbury?"

"I left the town an hour ere sunset, yestreen."

"And wast here ere ten? Thou should'st go for a running footman. But dost see what a load of offences rest on thee? Beside the poaching and theft, thou hast broken and entered a peaceful house, and hast compounded a felony by this knave's escape."

"Sir, I am at your mercy," answered Helpes.

The magistrate remained silent for some minutes, gazing at the floor.

"Thou art a stout fellow," said he at last, "and it were pity such limbs as thine should rot in gaol. Go, get thee back to Tewkesbury. Mark — this is without prejudice to that rogue, Shakespeare, who, if he come into our hands, shall be made the example he deserves. We will keep the artillery, lest thou should'st be drawn to the woods again; but for thyself, go free."

The youth bowed, muttering a few words of acknowledgment, hesitated, turned toward the door, and finally threw himself before Sir Thomas.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed, "I pray you let me have the bow!"

"By my faith, friend," said Sir Thomas, with amazed displeasure, "thou dost not lack assurance! I grant thee fair quarter, and thou must needs march out with all the honors of war."

"Sir Thomas," replied Helpes, "I must seem most thankless. But hear me speak. The bow was lent me to use at the butts by an old man in Tewkesbury almshouse, who saith his sire bore it at the fight in the 'Bloody meadow' there. 'Tis his only joy and pride. I think no day passes that he doth not rub it with oil or wax, and his greatest pleasure is to sit in the sun o' summer

evenings, twanging on the string, and telling his tale of the battle to any who will listen. Sure I am he would soon die without it. I promised to bring it again by sunset to-night. It was ill done of me to ask the loan or make the promise, as I now see, but it pities me to think on his case. I beg your Worship to send me to gaol, and let him have his bow."

"Powdrell," said Sir Thomas, "bring me this same bow."

Powdrell, stepping to a corner in the passage, took out the bow, wrapped in a cloth, and laid it before his master, who, unrolling the wrapper, scrutinized the weapon closely.

The use of the long bow, though rapidly failing, was not altogether discontinued, and the knight, a keen sportsman, could well appreciate the worth of the specimen in his hands. Shaped of the finest yew, black as ebony, and smooth as glass from constant polishing, yielding slightly at the merest touch, yet strong and elastic as steel when fully bent, it was a weapon to have delighted Ascham's eye.

"A finer I never saw," said Sir Thomas at last. "Didst say 'twas bent at Tewkesbury fight?"

"Ay, your Worship."

"And on the right side, I'll warrant," continued the magistrate with increasing interest.

"'Twas drawn for the house of Lancaster, your Worship."

"I knew it. I knew it!" cried the knight. "A good cause, a good bow. Will Helpes, thou hast thy weapon, thy liberty, and the pardon of Thomas Lucy for all offences committed against him. Thou mayst have a chance to draw this bow for old England yet, for truly thy ancient beads-

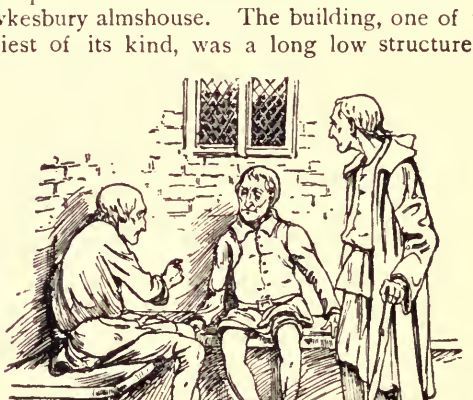
man could not do better than leave it thee as a legacy. Put by your committal, Master Tuff. Have away the cart and horse to the harvest-field. Give the lad somewhat to break his fast, Powdrell. Fare thee well."

Powdrell would have detained the young man a comfortable time (as he expressed it) to tell his tale and drink down unkindness, but Helpes would only stay for a cup of ale and slice of bread, and was soon on his way down the valley of the Avon.

CHAPTER VI.

"A man at arms must now serve on his knees,
And feed on prayers, which are old age's alms."
— *Anon.*

THE sun of mid-afternoon shone warmly upon a group of old men clustered around the door of Tewkesbury almshouse. The building, one of the earliest of its kind, was a long low structure of



coarse pale bricks not yet mellowed by time, with a roof of red tiles and one huge chimney.

Such of the inmates as could stir out were now gathered together, clad in rough blue gowns, then worn in age by men almost as universally as by

women. That modern solace of enforced leisure, tobacco, had not yet crossed the sea, but one or two were chewing dried clover blossoms.

"Sir George be gone, I hear," said Treddles, a blear-eyed old man, referring to the death of a local dignitary.

"Ay, ay," replied Noorth, who had lost a fore-tooth, and whistled at every 's,' "and I be main glad on 't. Shant ha' to bow to 'n no more commin' down t' street."

"Nay," remonstrated Treddles, "'a were a good gentleman, and gi'd us a groat by times."

"What o' that?" said Noorth, impatiently, "'twas na' half what he might ha' gi'n. But that were allays thy way, Treddles, throw thee a copper, and thou'd swear 'twere gold."

"Poor folk ha' hard lots, sure-ly, sure-ly," threw in a third, leaning on a crutch, "but we'n summat to thank Heavens for in a good wall at our back, and tight roof o'er head by night."

"I tell thee, Batter, thou'rt clean deceived," declared the sibilant Noorth. "Ah, in the good old times of our grandsires, 'twere different. Then a poor man could bide in his own snug house, when he were past work, and goo up to the good Fathers every day for 's dole, and the blessing as went wi' 't, and none to let him in 's way; but now he be haled off to a place like this, as is no better nor a prison. And prisoners we're all like to be soon, sick or sound," he proceeded, hitting on a new cause of complaint, "for I hears the Queen have sent down a carter for town, as has done well wi'out since ever 'twere built, and a Bailey to be set up in town-hall, as I'd liever see hangman at street end to clap us all in chains."

"Whoy, whoy," said Batter, rather taken aback, 'I'd thought as how 't would be a fine sight as

ever were: an' I mean'd to halt down to see 't, if day were fair."

"Then ye doant think t' conduit 'll run wi' wine, as I've heer'd on?" asked Treddles doubtfully.

"Wine!" scoffed Noorth, "ay, ye were allays a droothy body, Treddles, but doant think upon 't, an' there be a cask or two o' bad ale broached, ye may gi' thanks on your knees. Take my word for 't, there'll be naught else to wet a poor body's whistle."

"T' cask's not broached as 'll wet *thy* whistle, Noorth," remarked Treddles, nudging the cripple: and both cackled hilariously.

"Come, Hinckley, tell us thy mind on the morrow's doings," remarked Noorth hastily, turning to a fourth old man, who had not yet spoken, and whose right hand twitched nervously to and fro, as over the strings of some instrument.

"The morrow — the morrow —" murmured the other, "ay, he said he'd fetch it back to-night. An' then I'll go wi' sun, an' get place on a doorstone I know in High street, and wait till t' Queen, Lord bless her! comes on her white palfrey, an' then I'll howd it up and cry, 'Your Majesty, here's t' bow was drawn for your feyther's house at Tewkesbury fight!' Ah, I warrant she'll be rare an' pleased!"

"What's he prating on?" asked Noorth, with disgust, turning to Batter.

"Doen't thou mind," said the lame man, "he's allays telling the tale how 's sire fought in the bloody mead over yon with the bow as he lent to young Measter Helpes yestreen?"

"Ay, so. Well, he were a fool to loan 't, but I hope as he'll ne'er get it back. 'Twill save me

that weary long tale as he's allays strivin' to ding my ears wi'."

"Here cooms 's suster," said Treddles. "Happen she'll fetch un out o's maze."

A short, stout, brisk-looking woman drew near, carrying a bunch of keys in one hand, and a small parcel in the other.

"Save ye all," said she in general greeting. "How dost thee, broder? See — I've brought 'ee a pair o' warm hosen for 't winter." She held out her parcel to Hinckley, who took it passively, but made no reply.

"What ailed him?" she asked. "Hath he had a stroke?"

"Nay," replied Batter, "he be mournin' for 's bow as he lent Measter Helpes."

"Measter Helpes?" answered the woman. "Why, I seed 'n but now near t' gates, comin' this way."

"Had he bow wi' 'n?" demanded her brother, sharply.

"I knaw n't," said she, "but here he comes. Thee'll soon see."

All eyes were raised in the direction of a young man who, turning the corner, came slowly up the little street. His limping gait, bloody sleeve, and clothes first soaked and then caked with dust, told something of the toils and privations through which he had passed; but the bright eye and ruddy cheek showed neither spirit nor strength had yet failed him.

"Here's thy bow, gaffer," said he, reaching the weapon to old Hinckley. "I thank thee for the loan, and have brought it back in time. Sun's yet two hours high."

The old man, undoing the case with trembling

fingers, examined his treasure closely ere he bestowed word or look on the bearer.

"It's main safe," said he at last, "main safe. Maybe a bit scratched. But 't will wear off. But wheer hast had it? Wert in a fray?"

"Nay," said Helpes, laughing, "I'll ne'er tell thee where I've been, save that I've walked near three-score miles in twenty-four hours, swam the river twice, and have a wondrous longing to my supper. Good-even to ye all." And turning away, he soon was lost sight.

"Ah, Suster Annot, a bachelor like that's worth any maid's having," said Hinckley, who regarded his sister, some fifteen years his junior, as a young and marriageable damsel. "I hope he's na' come by much harm. Didst see his sleeve?"

"Ay, did I," put in Batter, "and it's none the same jerkin he set out wi' yesterday, more by token."

"He'll ha' bin in some alehouse brawl, I trow," said Noorth.

"Nay," exclaimed Hinckley, grasping the bow, which seemed to have restored his strength and speech, "I'll warrant him none of your brawlers. He'll ha' got the hurt in some good cause, such as this bow were first bent in, when Queen Marget an' her son —"

"Nay, if thou's for that tune again, I'll dance off," snarled Noorth, rising and entering the house, whither a clanging bell soon summoned the others.

CHAPTER VII.

"Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor." — *Book of Esther.*

With the first peep of dawn next day, Tewkesbury discovered a scene of unusual animation, the greater part of the humbler sort, both male and female, being busy with hoes, brooms, buckets, and barrows in cleaning Tewkesbury High Street, from the gates to the town hall. As this task had scarce been attempted, much less achieved, within the memory of man, it well needed the scores of laborers employed, who consoled themselves for their unwonted toil, and the enforced silence which would prevail later in the day, by a Babel of gossip and clamor.

"Eh, goodwife Barm," cried a ferryman, holding up an enormous specimen of foot-gear on his rake, "here's one o' thy owd clouted shoon, I've digged out o' t' muck. 'Tis well seen why thou's gone barefoot these three year."

"Thou liest, thou knave," returned the baker's wife, flinging the remnant of water in her bucket over him, "'twould make two o' mine. 'Tis thy wherry laid up here for want o' use."

A laugh at the expense of the ferryman, who was well known to be fonder of the ale-can than the oar, did not at all improve his temper, and blows seemed imminent, when a cry was raised, "Here they come!" and two parochial officers were seen at a distance, slowly marching down the

street, apparently to examine into the progress of the work.

Parting to right and left before these dignitaries, and working with desperate energy, the men hurling the mud into alleys, yards, and even doorways, and the women sluicing the stones with water, the officials found the street before them in a fair state of cleanliness, and having walked slowly to the gates, returned at the same pace to the Hall, between the ducking and grinning lines of laborers.

By nine o'clock all preparations were well forward. The conduit, despite Noorth's prediction, was really running wine — slowly and intermittently indeed, and sending forth a much diluted fluid which some of the bolder spirits did not scruple to term "cask-rinsings," but still indubitably wine.

Our friend Noorth, however, was possessed of another grievance. The sheriff's wisdom having conceived that her Majesty's envoy could not but be pleased with a sight of the paupers whom they had among them, the six who could go on foot were ordered out to form a part of the show, instead of being allowed to roam whither they would: and being set closely together on a bench against a most disreputable breach in the church porch, performed a double office. Noorth complained as loudly as he dared, and did not fail to point out to his fellows that this was the beginning of their slavery under the new order of things.

By ten, the procession had formed in the meadow without the city gates; and shortly afterward a flourish of trumpets announced the approach of the Queen's envoy, Sir Henry Systen.

The sheriff and the other city officials awaited him at the gates, and dutifully presented the keys.

Meanwhile the six old paupers sat in their places,

holding each man his bow, crutch, or staff, as the case might be, and craning their necks to get the first glimpse of the train.

"Ye mun tell Symes and me all goes by, Noorth," said Paxon, "for our eyes be too failed to trust."

"Well," grumbled Noorth, "here coom'th Sir

Henry Systen, as be Queen's envoy, wi' carter in's hand—"

"Where be t' Queen?" cried Hinckley, seizing his bow, and starting forward.

"Sit down, ye fool! Sit down!" said Noorth, "hold thy peace, and doant put me out; we'll none see t' Queen to-day. Next is t' Bailey as is to be, wi' two lads bearing t' gilt swan behind him,

as is whispering good words in 's ear. Next be the gentry o' horse-back, wi' a band o' hackbut-men. And here's a line o' townsmen in green. Eh! there's young Will Helpes among 'em, in a deal better trim nor he were yestreen."

"What be that singing?" asked old Symes.

"'Tis the mustard-men," answered Noorth.

But Tewkesbury's chief industry demands a more particular mention.

First came James Helpes, Will's father, bearing the golden pot of mustard which was to be sent to the Queen. He was followed by two youths carrying vases containing plants of mustard which had been reared under shelter for this occasion. Next, drawn by three yellow horses, came a large open cart, on which stood four journeymen, hard at work. One was grinding the mustard seed, another mixing and stirring it with oil, a third making it up into balls, which the fourth now and then flung among the crowd, while all roared lustily the following stave:

"Here we stand together clustered,
Round our fiery English mustard:
French and Spaniard long have blustered,
But they fear our balls of mustard;
Beef and venison, pigeon, bustard,
All are better for our mustard;
Sooth, we'll break his knavish costard,
Will not sing the praise of mustard!"

"There," said Noorth, when the cart had passed, "t' halberd men and bowyers come next, and we be to follow. A murrain o' those who thrust out such poor bodies for their own pride!"

The paupers accordingly rose, and tottered as well as they could the short distance to the Town Hall, which entering, they were provided with seats near the door.

The Charter having been read, and the Bailiff installed, it remained for him to express his sense of the honor thus conferred, which he did somewhat as follows:

"Right Honorable Sir, and Envoy of her Most Gracious Majesty: though our town be small, yet doubt not but it holdeth more true and loyal hearts than another in England; as a measure of mustard seed containeth more hot and fiery particles than a measure of any other corn, though twice as great; in some proof whereof, we offer her Majesty this golden pot, with the fruit of our industry: and for me, that am set as the first pilot of so goodly a vessel, I trust so to discharge my duty as not to disgrace the choice of the Queen, whom God preserve!"

The golden mustard pot was then placed before Sir Henry, who replied: "Most worshipful Bailiff: Fear not but we think you shall acquit you well in this your charge, as indeed you shall neither be shamed by the glory, nor puffed up by the miscarriage, of those who have gone before you. The welfare of this town lieth near her Majesty's heart, which shall be cheered by the report of your loyalty, as her eyes and palate by your fair gift. Well do we hope that Tewkesbury, from her small beginnings, may grow, in the light of her Majesty's favor, as her own mustard plant, unto a mighty stature. And so, God save the Queen!"

Here followed great shouting and hurling up of caps, and the audience dispersed to spend the rest of the day in games, feasting, and mirth.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The bitter arrow leaped forth, thirsting to drink blood."
— HOMER.

NEARLY two years had rolled away since the events last related. It was a windy August evening, with occasional dashes of rain and rumblings of distant thunder, and again Powdrell strayed in the woods of Charlecote park. But a change had passed on his appearance, and a still greater on his manner. His clothing and face showed the marks of hardship and exposure, his shoulder bore the Lucy badge no longer, and instead of the bold and confident air of one who possesses at least partial authority, he had the defiant but stealthy demeanor of a trespasser. He followed the windings of the little stream before named for some distance, until he reached a spot where it widened into a small marshy pool. Here a squat, heavy fellow of most forbidding aspect awaited him.

"Well met, Master Powdrell!" said he.

"I'm none so sure o' that," replied Powdrell. "I like ill to turn traitor; and I am half i' the mind to throw the job up."

"Nay, nay, thee 'll ne'er do that," said the other, soothingly. "Thou's promised us a score o' birds th' night; and all's ready for taking 'em away. We'n none do wi' out thee, thou knows the woods so well."

"I did know the woods well,' said the ex-keeper, "but now I seem to see every tree o'

another side than I did afore. An' Sir Tummas were a good master to me for twelve year."

"Nay, but to turn thee off at last for a bit o' drinking," persisted the tempter, "sure a' deserves to lose."

"It were na' that alone," said Powdrell, "but i' th' spring I overrid one o' th' horses as died. 'Twere o' Sir Tummas' errand, and a' could na' say th' blame were mine; but it gi'd him a handle. Then a young fawn broke 's neck on a tree. 'T were out o' season, the flesh were na' fit for gentry, and I deemed 'twere no harm to sell it to some country folk, and pouch th' money. But that mean-hearted rogue, Tuff, got th' tale by th' end and dressed it out for his Worship. And then, as ill luck would ha' it, when I were sent for up to Hall about it, I had drunk more than I were fit to carry. So wi't all, I were turned out o' place."

As he ceased, there came a bright flash and roll of thunder, nearer than before. Powdrell started and winced. The other looked up in wonder.

"Thou ben't feared, sure, for a flash like that?"

"Nay," replied Powdrell, "a wise woman told me, twenty years agone, that I'd die by a blow from heaven; an' I think on 't, whiles, when t' lightning comes."

"I'd best leave thee," said the stout man. "What wi' pitym' Sir Tummus, an' fearin' for thyself, thee's fit for naught."

"I'll ne'er be called coward," said Powdrell, fiercely. "Come on, ha' it over wi' soon as may be; an' no more o' that, or I'll fell thee."

The ill assorted companions accordingly pursued their way some distance further, until Powdrell, stooping, drew a net closely bundled together

from under a bush. "Here 't be; little I thought ever to come to this. Now follow on."

He wound about to left and right, pressing swiftly forward as if desirous of shaking off his confederate, who, however, stuck closely at his heels, until they rounded a thick coppice, and saw before them the pheasant-roost — the forms of the birds just discernible among the branches, at something more than a man's height from the ground.

"Be we to knock 'em down now?" asked the stranger, looking about for a stick.

"Ay, ye fool!" said Powdrell, "knock down one, and ha' the rest take wing. I know a better trick."

Striking a light, he took a roll of sulphur from his pocket, which having ignited, he placed slightly to windward of the sleeping birds, so that the breeze, broken by the coppice, carried the fumes among them.

"Now," said he, as the first bird began to waver on its perch, "be handy wi' the net — but what's that? More o' thy fellows coming?"

"Nay," stammered the other, "I bid none come."

"It 'll be the new keepers," muttered Powdrell, stamping the sulphur into the ground, "here — this way."

They retreated a short distance, but soon heard the voices of a second party.

"We're right i' their track! Nay — 'tis too late to run. Set thy back agen a tree, move not a finger, and happen they 'll pass us by."

This plan might have succeeded, had both been equally steady of nerve; but the stout man, after holding his ground a few moments, finding the

suspense too much for him, slipped round his tree just as three figures appeared, and took to his heels with a frightful crackling of dry twigs. Powdrell, seeing concealment was useless, started forward; laying an arrow on his bow-string.

"Yield thee!" shouted the others, presenting their pieces.

"Not wi'out a blow," shouted Powdrell; and launching the shaft at his adversaries, he snatched another from his quiver. The arrow found its mark in the breast of the youngest forester, who fell to the ground.

"He's killed him! He's killed t' young squire!" exclaimed the others, falling back into cover.

Powdrell, with a cry of horror, fled, he knew not whither. When he recovered his senses, he was stretched at the foot of an oak.

"I should na' be lying here asleep," he muttered, unable at first to collect his thoughts. "T' porchers may be busy. Eh! What be I but a porcher myself? an' I ha' shot Sir Tummas' son!"

A faint sound of voices was now heard, proceeding apparently from both sides.

"They'll ha' brought help to carry him away," he murmured, "and now they've come for me."

Rising on his feet, he drew out another arrow, and settling himself firmly, stood waiting, with an occasional glance upward. The confused buzzing of many tongues in consultation grew louder and louder, until it was evident that he was completely surrounded

"'Tis an ill end," he sighed, "but might be worse. Now, witch, let thy words come true!"

Drawing his string to the utmost, he pointed his shaft to the zenith, let it fly, and throwing down his bow, stood with folded arms. Several rushed

forward to seize him, but even as they did so, the whiz of the descending missile was heard, and the arrow, striking fairly on his crown, stretched him lifeless upon the earth.

CHAPTER IX.

"The daily waiting on the fractious chair,
The nightly vigil by the feverish bed."

— PRAED.

THE heir of Charlecote, however, was not dead. Suffering from a severe wound in the shoulder, he was conveyed to his father's house, where he lay for many days in fevered agony.

He first recovered consciousness on a fair September evening. The light of sunset shone through the window, close shut and curtained as it was, and enabled him to distinguish the figure of his cousin Dorothy, sitting by the table with a bit of lacework in her hand, occasionally drawing a long sigh of distress, as she breathed the hot stifling air then considered necessary for an invalid. Warm as the day was, a huge fire blazed in the chimney, while screens fenced every crevice.

For a few minutes the wounded youth gazed in silence, and then faltered out, "Drink, Dorothy, drink!"

"Oh, cousin!" exclaimed the girl, springing up "thou'rt surely better! Oh, how glad —"

"Drink, I tell thee!" repeated the sufferer, in a tone as imperious as his feeble voice could command; and Dorothy, softly approaching the bedside, poured out a spoonful of some liquid, and held it to his lips.

"More, more!" he gasped, swallowing it eagerly.

"Nay, cousin, I dare not. The leech forbade it. I will call my aunt. I did but take her place for an hour."

"What said the leech of me?" asked the invalid.

"He said there was hope, but thou must be still."

"'Tis well," replied Thomas; and closing his eyes, remained perfectly quiet, while Dorothy slipped away to her aunt.

The young man's improvement was steady, though not rapid; and before many days he was pronounced out of danger. His convalescence was slow, however, and his arm useless for some time; and every device that could amuse an exacting and capricious temper was called into play. It soon became evident that while no one perfectly succeeded in the task of diverting him, Dorothy could do so best and longest. With his father he had very little in common, and Sir Thomas's loud voice and heavy step jarred on his son's weakened nerves. Lady Lucy had never been a good reader or a quick observer, and her well-meant efforts to improve the occasion were unwelcome. But Dorothy was ever ready to read when her cousin demanded it, in a clear soft voice, was never vexed when he silenced her; while the graphic manner in which she would narrate the trivial events of the day, or the news brought by an occasional visitor, made her, whom hitherto he had noticed but little, an object of considerable interest in his eyes. Lady Lucy viewed this companionship with mingled pleasure and alarm, and resolved to bring it to an end as soon as settled health should make her son a person to be either crossed or reasoned with.

"In faith, Dorothy," said Thomas one day, after she had permitted him to win a game of spillikins, in spite of his unfair play, and then read "Ogier the Dane" to him for an hour, "a man might do worse than have thee always near, to hearten him up."

"Nay, cousin," replied Dorothy, "'Tis but little I can do, and I am well repaid if it can make thee forget thy pain awhile."

"True, thou canst do little, but 'tis done willingly. Go on with thy Ogier. I would I had had his shield in the park, to fence me against yon villain's arrow."

"Dorothy grows a fair maid," he observed to his mother next day.

"True, son," she answered, "'Twill soon be time for her to wed. Thy father speaks of Master Wardell's son."

"What, madam," cried Thomas starting, "hath she a liking to him?"

"Nay, I trust not," replied Lady Lucy. "It were not seemly she should. Perchance they may have seen each other at the hunting last winter. But the stripling is well spoken of, and thy father will see that she goes not dowerless."

"Nay, if every maid of the Lucy name is to look to Sir Thomas for a portion, he bids fair to go cold himself," muttered the youth.

"Son, I like not this," said his mother gravely. "'Twill be but a few pounds, that Sir Thomas can well spare. Sure, thou dost not grudge it her?"

"I grudge naught but this valiant grief in mine arm," answered the young man; and his mother's anxiety being thus aroused, the subject of matrimony was dropped for a while.

But Thomas had now a new theme for meditation. Dorothy, whom he had long regarded as a permanent fixture in the house, and whose use to himself had lately become so apparent, was now, it seemed, in a fair way to change her home; and not only this, but to carry some portion of the Lucy wealth with her. Before he slept, he resolved to come to an understanding with her on the morrow.

The next day was wet and gloomy, and the invalid's spirits correspondingly low; but when Dorothy, after a solitary game of battledore and shuttlecock in the gallery, entered flushed and sparkling, the clouds within doors were quite swept away. Thomas looked up in astonishment, and vowed silently he had never seen a lovelier girl.

"Prithee, Dorothy," said he, after the usual inquiries as to his health, "fetch thy lute, and sing to me a while; I am not in humor for the book to-day."

Dorothy's voice was one of those intended for a single hearer: sweet and fresh, but untrained and weak. Her cousin was in no critical mood, and as she sang the few ballads she knew, something like affection stirred in his heart.

"'The willow-tree,' Dorothy," said he at length. The maiden hesitated a moment, and then began the song he desired. The plaintive ditty was too much for her, however; and in the middle of the last verse her voice failed, and the tears began to flow. Thomas was quickly at her side.

"Dorothy, sweet," said he, "what ails thee? I sought not to make thee weep."

"'Twas the song — t'was the song!" said Dorothy, wiping away her tears. "I was foolish — heed it not."

"Nay, I cannot but be moved when thou grievest. Come, 'tis but a few silly jangling words — think on 't no more. I have weightier matter in hand. Dost love me, Dorothy?"

"Surely I love thee, cousin," the girl replied wondering.

"Not 'I love thee, *cousin*,' that last word spoils all. Come, be not coy, but listen. Wilt wed me, and be Lady of Charlecote?"

"I had not thought thou wouldst put such a jest upon an orphan maid," said Dorothy, rising proudly, and offering to leave the room.

"'Tis no jest, Dorothy; I speak sad tongue: Come, give me thy answer."

"Nay, cousin — if in sooth thou mean'st me the honor — nay, it can never be."

"Tut, tut,," said Thomas, smiling confidently, "I was ready for this. I know what a maid's nay-say means. Well I wot thy father, tho' our distant cousin, was a broken, landless man, and thy mother but a yeoman's daughter — that thou owest all to Sir Thomas, and hast not a groat to thy dowry. But what then? Never a Lucy yet was niggard of soul, or aught but generous to those beneath him. Come, an end of this. Say thou wilt have me to thy husband."

"Thy mother — thy father — " said the girl, controlling her rising temper, "how would they brook thy wedding one so mean and humble as thou hast named me?"

"Ah, sits the wind there?" said Thomas, with an embarrassed laugh. "Faith, I have thought on 't myself. 'Twill not be one word or two will quiet them; and I know they looked higher for me. Sir Thomas was ne'er the man to give up all for love, as I have done; and he will stamp and

swear a while, no doubt. But when all's said and done, he cannot get another son and heir; and if I talk a space of going to the Spanish wars, my mother will droop her flag. We shall find a way, Dorothy — we shall find a way."

"Spare all this trouble," exclaimed Dorothy, with a flame in her eyes. "Thomas Lucy, I will never wed thee — never — never!"

The youth stared contemptuously.

"Thou hast been at these new fashioned play-books, I see," said he, "but methinks thou hast chosen thy part rarely ill. Mayst try my patience too far. A proffer of marriage is a tender babe — 'twill abide nor storm nor heat."

"Let it die and be buried, then," retorted the girl, "only so can I ever think well of thee again. Speak no more to me of this. In time, I may forget thy words."

"Think well, Dorothy — venture not too far. Dost really mean to refuse the luck hath come in thy way?"

"In truth I do; nor shall I ever call it luck."

"'Tis well — very well,—" uttered her cousin, biting his nails and glowering at the floor. "A Lucy of Charlecote waits cap in hand on no one. Ay, this is to set a beggar on horseback. 'Twas but yesterday my lady mother told me how a fair match had been carved out for thee — ay, and a fair portion too, as perchance thou knew'st. And thus loaded with favor, thou hast dared to — to —" Not being able exactly to define Dorothy's offence, he went off on another course. "I would I knew who hath forestalled me. Is 't this same Wardell? or some squire of dames at Warwick, when my father carried thee to see the players there? or one of the players themselves? Faith,

this parish is become their best recruiting ground. 'Tis not long since that scurvy thieving rogue, Shakespeare, fled away to join a band of the knaves at London."

"Cousin, I have borne this too long," said

Dorothy, taking up her lute. "Thou mayst rail at me, but I prithee hold thy peace on better men than thyself."

"Better men! what means she? Dost speak of this same Shakespeare? I mind me now, thou wast in the hall at his trial—thou didst smile when Sir

Thomas told of his escape — this is why thou art ever poring on play books, and looking for players. Why, thou silly fool, he hath wife and babes" — Dorothy covered her face with her hands — "and hath he dared to look to thee? By this light, I'll have his blood! Ellis — Ellis!" he shouted, raising his voice till the walls rang.

The deaf old woman, who waited near the door, came tottering forward.

"Your honor's pleasure?"

"Bid Dickon saddle the roan horse — have my boots ready below — fetch me a cup of wine." He turned a moment to the cabinet, and took out some money, while the domestic hobbled away. "Fare thee well, Dorothy, thou shalt soon hear brave news from London!" he exclaimed, and, snatching his sword and cloak, rushed from the room.

CHAPTER X.

"Slightit love is sair to bide."
—BURNS.

LADY LUCY, who had been visiting some old and infirm folk at the village, entered the Hall on one side as her son left it on the other. Unaware of his departure, she tranquilly proceeded to her own room, her little dog trotting after, and the basket on her arm, which had gone forth loaded with cakes and pottage, now filled with dried herbs and flowers by those who had nothing else to give.

Having laid aside her cloak and hood, she went to her son's apartments. Even then, had she looked from the south window, she might have seen his rapidly diminishing figure, as his horse bore him down the London road; but she passed on, and a grove soon hid the rider's form.

She entered the ante-room, and was surprised to find it empty and disordered. An overthrown chair — the open cabinet — one or two books and papers lying on the floor — seemed to indicate a scene of some kind. She passed on into the bed-room — that also was vacant. Hastily summoning a maid, she bade her go down to the stables and offices, and see if her son were there, while she herself looked through the upper floor. Her search was vain, and the girl soon came hurrying back.

"Hast found him?" asked the mistress.

"Nay, my Lady — but John groom, he do say, as how Naunt Ellis came some half hour gone wi'

word for Dickon to saddle t' young red horse. An' scarce were he at door, when t' young squire came out booted and spurred, as he haven't put foot over threshold sin' a' were brought in hurt a month agone as ever were. An' then a' got to horse, and drank t' cup as Naunt brought him, an' away a' went down t' road fast as beast could lay legs to ground."

"Left he no word?"

"Ay; a' said, says John, 'Tell Sir Tummas I ha' gear in hand may keep me three days or four.' An' Mistress Dorothy leanin' fro' t' window, wi' face as white as her kerchief —"

"Enough," said Lady Lucy. "Thou mayst go now. Perchance he hath ridden to the races." And waiting until the staring girl had left, she took the way to Dorothy's room. Here her first summons met no response; but at length her niece, pale, tearful and terrified, opened the door.

"Dorothy," said the aunt, "come with me. I must hold some converse with thee." And she led the way to her own room, where she seated herself in the great chair, while Dorothy leaned against the wall.

"Dorothy," began Lady Lucy, after her lips had moved silently a few moments, "said my son aught to thee wherefore he left the Hall?"

Dorothy remained speechless.

"Speak," said her aunt. "Thou knowest I would not ask thee of his comings or goings at a common time, as 'twere a child; but he hath lost blood, he is still weak, he spake of pain in his wound but yesterday.— Hast been with him to-day?"

"Yea, my Lady."

"And did he speak wildly? Dost think the fever had come on him again?"

"Yea — nay, I think — I think he had no fever."

"Then why went he? Dost not know?"

"He — he went to London. He wished to see the players there," equivocated the girl.

"The players? He never loved stage plays, nor in sooth do I. And to go at such a time, and in such haste — was he in spirits? or had aught crossed him?"

Dorothy, fearing she had already said too much, remained silent a moment, and then began to sob convulsively.

"Niece," said Lady Lucy, "I know not what thou mean'st; this is too great a coil for me. Sir Thomas will shortly return, and he must speak with thee. Until then, go to thy room."

Dorothy crept away to her chamber, where she spent an hour in painful musings. The moment she had gazed on Shakespeare had fixed his face indelibly on her memory. She had never forgotten the look of those wonderful eyes, and her maiden fancy had created an ideal of his personality upon which she had loved to dwell. Like the first blush of the early dawn it had illumined her soul, intangible, pure, innocent as the dreams of childhood, and into this mystic region her cousin's rough speech seemed to force itself like some harsh and unwelcome intruder. No thought of the stranger as a possible lover had entered her mind, but she felt instinctively that none would comprehend her, and disgrace might attach to any mention of her feelings. As soon would she see the sun darkened as sully the fair image of her thought. Thus tossed in spirit she waited, and had reached no determination when a knock

was heard without, and a voice summoned her to her uncle's presence.

The Squire and his lady sat side by side, in the north parlor, looking graver and sterner than Dorothy had ever seen them both at once, and her first thought was, "How did I ever dare to laugh and jest in their presence, or call them Aunt and Uncle?"

Bidding the serving man, who had brought her down, place a chair and go, Sir Thomas began in a cold unnatural voice, apparently assumed as being equally removed from anger or kindness.

"Dorothy Lucy, old Ellis hath told us that my son and thou met this morning; that thou didst sing to him; that in a while she heard voices in anger, tho' she caught not the words; that at last he bade fetch his boots, and a stirrup cup, and saddle a horse; and then rode away. What sayst to this? Why did ye quarrel?"

Again Dorothy was silent.

"Speak; didst thou bid him go?"

"Nay, truly."

"Then what took him? Thou hast said he went to the players; but did he tell thee no more?"

The girl could not reply.

"If thou hast driven him from his reason and his home by any charm, or spell, or philter, be sure thou shalt sorely repent. Dost remember the witch was taken last year?"

Dorothy shuddered and trembled.

"Nay, Sir Thomas," said the lady, "fright her not thus. She is yet young."

"I meant not to harm her. An she would but speak, none would be kinder than I. Come, niece," softening his tone, "tell us the truth.

Mayhap the lad hath made thee some silly flattery, and then ridden away, and thou weep'st for his going. Is't so?"

"Sir Thomas," said Dorothy, feeling she must answer, "thou hast ever been kind and good to me; I grieve to trouble thee. 'Twas not of my will thy son went; I pray he may come to no harm; but I wept not for his going, for I love him not; nor can I tell his errand."

Her judges looked at each other.

"She speaks riddles," said Sir Thomas, "but must tell them ere long. 'Tis hard to lose son and niece in one day, for I loved her well, and I thought to give her a bridal would not have shamed my daughter. But now, ungracious, flouting wench! she will not speak out fair, and she loves him not, forsooth! let her wait till she be asked! Get thee to thy chamber! Thou shalt have four and twenty hours to think on't; then, if my son comes not back, thou *must* tell truth, or it shall be worse for thee. Go, I say!" And Dorothy fled hastily from the parlor.

CHAPTER XI.

"Where may she wander now, whither betake her?"
— MILTON.

DOROTHY spent her evening alone, and rested ill; but before she slept had arrived at a great decision.

"I must leave Charlecote Hall," she said to herself. "I cannot answer my uncle as he would have me, nor abide his anger if I continue silent. I will go to Tewkesbury and find Nurse Hinckley. Surely she will take me in, and teach me some way to live for a time; perchance my cousin will repent of his purpose and return. Then my uncle will be good to me again. The country folk have ever demeaned themselves well to me, and I have oft heard say Tewkesbury was but a day's journey hence." (In truth, Dorothy, after the death of her parents in her infancy, had been nursed by Dame Hinckley at Tewkesbury until her fifth year, when Sir Thomas and his lady had taken her thence, and reared her as their own.)

With the first peep of dawn Dorothy was awake, rejoiced to find that the day promised to be fair. After commending herself fervently to the care of Heaven, she put on a plain dark gown and her strongest foot-gear, made up her treasured pearl-earrings and two pieces of gold Sir Thomas had given her into a close parcel, which she placed in her bosom. A few small coins, which she thought would be sufficient for the day's expenses, were in

the pouch at her girdle. A muffler, and short cloak with hood, completed her array.

Prepared for the journey, she paused with her hand on the door and looked around the bower she had inhabited for twelve happy years. There hung her pretty gowns (she wondered if she should ever wear them again), there lay her lute, with one string broken, which she had struck against the wall when hastening from her cousin's room; and there, an unfinished piece of embroidery.

Turning away with a sigh, she stepped lightly down the hall till she came to the chamber of her uncle and aunt. Here she paused a moment, and then kissed the panel of the door.

"They were ever kind to me," she whispered, "and sure they will be again."

Softly descending the stairs, she let herself out at a side door, and at sunrise was a mile from the Hall. Concerning Tewkesbury she had many indistinct memories, and but two correct ideas. One of these was, that it lay upon the Avon; the other, that it was within a day's journey. But what constituted a day's journey she had yet to learn.

While in the neighborhood of Charlecote, where her face was known, her progress was not unpleasant. The few laborers whom she met going early to their work touched their hats respectfully, and a milkmaid, coming from the pasture with her steaming pails, was but too happy to supply the young lady with a draught, which, with a cake of bread saved from supper, made a tolerable breakfast.

It was a glorious autumn morning. A few high clouds drifted across the heavens, the Avon flashed

and glittered in the sun among the willow copses, and the thick foliage, not yet crisped by frost, and fresh from yesterday's showers, rivalled the bravery of May. Dorothy felt that her adventure would prosper, and wondered she had entertained any misgivings.

As she proceeded further from her uncle's domain, however, the demeanor of the peasants began to alter. At that period it was for the stranger to prove that he was not an enemy; and those who could not compel respect were likely to want it. First with astonishment, and then with alarm, Dorothy marked the increasing surliness of the cottagers of whom she asked her way; and after one old beldam had driven her from the door with coarse abuse, and another had threatened to set the dogs on her, she felt that the river would be her best guide, and determined not to lose sight of it again. This, however, necessitated various short cuts across the water meadows, in one of which she almost lost her shoes, and was sadly bemired.

It was near the end of harvest, and all the villagers who could be afoot, and some who could not, were out to shear the corn. Almost every grainfield she passed was full of busy life. In some the reapers were just beginning their task, in others completing it: here the laborers were setting and capping the shocks; and there the wains were already busy drawing them to the stack-yard. Dorothy would have rejoiced in the sight a few days before, but now, as she plodded heavily along the miry lanes, she almost envied the harvesters for being near their homes.

It was about ten in the morning, when, sorely weary, she stopped under a great tree to watch

one such company. Some fifteen couples of men and women were coming down the slope, laying low the yellow corn before them; the man in each case bent to his work with a curious diving motion, like an Indian swimming, gathering the stalks together with his left arm, and then, quickly ripping his sickle through the straw, flinging it sideways to the woman, who snatched it together, and bound it into sheaves. Behind them walked the steward, watching that none lagged, and examining the sheaves for ill-made bands, while after him a score of gleaners, old folk and children, pounced on every scattered stem, and gradually accumulated bundles of their own.

As Dorothy lingered, the overseer, pausing in his march, and glancing up at the sun, cried "Howd your hand!" Instantly work was dropped, and the peasants, clustering together, and bringing forth their luncheon, began to eat with all the zest of careless toil.

Dorothy squeezed through the hedgerow, and gazed wistfully at the food the nearest group of half-clad, half-savage women were devouring, but, warned by recent experience, durst not ask. Presently, however, one of them, after a look or two in her direction, arose, and bringing her half a loaf on a bunch of fresh leaves, together with a wooden cup of ale, asked, "If she would be pleased to taste their fare."

Dorothy thanked her, declined the ale, but ate of the coarse gritty loaf with more relish than might have been expected. The woman stood waiting by. Dorothy looked at her form, scarcely covered by the rags she wore, her shoulders and arms burnt and tanned by the sun, her wrists and hands rough and raw with binding the sheaves. "Art not very weary?" asked the girl.

"Weary, Mis'ess?" said the woman, with a bright smile. "What? wi' savin' the good corn? Nay, nay; 'tis like gold to huz. Ne'er a finer har'st can I mind; th' rood in our home croft be all sheared; an' what wi' that an' Gaffer's gleanin', we'll ha' bread till Lady day of our own hand. Nor t' loaf will be none so dear for poor folk as has to buy. Eh, but three year agone were a hard

time. Ye'll be fro' t' great house?" Dorothy nodded. "Then ye'll mind t' winter. I lost two bairns, an' me an' my master were nigh clammed."

"Is thy husband here?"

"Ay, Mis'ess; we be all here. There's feyther an' my eldest lad wi' th' gleaners; here's my two little uns," pointing to two young children asleep on a tattered cloak, "and yon's my goodman," nodding at a burly shock-headed fellow, who

grinned and tugged his forelock on catching the lady's eye. "But time be up — I mun go."

The steward cried "Strike in!" and all sprang to their work again. Dorothy bent over the babies, tucked a silver penny into the hand of each, and went on her way.

Gradually the grain fields became fewer, as her road lay over a succession of low wooded hills, each a little higher than the last. Here she met with a hideous and importunate cripple, who could make very good speed on his crutches, who pursued her a long way, first with entreaties and then with demands, and from whom she finally escaped only by scattering most of her money on the ground, and fleeing while he gathered it up.

Footsore and trembling, she gained the top of another hill, and looked down on a scene of matchless beauty. A broad fair vale lay before her, with gardens and orchards smiling to the sun, the Avon flowing gently in the midst, and on its further bank a goodly town, which must surely be Tewkesbury. True it was that the river seemed less than she remembered it, nor did the tall square tower which rose from tile and thatch recall the Abbey: but she set this down to the imperfect judgment of childhood, and felt wondrously cheered to think she had accomplished her journey a little after noonday.

CHAPTER XII.

"Come, Sir, throw us that you have about you."
— SHAKESPEARE.

THE river was yet to be crossed, and two small coins remained of her store, which she hoped would content the ferryman. But between her and the probable position of the ferry stood an alehouse hight the "Monster"; and round its door slouched a group of brutal-looking fellows, whom she feared to pass. Hidden in a thicket by the road side, she was debating whether to make a circuit through the fields, or wait for the loungers to disperse, when a horse was brought round, and a gentleman, judging by his habit, issued from the tavern. Hoping that this person's presence would be a restraint on the others, she set forward hastily. But the traveller, mounting more quickly than she had expected, and throwing a penny to the groom, came cantering up the hill at the best pace he could muster. As he drew near, it seemed to Dorothy that she recognized him. She looked again. Yes; in spite of his gay striped doublet and plumed bonnet, it was her uncle's clerk.

"Master Tuff!" she exclaimed, stepping forward, too glad of a familiar face to remember how little she liked it.

"Mistress Dorothy Lucy!" he ejaculated, pulling up, and tumbling down from his horse. "How fare you? Is Sir Thomas near?" And

plucking out his feather, he clapped it into the bonnet, and began to fumble at a roll behind his saddle.

"Nay, Master Tuff," she replied, "I am here alone and afoot."

Tuff's expression slowly changed. He replaced his plume, looked Dorothy over, and finally inquired "wherein he could serve her."

"'Tis no great charge," she answered. "If thou wilt fetch me past yonder fellows, and point out the ferry whereby I may pass over to Tewkesbury, I shall be much bounden to thee."

"Sure, Mistress Dorothy, here is some mistake. This is Evesham town. Tewkesbury is a dozen mile down the stream."

"What *shall* I do?" cried Dorothy in dismay. "I am so grievously wearied." And the tears began to start.

Tuff attempted to console her, first saying he might misjudge the distance, next wondering if rest would not restore her, and finally swearing that rather than see a lady thus distressed, he would himself bring her some miles on the way.

"Cheer up, Mistress Dorothy," said he. "I had moneys to collect for Sir Thomas in Evesham, but the business was soon dispatched, and he looks not for me till the morrow. I can well spare some hours. 'Tis a sorry jade this, but sure he will carry double for a time, and I will pad his bones for thee a bit." So saying he spread out the roll behind his saddle (which strangely resembled his every-day doublet) into a sort of cushion, helped Dorothy up, mounted before her, and turned down the hill again. They rode past the alehouse, Tuff calling magnificently to the loungers to clear the way, whereat the fellows, though they leered and

whispered, did draw somewhat apart, and refrained from open insult.

"'Tis an ill house that, Mistress Dorothy," said Tuff, when they were beyond earshot, "filled with brawlers and bullies; but a quiet boldness soon puts them down. Marry, when I entered the room and called for my wine, there were two rufflers looked on me as fierce as you please. At that I smote off the bottle neck with my sword, crying, 'I hope naught but wine may be spilt here to-day,' and they sat mum as mice."

Dorothy, not knowing how much of this was true, kept silence, and Tuff went on.

"Sir Thomas hath laid a great charge on me, but I warrant ye, he knows whom to trust. Do but heft this bag," he touched a heavy pouch at his side. "I trow a good heart and a stout arm are needed to carry this safe past the thieves that beset the ways."

Dorothy answered civilly that "she well believed Master Tuff would not fail in aught Sir Thomas might trust him with."

The poor beast they rode now began to halt and groan beneath his double burden, and Tuff at length got down and walked alongside, holding the bridle.

"I must needs say, Mistress Dorothy," he remarked, after hearing of her adventure with the cripple, "it was ill thought on to go trudging thus to Tewkesbury alone."

"Sir," said Dorothy, haughtily, "in this matter I will be answerable only to mine uncle."

Tuff muttered some apology, and they passed on a while in silence, when Dorothy, feeling that she had perhaps been ungracious toward a man who had gone out of his way to serve her, asked if he knew the road well.

"Surely," he answered, "many a time have I taken it. The river cranks far to the north here, but we shall strike it again."

Not many words were needed to put him at his ease, and he was soon in the full tide of boasting again, pouring forth his own brave deeds, past, present and future. He had now considerably shaken off his habitual respect for Dorothy, and several times forgot to prefix her name with the usual title of courtesy.

They stopped a moment at another hostelry to water the horse, and Tuff emerged more pot-valiant than ever, cocking his hat and threatening to "cleave to the teeth" a stable lad who stood in his way. His conversation thereafter turned upon sea fights and pirates; and he was avowing, with meaning looks at Dorothy, that if any girl of spirit would go with him he would throw up Sir Thomas' service and be off to the Spanish Main, when some object ahead seemed to cool him suddenly.

"There, Dorothy," said he, "when we have got through this wood thou mayst see Tewkesbury. But who is this stops our way? A marvellous ill-favored fellow, as I live. By your leave, I'll mount again. This sort are sooner overcrowed by a cavalier than a footman."

The man, however, did not seem at all likely to be overcrowed, for he kept his place until they had nearly reached him, when, presenting a pistol, he cried, "Stand and deliver!"

A resolute and well-mounted man might have ridden down the robber, but Tuff was neither the one nor the other. He hesitated, swallowed several times, clutched feebly at his sword, and then, as a rustling in the bushes seemed to announce reinforcements for the enemy, wheeled his horse round

so suddenly that Dorothy was jostled from her place. She grasped at his belt to save herself, but the ill-mended girdle broke, and she came heavily to the ground, while Tuff, driving home his spurs, scoured away at top speed.

Stunned for the moment, she presently recovered to find three or four villainous-looking fellows round her, one of whom was untying the pouch attached to the broken belt, another examining her hands for rings, and all abusing their comrade for allowing Tuff to escape.

"His horse was naught, and I see not that he matters," the sentinel was replying, "when he hath left purse and maid both behind. But soft! here comes the Captain."

The quarrelsome voices were somewhat hushed as a tall, powerful man about forty, of better appearance than the others, stepped into the road.

Dorothy rose and approached him, trembling inwardly, but addressing him with a composed look.

"Sir, if I speak to a soldier, I doubt not I may trust in his honor to do what yon coward groom hath failed of, and see me safe into Tewkesbury."

The man, who had expected some very different speech, hesitated, looked embarrassed, took off his hat and scratched his head.

"I did bear pike in Holland a score of years ago," said he, "but I had well nigh forgot it. Come, lady," bowing to Dorothy, "I prithee take my arm to our poor house — 'tis hard by — and rest thee a while, and taste some food, while I find a way to bring thee forward. What, lads, have ye a prize there?" as the money-bag caught his eye. "Cut the thong, Tom, — turn it out on this broad stump — ye shall share alike, if it be not gold."

Pulling out his knife, Tom obeyed, and poured out the contents of the pouch. But in place of a mass of silver, only four or five shillings lay on the stump, while a heap of pebbles rolled to the ground. Dorothy gazed with wonder at this new proof of Tuff's duplicity, and the disappointed thieves burst into threats and curses. Their leader allowed them to rave for a few moments, and then commanded silence.

"This is no talk for the lady's ears," said he. "Take up the shillings — there's twelve pence each, and got with little labor. This way, Mistress," and he led her up a narrow overgrown path.

Dorothy soon felt the spring and crackle of gravel beneath her feet, and observed that the elm trees on either side grew in so regular a succession as to indicate artificial planting, though now

crowded by a wilderness of saplings and briars. Her companion held aside branches, pointed out obstacles, and seemed every time he spoke to recall some phrase or accent of the gentleman.

"Didst say thou hadst served abroad, sir?" Dorothy ventured, when the way became a little clearer.

The robber stopped and gazed on the fair childish face, so full of trouble, yet set to look brave and cheerful.

"Many a time have I thought," said he, "when a young fellow in Holland, how sweet those words would be from an English lady's lips, and 'tis thus I hear them first!" He paused a moment, then went on vehemently: "A captain at one and twenty — ill luck at cards — caught dipping into the colonel's purse — broke for a thief — ye see the rest!"

They passed between two stone gate-posts, scarcely visible amid brambles and weeds, and emerged on an open space, once the lawn before a large stone house, which, however, as well as its surroundings, was in sad decay. The chimneys were copeless and jagged, the roof fallen in here and there, the upper casements hanging by one hinge, or altogether gone, the walls stained with leakage. Only the door and the few lower shutters were strong and sound, amid general dilapidation, reminding Dorothy of a hedger she had once seen at work, hatless, ill shod, and tattered, but with his hands and arms protected by thick, strong leather gloves.

"'Tis a fine old place," said the Captain, "but gone to ruin. The family left long ago, and 'twill not serve us many years. Nay, lady, look not there," seeing Dorothy's eyes straying to the

right, "here is the fairer prospect, thou mayst see the river through yon gap; 'tis said they called it the Lady's Loop."

But Dorothy had already caught sight of a spectacle she well knew from hearsay, which made her heart stand still. From a tall, withered tree swung a network of chains enclosing a few tattered rags and bleaching bones. Her courage gave way, and almost swooning with terror, she was helped indoors.

The Captain placed her in a chair, and some colloquy ensued between him and various other persons, which she marked but little. At length a most evil-faced old woman came forward with a glass of wine, and when she had tasted it offered to take her to a room. Dorothy followed the hag up the stone stairs and along the corridor to a small room at the east end of the building. The apartment was but a few feet square and had a window scarce six inches wide, but seemed clean and weather tight.

While her guide fumbled at the lock, Dorothy extracted her two pieces of gold from the packet, and giving them to the woman hoped she would stand her friend.

The crone looked at them carelessly for a moment, and then remarked "they should go to the Captain."

"Will he harm me?" asked the girl.

"Nay, I known't," was the reply. "May be not. The Captain's rarely taken wi' thee. Why, he bid me not search thee, and I ne'er heard that fro' him before. Perchance he'll wed thee, if thou canst manage well."

"Speak not of it!" said Dorothy shuddering.

"What, wench," was the surprised answer, "not

wed t' Captain? Thou mayst do worse, I can tell thee. But an thee likst it not, I'm as well pleased."

"Oh, save me! save me!" cried Dorothy. "Are you a woman?"

"I was one once," was the reply.

"Then help me! Have you never a daughter?"

"Nay, none. I had one lad — they hanged him. Then I joined t' band. I ha' naught more to fear in t' world or to hope, save it be to see the pride o' they smirking gentles brought down."

She locked the door and departed, leaving Dorothy a prey to the most fearful anticipations.

CHAPTER XIII.

"But still he bet and bounst upon the dore,
And at the portals thondred hideously,
That all the peece he shaked from the flore."

— SPENSER.

It was nearly sunset, and several young men stood on the bowling green at Tewkesbury, preparing for a game. Among them was William Helpes, now a man approaching thirty. His tall spare frame showed agility and endurance rather than great muscular power, while his quick eye and steady hand bespoke him an expert in the sport. He was just stooping for the first cast, when an exclamation from one of his companions made him look around.

"What is 't, lad?"

"Look yonder!" cried the other, pointing to the ferry, within sight of which they stood.

The ferryman was urging his craft to the further bank, where stood a man trying to raise a fallen horse. Failing in this after one or two efforts, he ran to the boat, jumped in, and seizing a spare pole, sped the passage with voice and arm.

"I' lad's in haste," remarked one.

"Nay, 'tis fear," said William, as shouts of "Help! Murder! Thieves!" became audible from the passenger. "Let us go and see what he ails." And pulling on his jerkin he led the way.

The man in the boat redoubled his cries as he drew near, and leaping to land, rushed into their midst as if pursued.

"What's amiss?" inquired Helpes. "Who is murdered and robbed? I see none slain, unless it be thy horse yonder."

"I — I am murdered and robbed!" shrieked Tuff, for he it was.

"Thou seem'st in brave case for a murdered man," said Will. "Quit thy halloaing. Is this some jest thou wouldst put on us?"

"Nay, ye shall hear," answered Tuff, becoming somewhat calmer. "I set forth from Evesham this morning with a goodly sum of money and a fair lady of noble family, who had been placed in my charge to bring to Tewkesbury. I carried her through more perils than one — ye may see I'm not he to be frighted by odds — but some four miles hence, as we passed through a most dismal wood —"

"Ay, ay; Gibbet Hill house."

"— Full a score of villains set on us, and took from me all but horse and life."

"So thou didst run away and leave the lady to shift for herself? A most trusty squire!"

"I did all man could," whined the craven. "I struck down two, but they dazzled me with this blow,"— he pointed to a cut along his temple, made, in truth, by a branch in his hasty flight — "they snatched my pouch — they bore off the lady — one had dragged me from the saddle, but my belt burst in his hold — I saw naught left but ride for help. I struck into a by-way, made the round of the ford, and came hither, as the nearest town."

"Thou say'st the lady was carried off?"

"Ay, truly. I heard her shriek, but was blinded with the blow."

"And who is she?"

"'Tis safest name no names," replied Tuff, who, now he found himself in safety, was recovering his wonted caution.

"Nay, tell me. We stir not hence for bubbles."

"Come hither, then." And as William stooped close to him he whispered, "'Tis Mistress Dorothy Lucy, niece of Sir Thomas, of Charlecote."

"Mistress Dorothy?" said Will with quickened interest, as he recollected the bright young face beside Sir Thomas' chair. "And thou couldst leave her and fly? — but it skills not talking." Turning to the rest he shouted, "Lads, here is a noble lady mewed up in yonder nest of thieves. Who will go save her?"

"I!" "I!" "I!" said several voices, and a cheer was raised; but one or two faint hearts began to suggest difficulties.

"'Tis four mile hence — "

"The night draws on — "

"A crew of bold villains — "

"A troop of horse were needed — "

"As luck will have it," cried Helpes, "yonder goes Master Sheriff, taking his evening walk along the Ham. I will go speak to him." He hurried off, dragging Tuff along, and hastened forth his tale.

The Sheriff, an elderly, heavy man, listened and stroked his beard.

"'Tis a most grievous wrong indeed," said he, "and shall have remedy. Rest ye here to-night, come before me at the town hall to-morrow, let us take thy testimony, a summons shall be issued, and justice done."

Tuff began to slink off.

"Sir, sir," exclaimed Will, "this is no time for delay! What may be done should be done now.

Let a few of us go forward, I pray, and at least keep track of these rogues till thy constables come up."

The Sheriff looked at him in reflecting surprise.

"Thou speakest boldly," said he, "but I think thou mayst be trusted. Here — 'tis something beyond rules — but — William Helpes, I appoint thee my deputy, with power to call a posse of any and all, in the Queen's name, whom God preserve!"

William uttered the customary formula, and took the Sheriff's staff.

"Here, friend," said he, overtaking the retreating Tuff, and grasping his arm, "we part not yet. Lads, I have authority to lead ye now. Hal Winn," he went over some eight or ten names, "get ye muskets and powder, meet me here as soon as may be. Hal, I prithee bring my sword, it hangs at the door-post of my room."

In a few minutes the company was again assembled.

"Now forward into the boat," said Helpes. "Thrust ye over speedily, Jack, and then return if perchance more may come after."

The ferry was soon crossed. Tuff wished to take his horse, who had by this time risen and was cropping the grass, his bridle among his feet; but this Helpes would by no means permit, and ordering a lad who stood near to stable him for the night, they proceeded on their way as rapidly as possible, only stopping now and then to make requisition on the farms for help.

The peasants, however, who suffered little from the robbers, but feared them much, were full of excuses. One pleaded age and infirmities —

another had just been taken with sore pains in his joints — another prayed to stay with his wife, who lay at the last gasp, and another would certainly follow Master Deputy as soon as his men came from the field.

Thus it happened that when, on the verge of twilight, they reached the highwaymen's retreat, the force was only augumented by four or five laborers with forks and axes, and an idiot known as "Silly Tom."

The house was dark, silent, and apparently uninhabited.

"We must call a parley," said William. "Simkin, thou hast the horn, I see, set a white clout on yonder pole, and come forward with me. Nay, Master Tuff, step in between us, an' it please ye. The rest of ye keep your pieces charged, be ready to reply if they fire."

The three advanced to the house, where Simkin blew a blast on his horn, then another, and another, while Helpes knocked loudly at the door. The posse, meanwhile, watched and commented from the shadow of the wood.

"Hast been here before, Dick?" asked one.

"Nay, not I," said the other. "'Tis a gashly place. Is that t' fellow was hanged in chains I see yonder?"

"Ay, that's him."

"How came it about?"

"Tell us the tale, Riggs, you're the oldest here."

"I'm none old enow to mind it," said the man thus distinguished. "'Twere fifty year agone. But I've oft heard feyther tell on 't. Ye see, 'twere a good old family lived there, an' there were one son, an' naught would do but he must go see

furrin parts. So away he went, and were gone seven year an' more, an' naught heard from him, an' every one thought him dead. So's cousin come in for 't place, when owd man died — a worthless young chap, as turned out 's aunt an' cousins t' first day he could, ground down t' poor folk, an' kept t' worst company. 'A had been here scarst a year, when t' heir, him as all tho't dead, ye mind, comes home from furrin parts wi' his pockets full o' gold, an' looked well on by all. He comes up to place here, an' meets his cousin on a fine summer even. 'A goes up to him, holding out 's hand, an' speaking him fair, an' t' young rascal were that angered as he whips out sword, an' runs him through the heart."

There was a long sigh of horror.

"'A got to horse an' away, but 'a were soon took, an' fetched back, an' tried an' hung on that very tree, by where he kills his cousin. They say as his ghost walks here now. T' family would none come back — none could live in t' house — it went to ruin, as ye see — and a bit ago these cut-purses took their quarters here."

"They do say," observed one of the rustics, who had drawn in closely, "as t' band has a way under ground five mile long, as comes out on t' other side river."

"I'd none wonder. But look! there's some one at last."

And indeed, in answer to the repeated summons, an old woman thrust her head from an upper window, and asked "what they wanted?"

"Open here!" shouted Helpes. "Open, in the Queen's name!"

"Whom should I open till?"

"To the deputy sheriff of Tewkesbury, and his posse."

"What do t' depity shreeve want wi' huz?"

"Here is a subject of the Queen's Majesty," replied Helpes, "has been foully misused on the highway hard by, and robbed of his purse; and a lady under his charge has been carried off here, as we have reason to believe."

"There's no lady here," replied the hag, "an' no robbers neither. Go yer ways, go yer ways; dunnts fright a poor owd woman an' her sick son to death."

"Open here, I say," cried Will. "If the man who hath had such wrong can find neither the lady nor his property, or recognize the men who robbed him, none shall be harmed: but keep us here no longer. I have authority to enter and search —" he held up his staff, "and yonder band of good men and true to help. Open, in Queen Elizabeth's name, or we beat down the door!"

"At your peril!" shouted a rough voice, and a half dozen shots were discharged from as many windows. The muskets levelled against the Deputy and his companions were charged with bird-shot, so they suffered no great harm; but Tuff, stung by a stray pellet or two, broke from the others with a howl of terror, and, taking to his heels, was seen no more that night.

Helpes and Simkin fell back more slowly, and joined the posse, whom they found in a very turbulent and demoralized condition.

Having restored some degree of order, various plans of attack were discussed. One suggestion, that a number of them should raise a log upon their shoulders, and charge at the door, was attempted, but the wounding of the foremost caused the downfall of all and showed the plan impracticable.

Skirmishers were then thrown out from right to left, but found the underwood cleared away about the house on every side, so that no cover could be had for assault. A dropping fire was meanwhile exchanged between besieged and besiegers, with some slight damage to the latter, who however were mostly covered by trees and stones.

Some two hours had worn away in this fruitless manner, and proposals to retreat were becoming numerous, when Silly Tom, who had disappeared some time before, came up to Helpes with a face of grinning importance.

"I'n done for 'n now, Measter; I'n fired t' thack," and a dark cloud of smoke tinged beneath with ruddy light, which began to rise from the rear of the building, showed he spoke true.

"Hurrah!" cried the bystanders. "Well done, Tom! The rats will soon be smoked out now."

"Ay," said Helpes, "the rats will be smoked out, no doubt: but how with the prize they have taken? The lady will either be slain or carried off. Wait ye here a moment, that I may get sight of yon end window again. Methought I heard a cry there."

He rushed off to reach the east end of the building. Meantime, the harvest moon, rising above the horizon, poured a flood of mellow light across wood and field, illuminating the tree-tops and the grass, and accentuating the deepest shadows. Presently he came hastily back.

"I saw her!" he cried. "She is in the east room. She looked from the window and put forth her hand, the casement is too narrow for aught else. We must break in ere the fire has got too far, or the gang has carried her off."

"But how?"

"I'll show ye." He sprang out on the clear ground, waved his arms and shouted. Several muskets were discharged from the windows, but none took effect.

"Now, now!" he cried, snatching a crowbar from one of the laborers. "Quick, ere they can reload: one of ye come with me — the rest stand ready to charge in when the door goes down!"

He dashed across the open, followed by Henry Winn with an axe, and in a minute they were battering the door with alternate blows, sheltered from the upper windows by the overhanging porch roof, while, owing to the thickness of the wall, no gun could be brought to bear on them from the narrow hall window, from which the best aimed shots had hitherto come.

"Lay on, lay on!" shouted Helpes. "Strike an' 'twere an anvil — nay, blunt not thy edge, Hal — leave the iron to me. Again, again — we have it now!"

The upper hinge burst, and the door fell back; but as it did so a fiery jet sprang from the opening, and Winn fell with a groan.

"Hast much hurt, lad?" asked Will.

"'Twill last my life, methinks," replied his

friend. "I'm shot thro' the neck, but heed me not — finish thy work."

He rose, and crawled aside, while the others came rushing on after their leader, who, driving in the door, found a barricade of chairs, tables and benches piled in his way; while in the back of the hall, now fast filling with smoke from the increasing fire, the robbers could be seen filing one by one down an open cellar way.

With calls to "stand and surrender," the deputy and his posse forced their way through and over the barrier, but not till all had disappeared save one fellow, who stood half way down the steps with his hand on the door.

"Where is the lady?" cried Will, drawing his sword, and springing forward.

"Seek her above," answered the ruffian. "There's a barrel of powder, and match alight, to help ye."

He fired a pistol at Helpes, slammed down the flap, and vanished.

Breathless, giddy, and wounded in the forearm by three slugs, Will dropped his sword, and leaned a few seconds against the wall. His friends crowded round with eager enquiries.

"'Tis naught, a scratch," he replied, recovering himself, "Come, up the stair!" and he placed his foot on the lowest step.

"Nay," interposed Riggs, "did ye not hear what he said o' powder? Hark! Hark!"

And in the silence which followed they could hear that most fearful of sounds, in a confined space — the hissing sputter of a lighted fuse.

With the instinct of self-preservation, most rushed at the door; but one or two held William back.

"I'll lay my life there's none there: ye'll ne'er find her —"

"Thou'lt be riding the night breeze next minute —"

"The nearer heaven!" he answered; and releasing himself, rushed up the stair alone.

He reached the upper hall, now hot and thick with smoke, calling aloud, "Mistress Dorothy — Mistress Lucy — Dorothy, where art thou?"

"Here, here!" called a voice through the darkness.

Groping his way, he reached a door, and threw his weight against it. The lock yielded, and he stood in Dorothy Lucy's presence.

A sharp report — a roar like the bursting of a volcano, followed by an outward rush of sulphur-scented air — and the floor heaved upward and disappeared from sight, the front wall falling in, and the tiles pouring in a clattering avalanche from the roof. The flames, which now had a strong hold on the west end of the building, sank for an instant, and then burst forth with redoubled fury.

"He's dead, for certain," said one of the posse, who from a safe distance viewed the scene. "'A were a brave lad, but 'a wouldn't hear reason."

"Nay, nay, there 'a comes!" cried another; and a hearty cheer was raised, as, clambering down the heap of rubbish the explosion had left, William appeared, with Dorothy in his arms.

Several horsemen had now come up, whose steeds were made useful in conveying the wounded men, of whom there were five, one dangerously hurt. Will Helpes, declaring his injury a trifle, walked to Tewkesbury at Dorothy's bridle rein, nor relinquished his charge till she was safe in Dame Hinckley's arms.

But long after their departure the flames, roaring upward into the sky, lighted up the country for miles around, and proclaimed Gibbet Hill house a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Sound sleep be thine! Sound cause to sleep hast thou!"
—TENNYSON.

DOROTHY'S waking next morning was gradual and troubled. The thread of light which crept in through Dame Hinckley's garret window, despite the loving care with which it had been curtained, recalled to her fevered mind the silver line of the Avon, which yesterday she had so feared to lose sight of, and on it seemed to float in succession the various forms she had met: the woman binding sheaves, the cripple and the alehouse ruffians, Tuff and the robber captain, all ending in a scene of darkness, smoke, and tumult, through which the face of Shakespeare came breaking like a star, and from which she would rouse herself with an effort, only to begin anew the weary round.

At length, resolutely disengaging herself from these visions, she sat up, and looked about her. She saw a garret but little larger than the great four-post bedstead which she had occupied so many years at Charlecote, and, small as it was, almost bare of furniture. The pallet on which she lay, a stool at her side, whereon a cup of milk had been placed, and a spinning-wheel, were the only articles she could perceive, except her own clothing and a little of the dame's. She rose and dressed herself, feeling very weak, and lame from head to foot, from the unwonted exertions of yesterday. Much in need of some sustenance, she drank the milk, and then tried to compose her

thoughts sufficiently to appreciate her position. Slowly the later events of the night came back to her, and she could faintly recollect, after that momentary vision of the face which had burst through the thunder-cloud of assault, a long and weary night ride through miry ways, ending with the clatter of paved streets, and the clasp of welcoming arms.

She drew the cloak from the window, and looked forth, but hastily replaced it again on finding that she could almost have touched the gable of the opposite house, and that a slatternly woman was gazing with great interest from the aperture fronting her own, both casement frames, covered with thin oiled linen, having been swung back to admit air. The neighbor directed a torrent first of inquiry, then of sarcasm, and finally of abuse, against the veil between them, to which Dorothy made no answer, but withdrew herself into the furthest corner of the room. She had seen the sun high in heaven during her brief glance without, and it was evident that the morning must be far advanced. But still there was no sign of Dame Hinckley.

At last a step, which strove to be a light one, was heard on the stair, and the worthy woman, softly raising the latch, crept into the room, starting with surprise as she saw Dorothy up and dressed.

"My service to ye, Mistress Dorothy," said she, curtseying formally; and then, as the girl held out her arms, she caught her in her own, crying, and caressing her with the old names of babyhood. "Eh, poppet! Eh, sweeting! but 'tis good to have ye here! Never was a fairer sight in these four walls. I thought not ever to see ye

again, but ye are welcome as flowers in May. 'Tis a poor place for a Lucy, but — "

"Nay, nurse," said Dorothy, who had thought much upon this matter. "Call me not a Lucy — I will be Dorothy Markham." And she added, under breath, "I have wedded poverty now; I must change my name."

Dame Hinckley looked amazed. "Markham? Sure, 'twas thy mother's name, and a truer, nor a better woman never stepped: but — but — well, an' thou'lt have it so, 'tis not for me to say thee nay. Thou knowest best, and wilt pardon a silly owd woman if she forgets by times."

"I fear me," said Dorothy, "I have been but a

sluggard this day. On the morrow I will strive to rise as soon as thou."

"Thou mayn't do that," said the dame. "Thou'll ne'er blind thy pretty eyes wi' rising, as I do, wi' sun all summer, and before him in winter. 'Tis well enow for an owd maid like me, but not for a young one."

"But why must get thee out so early, nurse?"

"To set open church-doors," replied Dame Hinckley proudly. I ha' done it these ten year. Gaffer Hedge, t' sexton, grows owd an' failed, and a' were never fond on work at 's best. So I goes down every morn, an opes t' doors, an' takes a besom till 't' floor, an redds t' place: an' Sundays an' High days I lays cushions for t' gentry, an' sees Sir Richard's gown and bands ready, an' keeps t' lads bashed. I does mostly all but ring t' bells an' dig t' graves. I has a dole from Sir Richard, an' summat from Gaffer Hedge, an' wi' Christmas-box an' Whissun-vails, I nigh pay for roof an' board. Then at even 'tis all to close again, mind ye."

"Then thou goest twice i' th' day?"

"Ay do I: but I'm ne'er away at night, my pretty: never fear, I'll not leave thee then."

"But does no one ever let thee in thy work?"

"Ay, ay," said the dame. "A host o' sturdy beggars would fain come in for shelter o' dirty days: but I never let 'em further than the porch, as theer shoon 'ud mucky t' floor shameful: T' lads are for hop-scotch an' marbles on t' flags at door, an' away or I can clout 'em o' th' head; an' only last Friday, as ever were, an owd body slips in when my back were turned, an' flumps down o' her knees at chancel-steps; but I soon had her out, I promise ye. 'Tis no place for praying this,'

says I, an' marches her to door faster nor she came."

"Nurse," said Dorothy, "my head aches sadly. Dost think I might go down to the street awhile for air?"

Dame Hinckley looked grave and considered a minute.

"If thou canst bear it, dearie," said she, "methinks 'twere best not stir out till even. Town were all agog last night, when Depity an' poss came in. Full a hundred bold fellows were reeling about, and swearin' how 'twere a sad grief they were too late to go along: and only Master Helpes gave 'em the slip, an' brought thee round a back way, while throng were running after wounded men, I'm feared house would ha' been torn down o'er our heads by morn. But when I win back from church, ere curfew sounds, I'll take thee out a bit: then if any ask after thee, I'll say 'tis my niece come to bide wi' me awhile. I ha' told truth these fifty year, an' got a name will carry one tale through."

Dorothy looked up and was about to speak hastily: but remembering how long Sir Thomas had called her niece, kept silence.

"But here stand I!" cried Dame Hinckley, "my hands hanging to my arms an' the light going to waste. Lay thee down again, dear, rest if thee cannot sleep; I mun get to my wheel."

And taking a bunch of flax from a hutch in the wall, she seated herself, and began to draw out the fine smooth thread from the whirling wheel with a dexterity born of long practice; while Dorothy, laying down her aching head on the sack of chaff which served for a pillow, sank into deeper slumber than before. She was wakened at noon for a

meal, but would only eat a little bread and water, and then relapsed into oblivion; while Dame Hinckly, gladly devouring a double portion of broad-beans, turned to her work again.

It was near sundown when the sleeper was roused by a touch on the shoulder. Her nurse stood beside her with a look of triumphant weariness, holding up some yarn.

"There, dearie, I ha' done three hanks to-day, for all; I could do four at my best; but three's none so bad for a woman nigh threescore. Dost feel well enow to get up an' snod thyself, while I be gone to church? Then we'll take a turn, an' ha' our bit o' supper after."

Dorothy, having arranged her hair and dress as neatly as possible without mirror, pins or brushes, seated herself by the window, and looked at the receding corbelled house front opposite, and the street below, so narrow and crooked that she could only see a few yards in either direction. The smell and sound of many frying suppers (each savory, but as a whole malodorous) rose to her point of espial, and for a moment she remembered regretfully the breezy park at Charlecote. But she saw her nurse approaching with love in her face, and all else was for the time forgotten.

"I ha' borrowed a cloak of gossip Jenkins, as thou'd best wear," said the dame entering.

Dorothy looked at the dingy garment presented with great disfavor. "I have one of my own," said she.

"'Twill none do," answered the other decidedly. "Art too much t' lady in thy worst gear. Thou knowst naught of life, heaven forbid; but t' more thou canst look, ay, an' talk, ay, an' feel like my niece, while thou bidst here, the better. I've none angered thee, sure?" bending forward anxiously.

"No, no," replied Dorothy, swallowing her feeling.

"Why that's well, dearling. Come wi' me. "And the two descended the strait and creaking stair. They passed along the tortuous alley toward High Street, Dorothy drawing the hood closely round her face, and Dame Hinckley, who was a person of some consequence in her way, elbowing aside all who obstructed her charge's progress, and bestowing on one impudent youth a buffet which sent him into the kennel.

"Dost mind t' lane, dear?" she inquired, "Many a time thou's played on these stones — Keep t' wall, Kate, a murrain to thee! — Jan Cobbler's dead, and 's son has new painted t' sign; thy first shoon were clouted there; here's t' baker's shop, where wouldst hold by t' bulk, an' cry for sweet cakes — Jem Black, where art shoving thyself? if I take a stick in hand, I'll send thee to t' cooper wi' a noggin to mend. — Here's t' High Street, dearie; is 't not a fine sight?" And the worthy soul, who in truth believed that Tewkesbury's chief thoroughfare had no fellow, stood a few moments, looking up and down with an air of complacency good to behold.

Her face clouded presently, however, and she began hurrying Dorothy back into the alley.

"Is it time to go yet?" asked the girl.

"Full time. Dost see yon power of gallants coming? There's no breaking *their* heads; and if they get sight o' thee, worse may follow."

She pushed Dorothy hastily along, but ere they reached the door, one of the company had nearly overtaken them. For an instant the maiden's soul leaped into her eyes, as she saw a hint of the face which had dwelt in her thoughts for two years.

A second glance, however, showed her mistake. Dame Hinckley advanced, bristling up like a hen, but soon dropped her guard.

"What, is 't thou, Master Helpes?" she exclaimed, drawing a long breath. "For sure, I thought 'twas one of these young whipsters will ne'er be stopped or spoken; but come in — come in" — she got them within the street door — "Master Helpes, thou must know Mistress Dorothy Markham."

"I came," said the young man, doffing his cap, "to pay my respect to Mistress Dorothy, and hope she is none the worse for last night."

Dorothy murmured her thanks.

"And I have some trifle here," he continued, tendering a brace of wild fowl, "I hope thou'lt try, Dame, to change thy Sunday dinner withal."

"Eh," said Dame Hinckley, taking the game, "'tis long or I've seen the like. My properest thanks to thee, Master Helpes. But how's this?" observing that his arm and hand were bandaged. "Did they peck thy fingers or thou couldst wring their necks?"

"Nay, 'tis but a touch I got last night."

"What, sir?" said Dorothy, "wast hurt in saving me? Is it a burn? Hath aught been done to heal it?"

"The barber hath picked out the slugs," replied Helpes, "and it must needs be sore a few days."

"Come up to my room," said Dame Hinckley, "let me get the bottle of balm, and thou needst not say that. I'll lay the fowls here, and Giles Baker will roast me them for Sunday."

They ascended to the garret, the balsam and some clean linen were produced, and the

arm unbound. It proved to be badly lacerated and inflamed.

"Go look from the window, child," said the Dame, seeing that Dorothy had turned very white. "This is no sight for thee."

"Nay," said the girl, "what another can bear, I trust I can look on. If Master Helpes will permit — "

And taking the place of her good-hearted but rough-handed nurse, she anointed and bound up the wound with a gentleness and skill learned from the mistress of Charlecote.

"I thank thee, lady," said Helpes when the operation was completed, "thou dost me too much honor."

"Nay," said Dorothy earnestly, "'tis for me to thank thee, who didst save me yesternight from a fearful death. Thou must think me most ungrateful, but in sooth my head is so wildered I scarce know who or where I am."

"I shall ever esteem myself most happy in that I was able to serve thee," he replied, moving towards the door. Dorothy held out her hand. Helpes bowed low over it, and with a "Good-even, Mistress Dorothy — god-den, Dame," left the room.

"There's true blood there," said Dame Hinckley. "Didst mark how he said naught of 's hurt? A clown may lay on like a thrasher, but if 's skin's broke, ye hear on't. And when he came up to this poor place, never a wink did he give to wall or plenishing, but looked right on us. Ay, the family may be burgers, but they come of gentles — I've heard they're kin to the Dacres."

While she spoke, she had heaped a few bits of charcoal into a small brasier. Then running

hastily down stairs, she returned with a live coal on a heap of ashes in her palm.

"T light goes fast," said she, "but mayhap there's time."

A piece of cheese and half a loaf were now set forth, and the dame began toasting the former at the coals, after blowing them to a glow. The bread was sliced, and the meal just ready, when a few heavy strokes sounded from the church tower.

"I feared it," said she, "there's t' curfew, but we're just i' time."

Throwing the coals on the hearth, she covered them with ashes, and supper was eaten in darkness.

Dorothy was soon ready for slumber, but Dame Hinckley firmly refused to share the pallet.

"I know my place better," said she. "I'm full as well here, in my cloak, wi' my back to wall. Feyther were full o' ashmy, an' I find it creep on me."

Not all Dorothy could say moved her, and ere long nurse and nursling were deep in repose.

CHAPTER XV.

"In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground."
— WORDSWORTH.

DAME HINCKLEY was away at her church duties early next morning, but Dorothy rose before her return and began to meditate what she could do to increase the family income. Of the Dame's two sources of revenue, one was out of the question, but surely she could spin. She said as much on her nurse's return, but was met with a dubious look.

"So many women spin," urged Dorothy, "it cannot be hard to learn."

"None so hard, take it early," replied the Dame. "But young as thee is, my pretty, I'm feared thee's too owd for that. Or best say, hoped; for a sin and shame it were that Lucy fingers should twirl a distaff."

"Remember, nurse," said Dorothy, laughing, "they are Markham fingers. Come, let me try."

And despite remonstrance, she sat down at the wheel, where she met with the usual fate of beginners — pinched her foot, cut her fingers with the thread, and so forth; still she persevered, and at the end of an hour had produced three or four yards of very slack and uneven twist.

"How much would that be worth, nurse?" she asked in the pride of first achievement.

"Let's see," said the Dame. "Happen 'twould — ay, thee's been at work an hour — it might be a hank a day."

"And what is a hank worth?"

"A penny," was the crushing reply. "As I towd thee, at my best I could spin four hanks a day and earn a groat."

"Then I can only earn a penny a day," said Dorothy, appalled. "Oh, nurse, I have but come to be a burden on you! I wish — but stay —" she drew from her bosom the little packet containing her ear-rings.

"Here, nurse, take these to the goldsmith and sell them. Sure they will keep me a year."

"Nay, sweet, none o' that. A burden! Is 't not the grandest honor to me to have a Lu — I mean, a lady, biding wi' me in these poor walls, gien I did na love her? And doant I love thee wi' all my heart? and doesn't thou do me more good wi' thy pretty face, an' pretty speech, nor thou wast the bravest spinster in 't shire? Sell thy fair ear-rings, quotha! Wouldst ha' t' owd woman be ta'en for a thief? Put 'em by, dear, put 'em by; they must hang in thy ears when thy wedding day comes."

"There will be no wedding day for me," said Dorothy.

"So they all say to owd nurses, but never one to right young gentleman. Thou'lt be a fair bride yet, an' I only hope I may live to busk thee."

"I wish," said the girl, "I had those gold pieces I gave the woman at — what call they the robbers'?"

"Gibbet Hill house, dost mean?"

Dorothy shivered at the ugly name.

"Nay, don't be feared. None will see 't more. 'Tis burnt clean wi' t' ground, they tell me. But how came thee gi-ing any money there? that sort mostly take; an' how? but I crave thy pardon, here be I axing for what 's no matter o' mine."

"I'll tell thee all the tale, nurse," said Dorothy, "except why I left my uncle's house: that must not be spoken of."

Dame Hinckley nodded. "By thy leave, dear, I'll get to my spinning the while: t' day runs on." And seating herself at the wheel, in which position Dorothy regarded her with a considerable accession of respect, she prepared ear and mind for her nursling's story.

Dorothy began with her early walk in the Charlecote fields, and then down the Avon. The good dame listened with the deepest interest. Many were her expressions of commiseration for Dorothy, great the scorn she heaped on Tuff; and after twice breaking her thread, a thing which, as she remarked, did not happen once a week, she was compelled to cease her work.

Only the conclusion of the story need be given in the narrator's own words.

"I heard them call without, 'Open, in the Queen's name,' and then the guns firing. After a time, just as the moon was rising, I saw some one near my window. I called, and put out my arm. More I could not, it was so strait. Soon after, the Captain — I knew his voice — came to my door, the which I had fastened as well as I might, told me the house was fired, and none should harm me if I would come forth, and away with them by the underground passage. I made him no answer, and methinks he must have been shot, for just as he began to speak again, he cried out, and fell against the door. Some came stamping up, and carried him off. Then the smoke gathered thick, and I knew little more till one broke the door with a great noise, and bore me out. There was a weary ride, which seemed like a dream, and then thou didst take me in."

"Ay, dear," replied the dame, embracing her, "and I trust ever to keep thee safe from such another fearsome night. There's no doubt some o' t' gang were killed," she went on, repeating the rumors of the town, "an' o' our side, poor Hal Winn is like to die."

She had now resumed her wheel and was plying it briskly, as if to make up for lost time.

"Oh, this is dreadful!" cried Dorothy. "How many lives have been lost through me!"

"'Twould ha' been none t' better, gif thine had been lost too. Gi' thanks for that."

"I do, I have," returned the girl. "But all this has come of my leaving home — Charlecote, I mean — and yet I could not stay."

She remained musing the rest of the morning, and at dinner could not eat her share of bean-porridge. Her nurse was much distressed.

"'Tis coming from country air to this close alley," said she. "I be wonted to 't. No reek ne'er turns my stomach; but in course 'tis different wi' a lady. But to-morrow's Sunday, and we'll ha' t' brace o' fowl Master Helpes brought, an' I hope thou canst pick some o' them. Lay thee down now, and we'll take t' air again at even."

Dorothy rested and dozed most of the afternoon, until Dame Hinckley came hurrying in.

"I ha' got back a bit sooner than common," she panted, "an' as good luck will ha' 't, there's a bull-fight on the Ham, an' every rudesby in town gone to 't. So we may find t' way clear."

The faded old cloak was again brought forth.

"I hate to wrap thee up in this, but 'tis safest. By-and-by I'll say, 'My niece has gotten a new cloak,' an' thou canst put on thy own. Eh! how th' gossips ha' pestered me about thee this day!

An' I durst na' gi' one o' them a clout, for fear 'twould make all worse. I ha' held my hand so oft, I hope to be forgi'n for the lies I'n told."

They descended to the alley, which they found deserted by all the boys, nearly all the men, and most of the younger women; and consequently reached the High street much sooner and more easily than on the previous day.

"Bull-fight's yonder," said Dame Hinckley laconically, pointing westward. "Dost hear 'em shout?"

And indeed, the roars of alternate applause and terror, mingled with the hoarse bellowing of the baited animal, were distinctly audible from some half-mile's distance.

"Thou'd none care to go look on from t' wall?" she added, inquiringly.

"Oh, no, no!" said Dorothy, shrinking away.

"Thou 's right, no doubt," replied her nurse, in a slightly disappointed tone. "It might na' be safe — I ha' been to many a one in my time — but surely thou is right — 'tis no place for owd women or young ladies."

She turned away and led Dorothy down the street, pointing out the objects of interest.

"Yon's t' Abbey, an' Town-Hall at street end — thou'll mind them — an' here's Sir Richard's house, an' t' Bailey's, as is last made — an' here's where t' king supped, after t' fight in Bloody Meadow — my broder 'll be proud to tell thee o' that — an' down this way lives Master Helpes and his sire."

She was turning down the indicated way, but Dorothy stopped her.

"Not there," she objected.

"Nay, why not?" said the Dame. "They're all at bull-bait, for sure. I'd ha' thee see t' windows. No gentle in town has fairer, an' just put in, as t' feyther must roll in money to do it."

They advanced along the street, and soon came to a commodious grey stone house standing back from the roadway, a spacious garden at one side, and every window fitted with glass casements, the bright lead of whose lattices announced their very recent introduction.

"Are they not fine?" said the Dame. "Eh, I forgot. Thou's well used to the like at Charlecote. But there's few such here."

Her voice aroused no less a person than William Helpes himself, who sprang up from a bench under one of the great apple-trees, and came forward to the wall, thrusting some papers into his doublet front.

"Will it please you enter, Mistress Dorothy?" said he, bowing and holding open the gate.

"Nay, gramercy," said Dorothy, blushing. "We did but come abroad to take the air. I wonder much to find thee from the brave sport yonder."

"I was never o'er fond on 't," he answered, "still I have gone or now, and might again, if I durst trust my arm in such a throng."

"I crave thy pardon, Master Helpes!" exclaimed the girl, "that I asked not for it sooner. Hast thou much pain?"

"Nay, 'tis not worth naming," replied Helpes, reddening in his turn. "I meant not to complain. Thy cure hath done wonders, the grief is gone, and I hope to use it by the Monday."

"It glads me to hear this. And poor Master Winn, Nurse Hinckley tells me of. Is there any hope?"

"Great hope," said Will, emphatically. "He lost much blood, but is now stouter, and they say he shall do well."

Both professed their joy at this news. There was a short pause, and again Helpes pressed them to enter.

"Not so, sir," said Dorothy. "We have already detained thee from thy studies too long."

"My studies? I did but while away the time."

"Think not to carry it off thus, sir. I saw thee put thy author carefully away, and I see now that thou art longing to return to him."

"In sooth, 'twas no such weighty matter of Tully or Plutarch as thou mayst think. I was reading of sonnets."

"Sonnets? Master Petrarch's, I suppose. I have seen a dozen of them Englished."

"Nay, these be not Petrarch's, and they need no putting into English, for they were writ in' t."

"An Englishman write sonnets? Hath he done it well?"

"By thy leave, lady, I'll show thee one, and thou shalt say if Petrarch hath done better."

And taking out one of the manuscripts in his bosom, he read aloud:

> "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee; and then my state
> (Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth), sings hymns at heaven's gate.
> For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

He read well, not without expression, and in a deep melodious voice quite different from his ordinary conversational tone; while the absence of the hesitation so common in reading manuscript showed how often he must have perused the poem.

Dorothy stood motionless, the old cloak falling to the ground, while recollection and admiration mingled in her features. As William glanced at her, it flashed across him that two years before, in the hall at Charlecote, her look and attitude had been much the same.

"'Tis fairly writ, indeed," she said at length, much more coldly than she felt. "'Twould pass with some of Petrarch's, I doubt not. And who is the poet? And what fair lady doth he praise thus?"

"The poet hath no name as yet," said Helpes, "but he cannot want it long. And I conceive"— slightly coloring — "the sonnet is writ to a friend."

"Oh, sure a friend could not inspire him thus? But hast thou more of these sonnets, Master Helpes? I would fain see if he giveth such good measure to every comer."

"Nay, lady, an thou'lt turn inspector, I'll be proud to lead thee through the market. But"—

Here Dame Hinckley, who had sauntered to a little distance, came bustling up. "Come away!" she cried to Dorothy. "Baiting's over; didst not hear the clapping just now? 'Tis near night, an' every knave will soon be back. Hood thyself, an' hasten. God-den, Master Helpes: nay, come not wi' us; come the morrow if thou lik'st, an' ha' thy arm swaddled again." And seizing the girl by the hand, she dragged her off, with but scant time for leave-takings.

"A stout young man, an' a good-hearted, an' a' will be rich some day," she panted out, as they sped through the darkening streets. "But I like not to see him wi's papers an' books; what ha' any but priests an' lawers to do wi' them? That's the next way to spoil t' eyes an' t' stomach. He'd do rarely, were 't not for that. But I trust thou mayst help to keep him fro' them, as I'm felly mistook if he looks in a book soon again when thou art near."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
When a new planet swims into his ken."
—KEATS.

DOROTHY woke next morning at her nurse's call to find the good woman standing at her bedside, dressed in her best array.

"I'm opened church doors as I'm wont," said she, "now put thee on, while I get t' Sunday ale an' white loaf, an' then we mun haste away; I've half town to seat."

The girl was soon ready for her breakfast, and did justice to the wheaten loaf, though she could only be prevailed on to sip of the ale.

"I like ill to ha' thee wear yon grimy clout to church," said the Dame, "but well I wot thy gay hood will draw more than wise men's eyes. Stay! I ha 't. Turn 't outside in — 'tis a sad-colored lining — now 'twill do."

They set forth accordingly, Dorothy's costume, from hood to shoes, undergoing the closest scrutiny from the women, and what could be seen of her features being as narrowly scanned by the men. Several youths, whose pasty faces, gnarled hands, or awkward gait, told their occupations more plainly than ruffles or swords could deny them, showed signs of making up to her, but were in every case repulsed by the truculent mien of her guardian.

"I fear none o' these half-sirs," said Dame Hinckley, as she repelled the advances of one

smirking lad. "I ha' made better stand back; yet I hope 'twill not be long or there's a stronger arm than t' owd woman's for thee to lean on."

Arrived at the church, Dorothy was placed in a dark corner, whence, almost unseen, she could view the exertions of her nurse properly to marshal the congregation. No court master of ceremonies could have a better idea of the grades of rank than had Dame Hinckley, in her way, and nothing was left untried by her, from an entreating look to a heavy thump, that might help on the end she sought.

The long sermon was at last over, and the pair reached home again, the dame fetching a sigh of relief as she shot the bolt.

"That's well done," said she, "but 'tis a heavy charge, a fair young lady. If I can but keep thee fro' t' gentry! — But here comes baker's lad, wi' t' roast fowl."

Dinner was scarcely over when William Helpes made his appearance, clad in a suit of rich material, but sober color, with no attempt to shine above his rank by the use of silk or plumes; while instead of the long rapier then worn by fashionables, a short straight back sword, with a small buckler hanging on its hilt, swung by his side.

The first inquiries were after his arm; and, much against his will, he was obliged to submit to another examination and dressing of the wound, which however appeared so much improved that it was not likely to need further attention.

"I came," said he, when this business was over, "to ask Mistress Dorothy if she would not take the air upon the Ham this fine even."

"What thinkst thou, nurse?" said Dorothy aside. "Were't well I went? Is 't safe?"

"Thou canst not be safer than with Master Helpes."

"But thou must come too."

"Surely. I'll be proud to follow ye to meadow, town, market or church.'

Dorothy bit her lip, and turning to Helpes said that she would be glad of the walk. He accordingly went down to the street to wait until they should be ready.

"Nurse," said Dorothy, as she donned her gear, "thou hast twice or thrice broke jests on Master Helpes and myself, which may not pass. I go with him now, for I would not be disgracious to one who hath served me so nearly, and suffered therefor; but I think not ever to marry; and even were 't not so with me, thou knowest a Lucy may not wed out of her rank."

"Thy father thought a Markham might," was the answer.

Dorothy flushed angrily, and was only pacified by Dame Hinckley's begging pardon, and promising not to repeat the offence.

The three were soon on their way to the Ham, Dorothy leaning on Helpes' arm, and her nurse walking a little behind.

"'Tis a fair town this," she began.

"Ay, in sooth," replied Helpes. "Hast seen the Abbey and the Town Hall?" Dorothy nodded. "And the 'Bloody Meadow'? and the river? 'Tis said there's no fairer river in Britain than the Severn. Thou shouldst take boat on it some day and row down. And at the spring tides, if thou'lt walk by it i' the spate, thou mayst see the eger come up, foaming like a boar — 'Tis a sight worth seeing."

They had now entered the Ham. The great

meadow was scattered over with detached couples and small companies of the townsfolk, some strolling and resting, some engaged in games of various kinds, or watching the performances of mountebanks and jugglers. Turning to the least frequented part, they were soon in tolerable quiet.

"Master Helpes," said Dorothy presently, "hath thy poet writ but one sonnet, and that to a friend? I would hear how he doth address a lady."

"He hath many such," said William, "but I fear one only is in my memory. Wilt thou choose to hear it?"

Dorothy signified her pleasure, and the young man began:

"When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of ladies dead, and lovely knights,
Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see the r antique pen would have expressed
Even such a beauty as you master now,
So all their pra ses are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
And for they looked but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing.
So we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise."

Dorothy listened with close attention, scarcely drawing breath.

"'Tis beautiful," said she when he had finished, "most beautiful; but how dost know that he addresses a lady here, Master Helpes? He says not even 'she'; much less mentions a name."

"Thou art ill to please," answered her companion, "last time we spoke on this, thou wouldst have it friendship could not inspire; and now thou askest for proof that this is not to a friend."

"I think indeed proof is needed," said Dorothy.

"But see, he speaks of her beauty; sure, a man would not praise another man's beauty."

"Why not, when he hath just spoke of 'lovely knights'?"

"But likewise of 'ladies dead.'"

"Well, an' 't be to a lady dead, we shall not quarrel. But I would fain see one to a living lady. Hath he any such?"

"In sooth, I think so. I have some half score at home. I will look thee one out."

"Half score? Have a care thou abuse not my belief, Master Helpes. I shall begin to think thou hast writ these same sonnets to thyself."

"I trust I am no such false coxcomb —" began Helpes, very hotly; then, collecting himself, "I prithee pardon my warmth, lady; Tewkesbury temper is soon up. But I tell thee naught but truth. I know that these sonnets, which I shall ever uphold for the best, were writ to diverse persons; some to a friend, some to a lady."

As Dorothy did not immediately answer, he added, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "I must seem the rudest clown in Britain; but I should sorely grieve to offend thee."

"Nay," said the girl smiling, "Tewkesbury

temper hath served me so well of late, I must not quarrel with it; in truth, I am not angry."

She held out her hand, which he took and closely pressed.

"Then thou knowest this poet?" she resumed. "Some grave and weighty ancient, I trow, with a bald pate, and a great beard."

"Not so; he is some four years younger than myself."

"Thou art most exact," laughed Dorothy. "It should seem, then, that he stands between us."

"Ay," said William, "but as a bridge, I trust, not as a wall."

"I have heard that sore battles have been fought on bridges; but I hope we shall not fall at strife over him."

"I should count it a sad mischance to fall at strife with thee, Mistress: tho' thou mayest think I have given but an indifferent sample of my peaceful humor."

"Thou wouldst fight for thy friend, no doubt, as well as thou didst for thy — for a stranger: yet I can conceive of thee as most peaceful by times: but to take up the tale again, sir, where dwells this poet? and what is his name?"

"He dwells in London, now; that is, for the time," said Helpes, halting and stammering as he began to reflect whether it were wise to tell Sir Thomas' niece too much of Shakespeare.

"Was he of this town?" pursued Dorothy.

"Nay, — from Stratford."

"And his name?"

"William, like mine own," replied Helpes, curtly.

Dorothy durst ask no more. Conviction was almost certainty, and though drawn on by a sort of fascination in her last inquiries, she felt that

the name of Shakespeare would be more than she could bear. Alternately flushing and paling, she walked on for some distance in perfect silence

Helpes, who had feared at one time that he should be driven either to rudeness or falsehood, was at first relieved, but presently, looking at his charge, felt more concern for her than comfort for himself.

"Thou art not well, Mistress Dorothy," he cried, "sure, this walk hath been too much for thee."

"Nay, I am well enow," she answered. "But let us stand awhile. See how far Dame Hinckley lags behind."

They stood a few moments, and then Dorothy attempted a new subject. "Thy father is well, I trust, Master Helpes?"

"Ay, hale and hearty," said Will. "He spends his life between his house and the works. He hath prospered in the business, and bred me up to it; but I love the fields better. I go next Thursday to see to some land of his near Charlecote."

"If it charge thee not too heavily," said Dorothy, as carelessly as she could, "I would ask thee to bring me back word how my uncle and his family do."

"I shall be sure to tell thee."

"But speak not of me there," said she, trying to remember exactly how much Helpes knew of her position, and whether she had said aught at the time of her rescue beyond asking to be conveyed to her nurse's home. "I may abide here some while."

Her companion bowed silently.

"And, Master Helpes, if thou canst find space

to bring me another of thy friend's sonnets ere thou goest, I shall like well."

"I will certainly do so."

Dame Hinckley now came up, and the three took their way into the town.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The deep, the low, the pleading tone
In which I told another's love
Interpreted mine own."
—COLERIDGE.

DOROTHY saw no more of William Helpes until Wednesday evening, and had abundant opportunity for reflecting on her discovery of the personality of his poet friend. At his name all the remembrances connected with him had rushed over her like a flood, and she began to wonder if her fate were not in some way connected with his.

"I must be wary," she thought. "One careless speech of praise from me hath been enough to drive me from my uncle's house, and send my poor cousin, perchance, to his death. I must take heed that this brave and honest townsman be not estranged from his friend through me."

In the meantime she had the satisfaction of some employment, as Dame Hinckley had procured her the materials for a piece of embroidery, and assured her of its ready sale to one of the great ladies of the town.

She was sitting at her frame during the Dame's usual evening absence, when she heard a rap at the door below, and on looking out, perceived Helpes standing expectantly anear the house front. Not liking either to go out or to admit him while alone, she went down, and opened a small casement window beside the doorway.

"Good-even, Mistress Dorothy," said he, smiling before he bowed. "I go up the river early on the morrow, and shall be pleased to serve thee in any way."

"I thank thee, sir," said Dorothy, acknowledging his greeting, and surmising that he spoke thus vaguely with respect to listeners. "I trust thou wilt have fair angling. The luces on the heads of Avon should be in good case. Pray fetch me what thou canst of them."

"I know them well," replied William. "'Tis a brave fish, and thou shalt have all I can bring of them. But here is another of the sonnets we spoke upon, which I have copied out for thee. I trust thou wilt like it well. And though he speak of his years and weariness, thou knowest that is how the youngest write."

Dorothy took the roll, and was about to open it.

"Nay, nay," said Helpes, laughing and coloring, "I prithee read it not till I am gone."

But she had already begun the lines:

"That time of year thou dost in me behold
When yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceivest which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long."

"He writes indeed like a youth of a great age," she said.

"Well spoken, lady!" exclaimed Helpes. "He

is truly a youth of a great age. When he was but sixteen, methought he knew more than the oldest man in the land: yet high-mettled as any barb. Seest thou here, how smoothly and how fairly he speaks of these dismal sights, and makes a sweet melody of them all? Few things there are his limbeck cannot still; naught ever came amiss to him or from him."

Dorothy listened in some surprise to this eulogy.

"'Twere sad pity, Master Helpes," said she, "that I had read this alone, as thou didst desire. I had not then heard how well thou canst speak for a friend."

"He needs not my well speaking," answered Will, "but 'tis right I should show I can value him."

"Hast known him long?"

"Great part of our lives: and did I wish for fame, I would choose none better than to be spoken on as his friend."

"Well, sir," said Dorothy, "I wish thee all success. But wilt not enter? I see my good nurse come up the way."

"Nay, nay, I cannot stay. I did but come to say I should be three days gone. Look thou for a fair budget of luces."

He bowed and departed, while Dorothy, hastening up stairs, was at work again ere Dame Hinckley's entrance.

At the first moment of leisure and solitude, she examined the roll William had left with her. It contained the sonnet, fairly enough copied out, though with one or two small erasures and alterations; and at the foot, among some ornamental flourishes, stood the cramped title "Willm Shaksper."

The confirmation of her belief was at first almost grateful, as she felt that she need no longer struggle against so many proofs, and that her admiration for Shakespeare was becoming justified. No longer need she think of him as the companion, ill assorted it might be, but still the companion, of poachers and vagabonds. The jewel had now found its proper setting: and she would scarcely have felt surprise at hearing that the rising poet would soon become the greatest man in England. Again and again the face which had quelled an angry judge, and inspired a careless child, rose before her mental vision, till she was in a frame little short of worship.

Helpes, who had proved himself capable of winning and appreciating such a friend, was also raised not a little in her opinion, which his courage and kindness had already made favorable.

While such musings as these occupied her mind, the greater part of each day was spent at her frame, the embroidery growing rapidly under her skilful fingers, to the great admiration of her worthy nurse.

On Saturday evening, just as Dame Hinckley was setting out on her wonted journey to the church, Dorothy heard some parley below, and presently the good woman came posting up.

"Master Helpes seeks thee, dear," said she. "Eh! but thou's made him forget his manners. 'A ne'er bade me god-den, but says forthright, 'Is Mistress Dorothy within?' staring past me, an' I were t' doorpost. 'She's within,' says I, 'an' within she stays, if thou casnt speak an owd friend fair.' Then 'a came down, I trow."

Dorothy made no answer, nor even turned her head.

"Come, come!" said the dame, "dunnot sit there no longer. T' light goes. Come, he has much to tell thee. Ye may walk to church wi' me, an hear t' news, while I redd up. Come, thou 's not tasted fresh air these two days."

Suffering herself to be persuaded, the girl took her cloak and followed her nurse down stairs. Helpes, with a face impatient for happiness, stood at the threshold; and a vainer damsel might have been enlightened by the eager gladness of his greeting. Quietly returning his salutation, she took his arm, and the pair followed Dame Hinckley along the street.

"I walks behind ye when ye go a pleasuring, as reason is," the good woman had said, "but now I be in church service."

"And what news from Charlecote, Master Helpes?" inquired Dorothy. "Are my uncle and aunt and — and my cousin well?" In spite of her determination to speak firmly, she could not keep a little tremor from her voice, as she named the cause of her wanderings.

"Sir Thomas and his lady were in good health, as I was told," replied Will. "Thy cousin was just returned from London, and 'tis said he shall soon wed Master Arnold's daughter."

As he uttered the last words he looked askance at Dorothy, to satisfy a suspicion of jealousy. But the joyful relief she showed dispelled his doubts.

"I am glad indeed to hear this," said she. "I know naught of Mistress Arnold, but no doubt she is well chosen, and 'twill bring his mother great content"

They walked on for some time in silence, Helpes considering if he should tell Dorothy more of what

he had learned, which was, that she was commonly supposed to have fled to London by concert with her cousin: that Sir Thomas, in this belief, had made various fruitless efforts to trace her in that direction, until his son's return had partly persuaded him of his mistake: and that now, fearful of some other escapade on the young man's part, he was hastening on his marriage. Joe Tuff, who could have thrown much light on these matters, had judged it best to keep the tale of Dorothy's adventures to himself.

While he thus pondered his companion addressed him.

"I have to thank thee for the sonnet, Master Helpes, 'twas fairly writ, indeed: notably the name of the author."

"Was 't so?" exclaimed Helpes. "Did I copy that with the rest? I meant it not. But no matter. Many will know the name or long, methinks."

"Through thee?"

"Nay, through himself."

"Thou believest him capable of much, then?"

"Of all — save unfaith or cowardice."

Dorothy perhaps had never felt more kindly towards Helpes than when he thus spoke the praises of the friend who was destined to be in some sort his rival: and the smiles which lighted her face drove from William's mind all thought of prudence or delay. They were now waiting without the church for the Dame's reappearance, and ere he knew what he did Will had taken Dorothy's hand and begun his speech.

"Mistress Lucy," said he, "a poor townsman, such as I, may scarce dare to ask aught of a lady — if it be not to give up all for his sake. Wilt

have me to thy husband? I love thee truly, and that's more than e'er I said to any woman since my mother died. If thou canst wed a burgess' son, he will never give thee room to repent."

Before he had finished Dorothy had drawn away her hand and the color began mounting in her face.

"Master Helpes, thou hast done so much for me of late that I would fain say nay as softly as I can: but nay it must be."

"I have frighted thee perchance," said he, "I spoke too soon: but give me leave to wait awhile. What?" as Dorothy determinedly shook her head, "is 't vain? Then I'll trouble thee no more: only tell me, prithee, am I too late? hath some luckier man stept in before?" as his thoughts again reverted to her cousin.

"Nay, not so," said Dorothy. "There is no other — that is —," her ideal ever in mind, "no other whom I love or would wed."

Helpes turned his face away for a few moments, and when he next spoke it was in an altered voice.

"May I see thee still by times, Mistress Dorothy? I should grieve to lose thee wholly; and some day I may serve thee again."

"I shall ever be glad to see Master Helpes, as at first," replied the girl.

Dame Hinckley now appeared, and the three took their way homeward, much more silently than they had come. Helpes made some excuse to depart at the alley corner, to the great discontent of the Dame.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain."

— COLERIDGE.

IT was a glorious day late in April, a year and a half after the events of the last chapter. A soft southerly wind drove great masses of cloud across the sky. Now and then a brief shower would come leaping down, followed by a radiant sunburst and a fleeting rainbow, while from every side sounded the joyous cries of beast and bird, exulting in another lease of life.

Two young men walked the Ham in close conversation: William Helpes, and his friend Shakespeare. The former was little changed, save that he wore deep mourning; the latter may best be described by saying that his countenance, fulfilling the promise of early youth, bore the look of one coming into his kingdom.

"And when didst say thy father sickened?" asked the poet of Helpes, who had been explaining some of his affairs.

"Near Yule-tide."

"And his death followed hard upon?"

Helpes nodded.

"Well, thou hast done all proper rites and decked his tomb; and see, thou stand'st alone. Why dost not wed, as I have bid thee so oft?"

"Truly, thou hast spared neither precept nor example," replied William, smiling, "but thou knowest two words go to that bargain."

"Nay, fear not the woman-word. 'Twill not be wanting. Where is she would disdain thee?"

"Thou hast ever spoke well for me, Will," said the other, "but let any man troubled with vanity go courting, and I'll warrant him a cure."

"That speech had ill-luck to its sire," said Shakespeare. "Who is the fair Touch-me-not, I prithee?"

"That I must not say. Let us speak of more likely matters. How come on the plays?"

"As a tired horse comes on," said the young dramatist. "'Tis ill vamping other men's shoon. But I have somewhat of mine own in hand promises better, methinks."

"Ay, let's hear it soon. Now thou hast seen the court ladies, thou canst fashion forth as fair dames as any, I'll be bound."

"Thou might'st think so. But she who hath been my chiefest model saw never court or camp. Thou rememberest the eve I lay in Charlecote keep, till thou, good fellow, cam'st to take me out? Her face was before me then, as in a midsummer-night's dream, and 'tis in the tables of my memory still."

"Mayhap," said Helpes, with sparkling eye, but strained voice, "'tis one with the lady of thy sonnets?"

"I care not if I say it is."

"And hast ever seen her since then?"

"Nay, not I. She has married some clod-pate, 'tis most like, and I would not choose to hear that any had brought her down to a nurse and chronicler of ale."

"I prithee, Will, tell me her name," urged Helpes, in a voice of such distress that the other stopped and looked at him in puzzled wonder.

"Nay, 'tis a bargain," said he at length, "if thou'lt tell me what I asked but now - the name of thy snow-cold love."

"'Tis better we name no names, mayhap," said Helpes after a minute's reflection. "Let us go down to the river and write on the sand."

A few steps brought them to the Avon's bank, and each, turning from the other, traced with his stick on the smooth beach; then, changing places, read what had been written.

Shakespeare, with little delay, effaced both names, and walked rapidly away. Helpes, looking about him in bewilderment for some moments, followed more slowly.

"Thou art not angry, Will, I trust?" said he, when at length he overtook him.

"We have wasted time," said Shakespeare, curtly; "one writing had served us both."

"Wilt come down to the bowling green, and have a game?" asked Helpes.

"Nay, not now," said the other. "I must get back to mine easy inn. I'll write thee from there, should I leave as speedily as the time demands. Fare thee well, Will: we part not unkindly, but —" he grasped the townsman's hand and walked swiftly, tho' with slightly halting gait, toward the walls.

Helpes knew better than to press him further in his present mood, and turned homeward to spend a lonely evening, wavering between grief, indignation and pride.

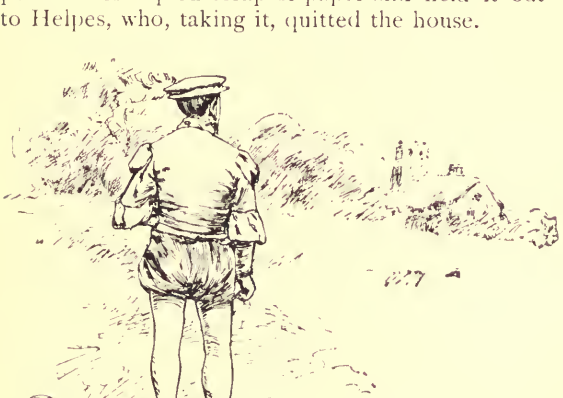
By the morning, however, solicitude had conquered, and he went down early to the tavern, determined to leave no means untried towards a reconciliation.

But the gaping lad who admitted him informed

him that "Measter Shakespeare had gone with t' first peep o' dawn."

"And left he no word for me?" asked Helpes, execrating his own tardiness.

"Ay," said the youth scratching his head, "He bid me gi' thee this." And he drew from his pocket a crumpled scrap of paper and held it out to Helpes, who, taking it, quitted the house.



On reaching a quiet place his first care was to smooth out the paper, and peruse the sonnets written thereon, which ran as follows: —

"Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flattering the mountain tops with sovran eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding the streams with heavenly alchemy,
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,

Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.
Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
With all triumphant splendor on thy brow,
But out, alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath masked him from me now.
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth."

"Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke?
'Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break
To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak,
That heals the wound, and cures not the disgrace.
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief —
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss;
The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.
Ah, but those tears are pearls which thy love sheds,
And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds."

With a groan he crushed the paper in his hands, and turned homeward. As he plodded along with hanging head, he nearly ran against some one coming in the opposite direction, and, looking up, recognized Dorothy Lucy.

"Good morrow, lady," said he. "Thou art early afoot."

"I came to bring the lotion from the leech for my nurse," replied Dorothy. "'Twas forgot last night, and she will go to the church each day, as is her wont, though the palsy cramps her sadly."

"'Tis an ill complaint," answered Helpes. "But thou art happy to have some one to care for, and not hie to an empty house, as I."

"Nay, but thy mother — "

"My step-mother, thou meanst. Didst not hear? She hath taken all her portion, and gone to

her folk at Gloucester, and left none but serving men and maids, who call me master to my face, and tell each other behind my back that I'll ne'er fill my father's shoon."

"A good servant minds a good master long," answered Dorothy, quoting one of her nurse's sayings.

"True, he was a good master, and a good sire; the more lonely house. An if I might hope that some one would yet take pity on me, and —"

"Thou must not speak thus, Master Helpes," interposed Dorothy, seeing whither he tended. "Thou hast neighbors and friends —"

"Friends!" said he bitterly. "Ay, I'm bravely off for friends, who have just fallen out with the best of them."

"Thy best friend would sure not fall out with thee so readily, if at any wise," said Dorothy, vaguely, uncertain whether he spoke of her or no.

"I said not the blame was his," replied Will. "The sun's a fair sight on the fields; but when he shines into the chimney corner, and puts out the bit of firing a poor man has laid by for his need, 'tis none so well."

To this oracular remark the girl made no response, but saying she must despatch her business, moved onward.

"May I not do thine errand for thee, or with thee, Mistress Dorothy?"

"Nay, not so."

"Is there naught I can do to pleasure thee?"

"Ay, surely, bring me another of those sonnets thou hadst once in such good store. Or hath thy poet dropt the pen, perchance?"

"He'll ne'er do that. I feared to weary thee,

but shalt see one ere long," hesitated Helpes, conscious of the paper in his doublet front.

"'Tis a bargain, then," said Dorothy, passing on her way.

She found Dame Hinckley groaning on the floor, her temper no way improved by a sharp attack of rheumatism.

"Thou's been long enow," she said querulously. "The leech kept thee without, I wot, while he mended his last nap. An he knew whom he served, he'd stir 's bones. Plague on 's worthless stuff, a drop o' mother's herb drink 'ud pass it all."

"Lie down again, nurse," said Dorothy, gently applying the lotion. "The sexton's daughter said she would do thy part to-day, if need were."

"Ay, ay, she'd be rarely glad to step into my shoon, but I'm none dead yet. When t' summer comes, and I'm less gnawn wi' cramp, I'll gi' her a leaf o' palm for her head, an she likes. But 'tis vain strivin' wi' her, poor doited body, as I heard her say t'other day Master Helpes should wed a lady fro' t' south. 'Twere grief to howd my tongue; but I could ha' towd her he looked no further than 's own river-head. Ay, ay, dearie, thou's comin' round — never tell me"— as Dorothy turned her head away — "thou's comin' round. Didna I see thee go about last week, rathan walk aneath Rob Mason's ladder? We all know that should mean no wedding for thee this year. Ay, thou'lt be a fair bride or winter comes again; an' after that, 'tis little matter how soon t' owd woman is aneath the mouls."

CHAPTER XIX.

"I'll buckler thee against a million."
—SHAKESPEARE.

DOROTHY, who could only obtain privacy when left alone in the garret by Dame Hinckley, sat down at her embroidery frame, and plied the needle diligently.

"I grow old fast," she thought, with one of those exaggerated fits of self pity not uncommon at nineteen. "My hands are seamed and scarred like those of two-score with this rough work,"—this indeed was the truest part of her indictment—"my cheek, sure, is falling away, and I found a grey hair yestreen. Nurse, yonder, cannot live but few more seasons; and since the stay I gave him this morn, methinks Master Helpes will come no more. I would not see him as a lover, but 'tis sad to have no friend left." And more than one tear fell among the seed pearls of her pattern.

That week and another passed but gloomily away. Dame Hinckley, though, as she expressed it, "holding like a rope" to her church duties, was now too lame for spinning, and faint but terrific mutterings from the Spanish war-cloud gathering on the southern coast penetrated even to secluded Tewkesbury. William Helpes had not visited the house for a fortnight, and both the Dame and Dorothy began to surmise that his constancy had been tried too far. Their resultant feelings differed, yet not so widely as might have been supposed. The Dame mingled praises of true-hearted

gentlemen, and denunciations of double-faced loons, in the most inconsistent manner, while Dorothy, though avowing frequently to herself that the end she sought — that of making Master Helpes forget her — was at last attained, always found a small grain either of contempt, irritation, or — it could not possibly be grief — mingling with her deep content at the consummation of her wishes.

The Sunday afternoon came round, and Dorothy, who had remained at home, sat by the open casement of the garret, striving for a breath of fresh air, and suffering from the heat of an unusually warm spring evening. "Alas, these changes," she thought. "'Tis scarce two months ago one shook with cold in this same room, and now, one scantly breathes."

As she meditated thus she was aware of a well-dressed man coming slowly up the street, scanning the windows and doors on either side as intently as his care to avoid the pools and rubbish heaps in his way would permit.

For one moment her heart leaped more lightly than her judgment or reason approved the next, when she saw it was not he on whose absence she had made so many efforts at complacency.

Realizing suddenly that she was leaning further out and gazing more earnestly than became a modest maiden, she drew back, but not before she had been recognized by the stranger, who, halting and flourishing his plumed hat, called in a low but penetrating voice, "Mistress Dorothy, as I think!" She was silent, and he spoke again more loudly.

"Doth Mistress Lu — that is Dorothy, dwell here, or at the Hall?"

Fearing lest more should be said then it were

well for the neighbors to hear, Dorothy looked forth.

"What are your commands, sir?" she asked, in as vulgar and servile a tone as she could assume.

"Dost not remember me?" inquired the man. "I am an old friend, who hast much to say to thee; prithee come down."

"I will come to the little wicket," said Dorothy, as faces began to appear at the nearest casements. "Thou must not stand halloaing thus in the way." And hoping that she had well combined civility and reproof, she hastened down the stair. The stranger awaited her with his face pressed close to the grate beside the door.

"Dost not know me?" he asked again.

"Not I, sir."

"Well, let me in, and thou shalt know that, and many more weighty matters, which I have come post to tell thee."

"Thy pardon, sir," said Dorothy firmly, "This is the home of my aunt, Mistress Annot Hinckley, and none may enter here while she is hence."

"Thy aunt? Dame Hinckley!" ejaculated the other. "I' faith, I'm rarely sorry for thee. Didst not hear she was taken for a witch but now?"

"O, Heaven help us!" cried Dorothy, her heart sinking and fluttering at these words, in those days both dreadful and frequent. "Where is she? Take me to her, sir. Sure thou canst do somewhat to help. My poor nurse, that never harmed any! And Sir Richard, too, can say he hath known her many a year——"

By this time she had unbarred the door and was about to sally forth; but the visitor, stretching his arm across, stopped her way.

"There is no such haste," said he. "Thou hast done enow. I did but try a master key on this same door, and it hath served me well."

"But my nurse — " stammered the girl.

"She's safe and well. Mark what I said. I asked if thou hadst not *heard* she was taken."

"From none but thee."

"Neither had I."

"Then — then 'twas a cruel speech," faltered Dorothy.

"Nay, nay, pretty one, an old friend's jest — be not angry. Sure thou knowest me now. This same beard," stroking the appendage as he spoke, "may have altered me somewhat; but dost not mind the day I squired thee from Evesham?" And Joe Tuff, for he it was, smirked and beamed as if recalling some valiant exploit.

"I remember thee now, sir," said Dorothy, her indignation gathering as her strength returned, "and I can truly say thy nature has not altered with thy face. The words thou hast just spoke are of a piece with that day's gallant deeds."

"Tush," said Tuff, whose brazen assurance was not readily overthrown, "I did the best I could for thee: many a man had sought his own safety, nor ridden to bring thee help. But let it pass, and tell me how thou dost. Faith, thou looks but sadly," not waiting a reply. "Beauty endures not long: but thou mayest pass yet a while. 'Twill joy thee to hear I have left Sir Thomas — my blood could brook a servitor's place no longer — and set up for mine own hand as law scrivener in Evesham, where I doubt not to do well."

"I trust there is no doubt on that matter," replied the girl, "and to my poor thinking thou wert best to return to Evesham as soon as may be, nor come hither again."

"What ails the wench?" said Tuff. "Why, I came here o' purpose to seek thee, Dorothy — think on that. I'm a rising man, and thou art none so fair as thou wert, or I remembered: but I seek a wife, and care not if I take thee."

"Sir," said Dorothy trembling and flushing,

"didst make hither to insult an orphan? Leave me, and come no more." And she endeavored to close the door. But her unwelcome guest, jamming himself between the posts, blocked the attempt.

"In vain!" he laughed at Dorothy's efforts. "Thou dost not shuffle me off so readily. Hast

never a manchet or cup of ale to offer for old times' sake? Why this is but a churlish treatment, but if naught else offers, I'll have a kiss." And passing his arm around her waist, he sought to make his words good. Dorothy, calling for help and turning her face away, thrust him off with all her strength. The half dozen persons who had gathered around the door looked on in huge delight.

"To her, lad! To her!" cried a cobbler rubbing his hands.

"There's no harm in a kiss," wheezed an old crone, "an Madam did na' like him, she should ha' kept t' door." And she burst into coarse laughter, wherein a couple of laundry-girls most heartily joined.

"What means this, knave?" cried a stern voice, and William Helpes' hand clutched Tuff by the collar. "Darest thou treat a lady thus?" And with a powerful fling he hurled the scrivener through the row of bystanders (two of whom measured their length upon the stones) and against the wall of the opposite house, where he fell in a collapsed heap.

"Hath he hurt thee, dearest?" asked Helpes, turning to Dorothy.

"Nay, not yet," sobbed the girl, "but never came help in better time."

"I'll be revenged, yet," snarled Tuff, gathering himself up.

"Revenged, thou cur!" said the other contemptuously. "And you," turning to the throng, "Call ye yourself good townsmen or neighbors, that could stand and look on thus?"

"Blame me not, Master Helpes," said the cobbler, fawningly, "he took me off guard, but now

— what say ye, gossips, to take him down and duck him in the river?"

With a shout of approval, all rushed on Tuff, who, dropping his cloak and staff, and springing away, flew down the lane at a pace that left little hope for his pursuers, who however followed at their best speed out of sight and hearing.

Helpes and Dorothy remained standing alone together in the doorway until the cries of pack and quarry had died away.

"I must go now," said Will curtly.

Dorothy looked up surprised.

"Nay, think me not rude. It glads me to have done thee some service, but the need is past — and — and — " gazing at the fair and well loved face before him — "I must needs speak if I stay, and speak of matters which please thee not, as I know too well. Of a hand that would fight and fend for thee at need — a heart that lies at thy feet — a life which thou only canst light or darken. Tell me, Dorothy, shall I stay or go?"

There was a minute's pause. Then Dorothy, looking up with a smile, tho' the tears ran down her face, whispered "Stay," and Will caught her in his arms.

The shouts and wrangling of the returning troop roused the pair from their new Eden. "We must not stand here," said Dorothy sliding from her lover's embrace. "I cannot bid thee enter, and I would not drive thee forth."

"We will both go forth," said Will. "Come with me to the church, as oft aforetime; we shall meet thy nurse there, and I trust she will not ban us."

Dorothy reached her hood, and the two set out, passing by the bowing and panting throng.

"We've gi'en un a good run, Measter."— "He were well winded ere we lost un."—"Stout legs, weak spirit." Such were the ejaculations.

"Thank ye — thank ye, friends," said Helpes. "I knew your hearts were right. Here's somewhat to slake your throats, after the chase."

And distributing three or four shillings, he strode away, holding his head high, and drawing Dorothy's arm close under his with a new air of ownership.

"'Twill be a match, for sure," said the old woman who had so recently led in laughter. "Bless her bonny face, and his broad shouthers, there be no finer couple i' the town."

"A sturdy blade as need be," acquiesced the cobbler. "Look at 's iron fists, an' long champion arms. Didst see how he trowled yon fellow o'er the way, as 'twere a biass bowl."

"Thou shouldst know, friend," said the tailor, "for thou didst sprawl i' th' mire from a touch of that same bowl."

"Enow o' that, Snip — enow o' that," growled the cobbler, and both adjourned to the ale-can.

"Is't possible thou canst love me, dearest?" Will was saying. "A gentle lady like thee to wed such a rough burgess?"

"Miscall not thyself," said the girl, with playful authority. "Any lady in the land might prize such a true and loyal heart."

"A doubting heart, I fear me, sweetest," he answered. "Hadst thou given me a third refusal, I had never dared speak again.'

"But how didst chance to come at my very time of need?"

"Thy own bidding. 'Twas but now I came by the sonnet thou didst ask for, and I sped to bring it. May I read it thee now?"

They were by this time entering the church.

"Dost think 'tis right to read it here?" she asked.

"Thou wilt say so when hast heard."

They found a seat, and Will took out the paper. "Nay, 'tis not this," he said frowning. "I have it now." He thrust back the first manuscript, and produced another.

The spring wind and sunlight poured through open door and lofty window, rustling and waving the ancient banners, and touching brass and marble till they shone through the shadow; while far away sounded the faint chant of a final anthem. In a low, deep voice Helpes read aloud the immortal sonnet:

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediment; love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

"Could such words have better time or place?" said William. "Here we plight our troth."

They kissed each other, bowed in prayer a minute, and then left the church. Dame Hinckley awaited them at the porch, and her joy can scarcely be imagined. She went from laughter to congratulations, and thence to tears, which exhausted her so much that Will and Dorothy were obliged to lead her home.

It was not till Helpes was well toward his own house, after a promise to return early on the morrow, that he again drew out the first manuscript he had produced in the church.

"'Twas meant for her," he murmured, "but she reads it not yet. Some day, perchance. She might like ill I were led by it, but sure 'tis no shame to be moved by such as he."

He perused the lines again, and we may look over his shoulder.

"Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou knowest thy estimate;
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing,
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee, but by thy granting?
And for that riches where is my deserving?
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
And so my patent back again is swerving.
Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing,
Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
Comes home again, on better judgment making.
Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter
In sleep a king; but waking on such matter."

CHAPTER XX.

"So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee." — *Psalms.*

It may easily be supposed that the discussions of ways and means were many and long. When they concerned the wedding of a damsel of Dorothy's high birth and breeding, but present lowly condition, such must naturally be the case. William Helpes, whose possessions, for one in his station, were more than ample, wished her to move into a better lodging, which he would provide. But here Dorothy was firm.

"This roof sheltered me first," said she, "and here I will abide until I go to my husband's house."

"Well," said Helpes, "if you will not leave it sooner ye both must do so later. Dame Hinckley, thou comest to us for life the day we wed."

The good woman's cup of joy was now full. She had grieved a little, secretly, over a solitary old age, and to be thus transported to a great house, presided over by her darling, was the best earth could have given.

"I thank ye, Master Helpes," said she. "'Tis what few men would offer. I have lived here many a year and here I tho't to die; but I'll be proud and glad to go wi' ye, an' I trust to be of use yet awhile."

William's wishes, and Dorothy's unprotected situation, would both have bespoke an early day for the wedding, but his father's recent death ne-

cessitated some delay, and the date was finally set for September 12th.

Thus much having been settled on the first evening of conclave, the groom-expectant took his leave, and the two women went into the question of funds for the wedding outfit.

"I ha' store enow o' linen laid by," said the elder, "but 'tis coarse, mean stuff, fit for a peddler's wench. An' the gown thou wearest, the same as ever thou cam'st fro' t' Hall in, has been darned so oft 'tis well if it howds together till thy wedding day, wi' all savenapes can do: gentles' coats are fair to look on, but they dunnot last."

"I shall be but too glad of the linen, nurse," said Dorothy, "and perhaps," thoughtfully, "I may steal time enow to broider me a gown."

"That's well thought on," cried the Dame. "'Twill set thee far better than working for t' town madams here. But where be we to get t' veil, an' shoon for hand an' foot, an' a score o' things a lady should wear? Lackaday! had I t' fi' pounds now that feyther left me, as I put into Dame Hickup's chop, an' ne'er saw again!"

"Wouldst give me thy all?" said the girl, with affectionate reproof; "but we must go to rest now, or the palsy will pinch thee again."

"Never fear me," replied the Dame sturdily. "This good news hath helped me more than all the leech's oil."

Three or four weeks passed away in preparation on both sides. Dorothy still kept up her patrons' embroidery, despite all protests, and the spare time of herself and nurse was spent on her simple outfit. Every week they walked to the house soon to be hers, where such alterations as she would suggest or Helpes could devise, were swiftly carried through.

During May William was called away on one of his business trips to Stratford. He was absent but a few days, and had only to say on his return that he heard the Lucy family were as usual, and that his affairs had prospered well.

One day about the first of June, as Dorothy sat singing at her work, she was surprised to hear the trampling of horses on the pavement below — a most unusual sound in narrow, tortuous Keech Alley. Remembering, however, her late experience with Tuff, she kept to her seat and occupation until a knock at the door below drew her to look forth.

A young groom, in familiar livery, holding a dun hack by the bridle, stood on the step; while behind him, on a stout bay, sat a dignified, grey-haired gentleman — her uncle, Sir Thomas Lucy.

Hastening down stairs, she unbarred the door and threw it open, trembling so violently that she could scarcely recover from the deep reverence which the occasion demanded, or utter the words, "My respectful duty waits on thee, Sir Thomas."

Her uncle dismounted and came up to the door.

"It is long since we have met, niece," said he austerely, extending his hand, which she took and kissed. "Dickon, bait the horses at the next stabling, come again at noon." The man bowed and departed.

"And now, Dorothy," continued her uncle more kindly, "tell me how thou dost, and why didst flee away from thy home, with never a word?"

"I — I feared to stay longer," she brought out with a great effort.

"Ah, I must have frighted thee sadly," said Sir Thomas, "but I meant the best — I meant the best."

Dorothy invited her uncle to enter, and he stepped within the door, where she brought him a stool; then, taking courage, inquired formally after Lady Lucy and her cousin.

"Thy aunt's but weak — weak and wan. I fear me she fails, or I had brought her behind me on the pillion. And thy cousin, too, is but sadly in health. Didst hear he had wedded?" The girl assented. "His wife's name is the same as thine, but she's not *my* Dorothy — that can never be." He paused a moment, and laid his hand caressingly on his niece's head. "But 'tis a comely young woman, and a notable, and she hath brought him a fair daughter of late."

Dorothy expressed her pleasure at this news.

"Ah, Dorothy," continued her uncle, his features relaxing into their customary cheerfulness, "I have hunted thee like a partridge, as the Scripture saith. Many a long hour and many a broad piece have I spent searching in the south, when thou, little weathercock, hadst whirled to the west. But 'twas in my mind thou hadst fled to London with — well, it matters not with whom. And I hear brave news of thee now. Thou must wed a bold archer, forsooth, and never a 'An' it please ye, Sir Thomas,' or 'By thy leave, uncle.'"

The girl stood silent, the rebellious thought passing through her mind that one who had caused and neglected her sorrow had small right to abridge her happiness.

"How — how didst hear it, Sir Thomas?" she asked at length.

"From one who should know, the lad himself. I met him last week, as I rode near Stratford: we fell into discourse, and I drew all the tale from him, an it had been a gold wire; I

should be a judge of a man by this, as well as a judge of men, and I find he ne'er thought to strike my deer. 'Tis a true, brave heart, and he has the good word of all, and gold and lands, and a vein of gentle blood to the boot. Tush, Doll," his joyous nature breaking down all the restraints which pride and misconception had slowly built up, "fear me not — I'll never say thee nay. My consent thou hast — I'll stand by to give thy hand away — we'll have the merriest wedding e'er was seen, and the good old times shall come back again for ever and a day!"

And in the exuberance of his happiness the good knight uttered a view halloa, which echoed with startling effect in the low and narrow passage where they stood. Dorothy looked around in some apprehension, but it chanced that all the tenement's inmates were abroad, and no one appeared. Her uncle, looking slightly ashamed, wiped his heated brow.

"Thy aunt sent her love," he began in a lower voice, "her dearest love, and she hoped to see thee soon — sure, the summer will set her up again. And — and thou'lt come and be married from Charlecote?"

This question was asked with some embarrassment; and Dorothy, forseeing many difficulties attending this arrangement, declared her steady purpose of remaining where she was.

"Well, well, it may be best. A bride must have her way. Thy cousin Tom," went on the worthy justice, "he is poorly, as I said, or he had ridden with me — but thou hast his best wishes — and could he do aught to serve thee — "

Sir Thomas halted and stammered so much that his niece, rightly supposing him to be the composer

rather than the bearer of these felicitations, broke in with thanks and disavowals.

"And now, Dorothy," said her uncle, turning to the stair, "let us see the nook where thou hast nestled all these months."

"'Tis a poor place — not fit for thee, Sir Thomas."

"Call me uncle," said he resolutely, "and let me see thy home."

Very unwillingly Dorothy showed him to Dame Hinckley's garret. Her uncle was evidently prepared for a small lodging, but apparently the reality exceeded his ideas, for he looked about, hummed a tune, and finally exclaiming, "Any port in a storm," turned down the stairs again.

"I see Dickon yonder," said he, after a few minutes' reflection. "I must go. We will come soon again — here's a small portion for thee, Doll; nay, no thanks — my own niece must not go dowerless, bless thee; fare thee well!" He kissed her and departed.

Dame Hinckley returned a few minutes later to find her charge weeping violently over a large purse.

"How now, dearie? What hath chanced to bring thy tears? Aught of ill?"

Dorothy, wiping away her tears and explaining the situation, set the good woman almost beside herself with rapture.

"'Tis well my work is i' th' church," said she, "or I could ne'er do another hand's turn. I be fain mazed. And Sir Thomas ha' stood in this same spot? Eh, 'tis just t' way o' t' world: all forgi' a bride. And now thou mayst be set forth as becomes thee wi' store o' silk and taffety, an' hosen an' lace — "

"And a pair of virginals, and an ambling palfrey, and a blackamoor slave, perchance," said Dorothy, smiling. "My uncle hath been most kind and generous; and I grant his gift sets me much at ease; but we must not be over hasty, or forget that I am to be a citizen's wife."

On examination the purse was found to contain a hundred pieces of gold, amply sufficing for all Dorothy's occasions.

It was a week or two later that the bride-expectant and her guardian set forth on their first expedition to the chief mercer in Tewkesbury.

The shopman received them with the readiness of a business man who wishes neither to affront a customer, nor lavish too much deference.

"What d'ye lack, gentlewomen?" he cried, taking up the burden which the prentice sang without. "Dame Hinckley, I wot — and thy niece will wed — ay, rosy country cheeks! Shall I cut one of our Tewkesbury woolens? or here's grogram, will make a brave gown piece for a stout yeoman's wife."

"Country cheeks! Yeoman's wife!" ejaculated the Dame. "I'll have thee know, Master Simon, this is kinswoman to Sir — "

"Nay, nay, nurse — peace, I prithee," entreated Dorothy.

"'Tis a dull morning, Mistress," said the clerk, in oblique apology, removing his cap. "Robin, set the stool for the lady — help me down with yon bale of sammets."

"But I am minded to see the woolens first," said the girl. "Here is a fair piece of murray cloth pleases me well. Dost like it, nurse?"

"Ay, truly; and 'tis Master Helpes' chosen color," replied the Dame, more loudly than was needful.

"As good as Leicester sheep e'er bore! 'Tis a pleasure, Madam, by your leave, to serve a lady who can judge of such things. May I cut off a score or so of ells? And another piece of this blue? 'Tis a well fancied color, and will ne'er change. And now wilt look on some silks? I would Master Sherer were here to show them, but he hath gone up to London. Here is a right India, Madam, was brought overland to Venice by caravan in the good old way, as I can assure thee — these long sea-voy'ges are ill for the gloss."

Dorothy purchased a portion of the lauded silk, saw it put up with the woolens, and then, taking out her money, asked for the reckoning.

"Is there naught else, Madam?" inquired the dealer. "I humbly trust thou'lt honor our poor shop again; none in the town can serve thee better. Nay, there is no haste — thy name on our books were worth more than thy gold in our till — but as thou wilt. Robin, knave, art loitering there? Take up the parcel, bear it after the lady — nay, good Dame Hinckley, put no hand to it — we know what becomes a customer of quality. And, Madam," pursuing Dorothy from the shop, "I hope thou wilt remember us against the winter comes — we have store of miniver and sable would please the Queen herself — my service to your ladyship."

Robin carried the parcel to Keech Alley corner, where he was dismissed with a small gratuity, and the Dame took the goods.

"Thou seest, nurse," said Dorothy, when they had ascended the stair, "we must buy but few more braveries, else this room will scantly hold them."

"True enow," said the other, "without thou takest the next garret?"

But this Dorothy decidedly negatived. "And further, nurse," she continued, "thou must not boast thus. I honor and love my uncle, and for Master Helpes, 'tis enow to say I am to wed him; but be not so free of their names to strangers."

Dame Hinckley promised, and to do her justice, endeavored to keep her promise: yet could not refrain from winks and nods and hints, which, together with Sir Thomas' frequent visits, caused a marvellous change in the neighbors' conduct. Those who had hitherto treated Dorothy with the scantest civility, now made her the recipient of so many ducks and bobs whenever she went forth as quite bewildered her. Though wonted to a measure of such homage at Charlecote, the amount now lavished on her reminded her of her aunt's bottle of hartshorn waters — pleasant and refreshing at a distance, but overpowering when brought too near.

During the hot weather Sir Thomas rode over once a week, and rapidly fell back into his old playful ways with his niece. Dorothy wondered somewhat that, coming so frequently as he did, he should not fetch some of her own belongings from Charlecote, and once hinted as much: but as he only produced a small parcel of handkerchiefs and ribbons at his next visit, saying hastily "it was all he could lay hands on," she did not refer to the subject again.

CHAPTER XXI.

"The guests are met, the feast is set,
Mayst hear the merry din."

— COLERIDGE.

THE Invincible Armada, though not threatening an inland town like Tewkesbury as immediately as the southern and eastern coast, was nevertheless a menace to all England, and many were the military preparations throughout the summer of 1588. William Helpes was continually out with the train bands, and much of Sir Thomas' time was spent in organizing and drilling his dependents. By the middle of August, however, the scattered remnants of the Spanish fleet were scudding over the German ocean, and Lady Lucy's health having somewhat improved, she was brought over to Tewkesbury near the end of the month.

Sir Thomas, having seen her safely at rest in the lodgings he had taken of Master Huggeson, on High Street, in which they proposed to remain until the wedding, came round to acquaint Dorothy that her aunt had borne the journey but ill, and could not see her until the morrow.

On the morrow therefore, guided by her uncle, Dorothy went to Master Huggeson's house, Sir Thomas beguiling the way with many jokes and witticisms on coming events, and only lowering his voice and endeavoring to walk softly when fairly over the threshold.

He led Dorothy up to her aunt's room, opened the door and turned away. Lady Lucy looked

much older and paler. She sat in a cushioned chair, and Dorothy scarcely knew her until she smiled and uttered a low greeting.

Then the girl, catching her aunt's hand, fell weeping on her knees.

"Rise up, Dorothy," said the invalid. Her niece obeyed, and Lady Lucy looked anxiously but silently at her. Dorothy divined her wishes, and said humbly, "I crave thy pardon, aunt, for leaving thy house as I did."

"'Tis well. I do not deny thou hadst some excuse: but a fault must not be o'erslidden. And now tell me of thyself and thy husband that is to be."

Dorothy uttered a glowing eulogy on William Helpes and her own great happiness.

"Ah, a young heart goes far," sighed the aunt. "I might hear thee laugh and jest with thy uncle beneath the window, as all this had never been: but he is a wise good man, and it ill becometh me to cavil at his words or deeds."

Dorothy remained a few minutes longer, and then, fearing to weary her aunt, departed. Sir Thomas waited without.

"What dost think of her?" was his eager query.

"She hath fallen away, and seems but frail."

"Thou knowest naught i' the world o 't, wench," was the brusque reply. "I tell thee she's far stronger than last May. An she hath gained so much in three months, she'll double it in six. And had she a good word for thy Will? Ah, his poaching sticks in her throat. I ha' told her it did him no shame to stand at the bar for once, but — but — "

"He stood not there alone neither, uncle," added the girl.

"Speak not of them," said Sir Thomas, testily. "I name no names — they may come and go — they may get gold and land — it may not skill to rake up aught against them — but there's a vast betterment betwixt Will Helpes and them, the rogues! Canst not see it, Doll? Ah, well, there be things past women's minds."

Dorothy was with her aunt each day, deep in the mysteries of textile fabrics, and poor Dame Hinckley was made to feel some of the drawbacks

of greatness. Lady Lucy had brought down her own tiring maid to assist in the toilette, and this eminent personage was as a thorn in the flesh to the worthy Dame.

"I cannot abide her," she said one day, in a petulant outburst. "If I do but speak a word, she looks on the hair o' my head, and says 'Tis done otherways wi' us,' or 'That's all gone by, good woman,' and I, that ne'er feared woman yet, stand staring, an' no word to say — but what an owd fool I be, mumping an' grumblin' for a straw, when my dear is so happy."

The wedding presents were few but valuable. A large silver bowl from Sir Thomas, some fine old lace from his lady — a beautiful fan from the younger Lucy and his wife — these nearly completed the list. But the one which gave Will Helpes most pleasure came from his old comrade of the greenwood.

"Look on this, Dorothy," said he one evening, taking out a small parcel. "See what Will hath sent thee."

It was a little scent-bottle of crystal and gold, shaped like a swan, and filled with attar of roses.

"'Twill sweeten our house, dear, long as we live," said he.

About this time Dorothy received an invitation from William Helpes' aunt (his only relative in Tewkesbury) to dine with her on the eleventh of September — the eve of the wedding day. Both from the inconvenience of the date, and also from the fact that Dame Wotton had never taken the smallest notice of her hitherto, Dorothy had no mind to accept; but finding that William was desirous she should go, and Sir Thomas, to whom she mentioned the invitation, seeming strangely eager it should be fallen in with, she concluded to do so.

"'Tis just as well," said Dame Hinckley. "'T garret must be scarped and swept, an' I'll ha' in a wench to do 't, an' all will be fair when thou comest home again."

Accordingly Dorothy set forth early in the morning for the church with Dame Hinckley, and having waited there until the usual round of duties was performed, bent her steps toward the house of Wotton.

Her nurse was anxious they should not go through their own alley, but as she could not prove

another course to be shorter or better, Dorothy kept on her way. A gaping crowd about the vicinity was nothing remarkable of late; but a dray load of deals stood before the door, and from the open windows came not only the clash of broom and mop, and the shrilling of female voices, but the sound of hammer and saw, and the deeper notes of men.

"What means this, nurse?" exclaimed Dorothy to her companion, whose countenance expressed neither surprise nor curiosity. "Is the house to be torn down?"

"Sir Thomas doubted as t' stair were na' strong enow for all might tread it to-morrow," answered the Dame, pushing briskly on. "And he hath had in Jem Joiner to underprop it." And she would say no more.

Dame Wotton was a well-to-do widow of about sixty, really attached to her nephew, but neither liberal nor large-hearted by nature. She had pleased herself with the idea of kindly patronizing William's bride, but during the last few days had heard so much of the greatness and glory of the Lucys, that, quite turned from her original plan of campaign, she now only thought of surrender.

She received Dorothy with the deepest courtesies, ushered her into a really very good and well furnished room, to which she referred as a "hole," and introduced an elderly friend, who greeted the young lady in great perturbation, and scarce opened her lips again during the day but to beg pardon.

Cowslip and currant wine were immediately produced, and Dorothy was compelled to partake of both, and then sit so near a huge fire that she was almost smothered. Dame Hinckley, who had es-

sayed to make her way to the kitchen, was not allowed to do so, both the hostess and her guest treating her as fully their equal, and Dorothy greatly the superior of all.

Dame Wotton had begun some interesting tales of William's boyhood, when a substantial lunch was brought in; and of this the last traces had scarcely disappeared, when all were summoned to a dinner sufficient not for four but forty. The feast was greatly prolonged, and it was almost twilight when they were prepared to go. As they were muffling, the hostess, excusing herself, bustled from the room, and inadvertently leaving the door open, the following colloquy was heard:

"Roger! Sim! be ye there?"

"Ay, Missus."

"Hast thy halberd, Hodge?"

"For sure."

"Thou too, Sim?"

"Nay, Missus; un hath been mislaid."

"What to do? Ay, I ha 't; bind cook's cleaver on a staff: she'll ne'er know t' differ."

Dame Wotton shortly returned, and announced "her men would arm, and see t' young lady safe home." And by these valiant guards Dorothy and her nurse were accordingly followed to their dwelling.

Darkness had fallen by the time they reached it, and Dame Hinckley, lamenting that she had brought no light, was at what seemed the wholly unnecessary pains of guiding Dorothy up the stairs and to her bed-side. Entreating the girl to "get to bed soon, she'd ha' enow to do o' the morrow," her nurse groped out a tallow dip, and hacked long and stoutly at flint and steel ere she struck a light. And scarcely was this accomplished, when, drop-

ping the candle, she stumbled, and crushed it with her foot.

"Bungler that I be!" she cried. "But ne'er mind dear; lay thee down i' the dark; 'twill bring good luck."

"But where is the bed — the pillow?" asked the girl, who was by this time undressed, groping about. "Naught seems the same."

"Must I couch thee then, poppet?" asked the sturdy old woman; and taking Dorothy up in her arms like a baby, she laid her in bed, and tucked the clothes around her. "They maukins ha' left all here huggermugger; but they know no better. Good night, dear, an' bless thee," and with a kiss she moved to her own corner.

The day had been overcast and cloudy, with drifts of rain; and both sleepers were lulled to rest by the sound of a heavy shower on the roof. The dawn, however, was bright and beautiful; and as the shadows slowly dissipated, it seemed to Dorothy that she was waking from a long and troubled dream, again a child at Charlecote. There she lay in her own carved bedstead, an angel's head on each post: it was the same low-browed but spacious room — there stood her painted and gilded chest, the lid just open — her lute leaning against it — the walls tapestried with the siege of Troy, studied by her a thousand times — the very gowns she thought she had left forever, hanging on their pegs.

She started up in bed. A door was opened, and Dame Hinckley, wearing a fine new gown and kerchief, came smiling in.

"Good-morrow, Mistress Lucy. Is 't not a brave surprise?"

"Where am I?" cried Dorothy. "Who hath taken me back?"

"None — none, dear," soothingly. "But haste and busk thyself. There are some without fain to see thee."

A well-known jolly voice was now heard below singing "The hunt is up."

Dorothy hurried on some clothes, and then opened the casement. In the lane beneath stood her uncle, as much at home as in his own hall-yard.

"How fares it, niece?" he cried. "Thou wouldst not come to Charlecote to be wedded, so we have brought Charlecote to thee."

And the good knight, delighted with his own conceit, shouted with laughter, stamping up and down.

Dorothy now perceived that two barriers had been erected across the alley, enclosing a space before their door some fifty feet long, which was strewn with fresh rushes. Greeting her uncle kindly, and saying she would soon be down, she proceeded with her array, glancing around the transformed room meanwhile.

As Dame Hinckley explained, Sir Thomas had hired the two adjoining garrets from their occupants, had thrown all three into one by the removal of the board partitions (lath and plaster not being then in use for interior walls), and all defects being covered by the tapestry, the furniture was set in place.

Hastening down to her uncle, Dorothy received his blessing, and proceeded to thank him for his thought of her, saying, however, that it was a great toil to bring so many things over but for one day.

"Not a thread goes back, Doll," was his answer. "All shall be thine. The room hath stood ever since as thou didst leave it, but this spring our

dames — Tom's and mine — were fain to make it a nursery, and spoke of new furnishing, and where the old should go. 'By your leave, my ladies Lucy,' quoth I, 'plenish it anew as ye will, but my niece shall have all her own.' And so it stands.

Look now, here comes thy aunt: I doubt if she wins to the church this day."

Lady Lucy now appeared, supported on either side by the tiring-maid and a damsel bearing a basket of millinery. She was still feeble, but declared she would go in with her niece and see her dressed, whether or no she could see her married.

"I have often thought on thy wedding, Dorothy," said she. "'Tis not wholly what I had in mind, but I trust all will be well. Thy uncle hath told me of his fancy touching the room — he is merry as a child upon it — thou knowest he loves a jest. And think not but thou art welcome to all stands there — we both love thee well — thou wast as our daughter many a year."

The bride-elect, her aunt, and the maids, now took their way to the renovated garret, where,

joined by Dame Hinckley, they entered on the mysteries of the toilette, whither we shall not presume to follow. Suffice it to say, by ten of the clock Dorothy Lucy issued from her chamber, as fair and well-apparelled a bride as Tewkesbury had ever seen.

Sir Thomas awaited them below, conversing with one of the gentlemen of the neighborhood whom he had known slightly for many years, and whose acquaintance he had much improved recently. This personage gave his arm to Lady Lucy, Dorothy took her uncle's, and, preceded and followed by a dozen stout serving-men, they took their way to the church; the maids and Dame Hinckley brought up the rear, the latter accompanied by her chosen friends, a society which had marvellously thriven and increased of late.

William Helpes met them at the church door, where the first part of the service was read by the curate. The banns had been duly published, during the last three weeks, and no man stood forth to state cause of impediment. The company then proceeded to the altar, where Sir Thomas gave the bride away, and the nuptials were concluded.

The registry book was then had down, and the parties prepared to sign their names. Writing was then such a rare accomplishment among females, even of the better class, that the bride's doing so was looked on with some admiration. She had almost finished tracing her signature, when an exclamation from her uncle stopped her.

"How's this, Doll?" he cried. "I prided myself on thy fair writing, and canst only make thy *mark!*"

And indeed the unfinished signature stood

"Dorothy Mark—." It was plain that in that moment of excitement she had begun her mother's name of Markham, by which she had been so long known in Tewkesbury. Ashamed of her error, she hastily erased the unfinished word, and wrote above it "Lucy," thereby leaving such a blotted sign-manual that those of her descendants who have scanned the register for that year have great difficulty in coming at her real title.

The wedding party now issued from the door amid the pealing of bells, the music and song of minstrels, the cheers of friends, and the laughter and whooping of the rabble. Palfreys were in waiting at the door, and each cavalier taking his lady on a pillion behind him, they rode toward William Helpes' home.

The day was exquisitely beautiful, bright and clear, the sky glittering from recent storm, and the air tempered to that rare perfection when it is impossible to feel either heat or chill.

As Dorothy sat behind her stalwart and devoted husband, loved, honored and envied by all who saw her, she thought of the last time she had ridden a horse, when two years before, a poor, half-dead fugitive, she had been carried through Tewkesbury streets.

The procession, gathering like a snowball at every corner it turned, at length reached the house, and the wedded pair rode up to the door, between a double row of Helpes' servants and business dependents, each clad in a smart new coat or cloak, and all bowing, ducking and uttering their good wishes.

William Helpes dismounted, lifted his wife from the pillion and over the threshold, ere her foot touched the ground; and the housekeeper, who

stood just within the door, handed over her keys with a deep courtesy.

The table (or rather three tables, placed end to end) stood ready, covered by fair linen cloths, with long, knotted fringes, and bearing every kind of solid and liquid refreshment then known in a substantial citizen's household. A fine voice sang from an inner room an epithalamium as follows, while various musical instruments sent forth their notes at intervals:

"Here ends all art, all artificers end,
Come ye, look through our little golden loop;
Here is the best which heaven to earth did send,
Here is the bond of love, and joy, and hope.
The soldier's laurel, poet's bay, down fling,
Take up this tiny wreath — the marriage ring.

The double bow, which heralds sunny weather,
The shining halo of the rising day,
Th' equator smooth, which binds the world together,
The chaplet fair, which rounds the brow of May.
A diadem by meanest mortals owned,
Who rightly wears thee sits a king enthroned.

Let but a slender finger swift pass thro' thee,
And all delight shall follow in its train:
Hold fast by this, and woe may not undo thee,
That brave ring-armor blunts the edge of pain.
Gentles, but hearken to the minstrel's voice,
And ye shall ne'er repent, but aye rejoice."

The bride and groom sat in a large double chair at the board head, Sir Thomas and Lady Lucy on either side, and the other guests downward in order of rank. The good justice was in his element, laughing, jesting, matching tales, and calling healths, and only Lady Lucy's pale and weary looks at length ended the feast. The wedded pair stood in the center of the room while the huge bride cake was broken above their heads by two

friends, and soon after the company began to disperse.

As Sir Thomas got to horse in the evening light, he saw several men approaching with ladders large and small.

"What be these, friend?" he asked of a by-stander.

"'Tis the custom here, your honor," replied the man, touching his cap. "We do allays prop up t' doors an' windows of a new married man wi' ladders on 's wedding night."

CHAPTER XXII.

"He kepte his pacient a ful gret del
In houres by his magik naturel.
Of his diete mesurable was he,
For it was of no superfluite,
But of gret norisching and digestible.
His studie was but litel on the Bible."

— CHAUCER.

ELEVEN years had passed since the events of our last chapter. The sixteenth century was near its close. Queen Elizabeth still sat on the throne, but her light grew dim, and her courtiers expected the Northern sunrise. The solid men of London were planning the East India Company, next year to receive its charter, and the first successful American colonist was as yet a slave in the wilds of the Caucasus.

Few changes had passed upon Tewkesbury. A long, cold winter was just relaxing its hold, the festal season between Christmas and Shrove-Tuesday was over, and all the town kept Lent. The March winds roared and swept through the streets, threatening thatch and tiles, rapidly coining the country's ransom, and driving all prudent citizens early to their homes.

A glance into the household of William Helpes showed a great fire burning on the hearth of the principal room. On one side sat Dorothy smiling at Dame Hinckley, who, grey and bent, held in her arms a seven-month-old infant — William Helpes' first-born son. The mother looked with joy on the child for whom she had almost ceased to hope, but

her face clouded whenever she turned to the opposite side of the room, where her husband lay sick upon the couch. A *weed*, or heavy feverish cold, taken some weeks before, had not passed off as rapidly as usual, and at length, much against Helpes' wishes, medical assistance had been invoked. Since that time, however, the patient had grown steadily worse, and Dorothy was beginning to fear that he might not recover. She had not yet induced him to "be a bedral by day" as he expressed it, but, his doublet and shoes removed, to lie on the cushioned settle, wrapped in a cloak.

"How dost feel now, husband?" asked Dorothy, repeating the hourly question. "Hast any pain?"

"Nay, none — only this pestilent weakness," was the impatient answer. "I was sorely racked yestreen, but now I want naught but strength. Meseems I have my ailing under now. I'll not give in to 't — I *will* fling it off!"

Springing up, he walked to and fro in the room, and seizing the heavy poker, bent it against his knee: but was presently obliged to lie down again, weak and gasping.

"Nay, thou'lt kill thyself," remonstrated his wife. "Lie still until thy dinner, that may hearten thee."

"An I could eat a bit of good flesh meat, it might be so," he answered. "But this same watery fish goes fair again me."

"Sir Richard has seen thee, and knows how ill thou art," said Dorothy thoughtfully. "Surely he would grant thee a dispensation."

"Tush, Doll, think not o' 't: I trust to keep the church's rules: and I should pass, that have a

dish of carp to my own share each day, while the rest of ye feed on stock-fish and parsnips."

"But thou sayest the pain is worst of afternoons?"

"Sooth, 'tis so; but Master leech tells me that hath naught to do wi' 't."

"I would our own good Doctor Hill were well enow to come; I like not this helper he hath gotten."

"But thou knowest Master Hill hath seen me once, and said his assistant had great skill. And here he comes, ever the same, an hour ere noon."

Stepping to the door, Dorothy admitted a slight, lean, stooping man, clad in black, with a cloak and hood of the same, this last an article of costume not altogether discarded by men at that time, and which left little of the head visible but eyes, nose and mouth.

"And how is ze patients?" he asked with a foreign accent. "Sure'y an improvements is now pass upon him?"

"Alas, no," said Dorothy. "Yesternight was the worst he hath yet seen."

"Zat is bad — very bad. But Rome was not built in a day — we must give ze curatives time to work." And after feeling the sick man's pulse, he launched into a long medical disquisition, plentifully garnished with French and Latin words which much more learned persons than his hearers might have found difficulty in understanding. At length, concluding his harangue, he administered a bolus, and then asked if the patient's dinner were ready.

"Presently, Sir," answered Dame Helpes, "the fish are in the pan."

"I must see it myself — ze seasonings must be

aright, or, look you, ze whole balancings is destroy."

A serving maid soon brought the smoking dish of carp to the door. The leech smelt and tasted the mess, and then, pronouncing it not sufficiently seasoned, asked for the salt cellar, and scattered a little more over the dish.

"It shall do now," said he, "all shall be as we would have it." And he took his leave.

Helpes, declaring he had no stomach to the fish, but the leech's bidding must, he supposed, be done, partook of a share, and was soon after attacked by severer pain than ever, attended by feverish delirium. A wretched restless night kept his wife in constant attendance upon him, and it was almost daybreak when he finally fell asleep.

Dorothy's resolution was now taken. She snatched a few minutes' rest, and then donning her cloak and muffler, came forth from the chamber, bearing with her the little William — a quiet and patient child, who required but a small amount of attention. Dame Hinckley waited without the door.

"Eh!" said she taking the baby, "but t' master's bad. I might hear him groan whene'r I past. He cannot bear many such nights."

"He shall not," said Dorothy, firmly. "I have that in mind shall cure him. Keep the child till I return, let none disturb Master Helpes."

And taking a basket, and calling one of the serving lads to follow, she left the house. In about two hours she reëntered, and sending the boy down to the kitchen, crept into her husband's room, where she sat watching his slumber until he was roused by the physician's knock.

"How dost thou, William?" said she, lovingly bending over him.

"As ever," he answered feebly. "The pain is gone, but I am weaker still. Is that the leech?"

"Ay. He must come up to thee, methinks."

Helpes grimaced but said nothing. The physician entered the room.

"So he has gone to hees bed? Ah! it is ze act of ze wise man. Now all shall soon be well."

"He was far worse, last night, sir," said Dorothy, looking steadily at the leech. "Art sure thy treatment is for the best?"

"Ze best fitted to ze end, Matam," in some heat. "We must have patience, as I did say. Yet a little time, and according to Hippocrat —" And he went off into another discourse, chiefly in dog Latin. This ended, he administered his bolus, again examined and seasoned the dish of carp, and departed.

"And yonder is my dinner?" said Helpes, sitting up in bed, and looking on the victual with no eager eye. "I care not if I never see carp again."

"Thou needst not," said his wife, withdrawing her gaze from the leech's retreating form, and rising from the window. "Set the fish by, Nan, and mind ye, cover it with care. I will serve Master Helpes myself." And going down to the kitchen, she returned with a fine joint of roast beef.

"How's this, Dame?" said Helpes sternly, averting his face from the too attractive sight. "Hast forgotten the season?"

"Not so; here is thy grace before meat."

Her husband took the paper she offered, and unfolding it read as follows:

"Lent, 1599. — I this day graunted a license unto William Helpes, he being verie sicke, to eat fleshe, the said license to endure no longer than during the tyme of his sickenes.

"Ri: Curteis, Curate of Tewkesburie."

"I was afoot early to see Sir Richard," explained Dorothy. "He gave me the dispensation with few words, and he hath copied it into the register book. Fish thou shalt eat no more. I know not why, but am well convinced 'tis little better than poison to thee. Now mayst fall to with a clear conscience."

William made an excellent dinner for a sick man, and afterward took some repose, while Dorothy nursed her child, who, as she observed, had reason to be jealous of his father. She then attended carefully to the disposal of the dish of carp. Helpes insisted on coming down for a short time before dark, saying "he had ne'er lain by the whole day since he could mind," but was soon persuaded by his helpmeet to return. There was no recurrence of pain, however, and he passed an excellent night. The next morning he declared himself much improved in body, but something troubled in mind.

"I had clean forgot, Doll, when thou gavest me the curate's license, I should have one from the leech as well. Sure, he will take it amiss, and small blame to him."

"Leave that to me. Methinks I can set matters so before him that thou shalt hear no word of complaint."

Promptly at eleven the medico appeared. "How shall ze patient be, Matam?" he asked of Dame Helpes, who having opened the upper half of the door, leaned over it, with no apparent intention of doing more.

"He is better, sir; far better," answered Dorothy, in a strangely high and sharp voice.

"Zat is most well," replied the man, real surprise and feigned satisfaction blending in his

tones. "Pray you, Dame, let me in; I must judge if ze amendment be real."

"Thy pardon, sir," said she, budging not an inch. "Since thy haste is so great, stand no longer at our poor door. My husband is so far improved he needs no more of thy care."

"But, Matam——"

"Furthermore, sir," she went on, "being avised that fish suiteth not with Master Helpes' complaint, I have a license from the curate for him to eat flesh till he be recovered; whereof he took a full meal yesterday, and shall again to-noon."

"This is an insult!" shouted the leech, his accent failing as his anger grew, "an insult to myself and my profession. Wilt try experiments on thy husband thus? 'Tis no better than murther!"

"Have a care, sir," said Dorothy, frowning till her eyebrows met. "Murther is a hot and heavy word, may harm the user. As thou speak'st of experiments, it may please thee to know I gave most part of the last dish of carp to a dog, which now lieth dead in his kennel: a small portion hath been saved for our good Doctor Hill to look into when he next cometh; and until he cometh, no other physician shall cross this threshold." She drew back and closed the door.

The leech stood a moment scowling at the panels, and then, with a savage imprecation, turned away.

It was two or three days later that Dr. Hill made his appearance; a stout, much muffled figure, sitting sideways on a fat pony, at whose bridle walked a serving lad: the position explained by the Doctor's swathed and gouty foot, which would enter no stirrup ever made. He painfully

dismounted, and hobbled forward to meet Helpes and his wife, who stood together at the door.

"How doth our invalid?" he asked cheerfully. "Hale and hearty again? I might not come sooner — I was bound and fettered with business — ye see," lifting his gouty member, "I have the world at my foot."

He took a seat, and made some professional inquiries.

"Faith, man, thou hast been hard bested," said he, "but I see not that much remains for me to do. The dispensation was well thought upon. And that Master Jean Dufay, that English rascal in a French skin, I would he stood here to spell out his knaveries."

"What said he of the matter, Doctor?"

"Gone two days since — o'er the water, I trow. He came home betimes, and I might hear him rummage in the surgery a space, and then go forth, telling the lad he should be late. None have seen him sithence; and when I was holpen to the stair-foot in the morn, I found all in great disarray, and a goodly purse gone, whose nest, methought, none knew on but myself. What will ye? poor rogues must live — the empty sack may not stand."

"Hath he been long with thee, sir?"

"Most part of a year. He came bearing a letter from one of my craft in France, and said he had been bred there, though of English birth. He understood his work, I'll say that for him; a quicker, cleverer fellow ne'er handled pestle. But ye know the old saw, 'He who burnishes the bit o' Twelfth-Night, lets the horse go hungry by Lady-Day'; as we went on I liked not his ways — I found the French knot in 's tongue came loose

by times — and but for the gout laying me by the heels, that I might not make shift without him, my house had seen his back a month ago."

Dorothy now produced the remnant of the dish of carp, and told of its effect on the dog. The doctor examined it carefully, sent for his apparatus, applied one or two simple tests, and shook his head.

"Husband," said Dorothy in a low voice, during this process, "dost know who this Master John Dufay, as the Doctor calleth him, was? None other than Joseph Tuff, my uncle's scribe."

"Art sure, goodwife?"

"Verily; I am. I knew him not until, as Master Hill saith, he dropt his French. Then I was sure on 't; but I would not fray thee with 't, being yet so weak."

The doctor looked up with a puzzled face.

"There is much amiss here," said he, "much amiss, but it passes my skill to say what forthright. Will Helpes, thou hast a marvellous strong habit, or hadst lain beside thy talbot. I will take this home, an' ye wish, and look into it more closely."

"Nay, Doctor," said Helpes, "let it pass. An' he meant me ill, he hath failed, thank heaven and

my good wife; if he sought not to harm me, 'twere a hard charge to bring."

"Well said, Will," assented the old physician, leaving; "if thou pursuest not after thy heath, I shall not after my gold."

Helpes continued steadily to improve, and by Easter day was himself again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Death doth ride
Ever at the horseman's side."
— *Anon.*

We must now take another stride forward of some seven years, and find a Stuart ruling Great Britain, and the present authorized version of the Scriptures just issuing from the press. This last subject provided discourse for two respectable citizens who passed through the streets of Tewkesbury on a fair autumn morning. Their flat bonnets and collarless shirts, with drawing-string at the neck — their sad-colored garments, gold rings, and portly forms, marked them as well-to-do merchants. Behind them skulked a lean, ragged, evil-looking man, apparently waiting an opportunity to slide in a petition for alms.

"It may be well to have Holy Writ done into English," said Sherer the mercer, "but once should serve. Betwixt Wyclif, Tyndale, the reverend bishops, and now the king's majesty, how shall a plain man do?"

"Sure, the King knoweth best," said Tanghaft, the cutler. "Thou mind'st he is bespoke the 'British Solomon'; and with such aid as he hath, none may doubt."

"I yield to no man in duty to the King; but see, if his Bible differ from the rest, and his be right, theirs must needs be wrong."

"Not so, neighbor; look ye, it may be but a differ of words."

"I tell thee, there be just so many words in every tongue that is spoken under heaven; and one should fit to another like hand to glove. Else how might it ever be done at all?"

"'Tis said our new Bailiff is a great book-man," remarked Tanghaft, shifting the subject.

"Ay, ay. I have seen him walk abroad, poring on scrolls, when 'a should have been at's business. But he's a rare good fellow for all that, is Will Helpes."

"Thou sayst well. I think he hath the good word of every man of weight i' t' town to back him."

"Ay; and none more deserving — but how's this, knave?" cried Sherer, turning sharp round on the mendicant, who had closed in on them with eager looks. "Why dost dog us thus by the heels? Off with thee! Or shalt try the fit of oaken shoes."

Grumbling something unintelligible, the fellow slunk down an alley.

"Dost know him?" asked the mercer of his friend.

"Soothly, nay. 'Tis an ill-looking rogue: something of a French. But town's full o' strangers, drawn in to see the day's doing. Canst say who be these?" indicating two men on the opposite side of the way.

"Nay, I know 'em not; but they be Welsh. Dost mark their speech? 'Tis like the cloop of liquor from a bottle-neck."

"Canst understand them then?" asked Tanghaft.

"I mind but one word of Welsh, and that's 'cooroo,' which is beer. But let us make on, or we shall miss our seats for the show." And the worthy burgesses proceeded up the High Street.

The two Welshmen who had caught their attention belonged to a people who were by no means unfamiliar objects in Tewkesbury, lying as it did on the borders of Cambria; but these men were apparently from the wilder part of their country, then as little known or travelled as the Scotch Highlands a century later. The taller and elder of the two, a man about thirty-five, was dressed in a short yellow tunic, his feet and legs protected by sandals and loose cross-gartered hose, a large blue cloak wrapped round his arm, and a gold-handled dagger in his belt. The other's costume was much the same, save that he was bare-foot, and his weapon had a plain wooden hilt. The heads of both were uncovered, but the elder man's long hair was carefully combed and dressed, while his companion's was the traditional "Welsh furze-bush." The young man's bearing, however, was marked by the humblest deference toward his superior, whose every thought he seemed solicitous to anticipate.

The British strangers continued their course through the town, more and more slowly as the crowd grew thicker, till at length they came to a stand just below a long overhanging balcony, or bay, in the High Street; the very same, as it chanced, where William Helpes' wife and sons had taken places to view the pageant of which he was to them the greatest part.

He was indeed, as his neighbors had said, a general favorite, and the most popular man who had ever attained the chief magistracy of his native town. Moreover the exploits of his youth had now receded far enough into the past to have something of the fabulous about them, while yet there remained good store of living witnesses who

by no means allowed them to lose in the telling. It was confidently asserted by many that he had walked an hundred miles in a day — that he had flung a man over a ten-foot wall — that he had burst in a heavy iron door with his shoulder — and that he had, single handed, slain five ruffians, in rescuing from their stronghold the noble lady who was now his wife. His reputation, long silently growing, and now thus bruited abroad, seemed likely soon to equal that of his mythical countryman, the great Guy of Warwick.

Thus buzzing, humming, and clustering together like bees when their hive is touched by the morning sun, the citizens gathered along the route of the procession, which led from the gate by which the Queen's envoy had formerly entered to the town hall. And when at length the train came in sight, pushing its way onward like a long dried torrent occupying its bed, and yet more when the hero of the day took his place in the line, the murmurs of praise swelled into a roar of acclamation which might have terrified one not aware of its cause.

Gallantly did the object of their admiration justify it. Clad in splendid apparel, the insignia of office borne before him, carrying his forty-eight years lightly as half their number, his strong athletic figure and well managed horse forming a sharp contrast to those of the poor equestrians who had preceded him in office, the plaudits of the multitude, sweeter than the praises of the judicious few in that they bring no sense of obligation, ringing in his ears, and hundreds of shining faces converging toward him like sun-sparkles on the heaving ocean, he might well feel lifted above his ordinary frame. As he caught sight of the window

where Dorothy, in the full prime of matronly beauty, sat with her three fair-haired boys, and heard the joy of his family mingling with that of his friends and neighbors, his cup of happiness seemed full. But Nemesis was on his track.

Passing beneath the balcony, he rose in his stirrups, waving his hand to Dorothy; and as he did so, a gaunt, fierce-eyed figure darted through the throng, and flashing out a dagger, struck with all his force at the Bailiff's exposed side.

The blow was well aimed, and William Helpes' triumph had ended then and there but for the elder Welshman, who, as we have said, occupied a position just beneath Dame Helpes' window. Springing forward, he caught the assassin's wrist, so far parrying the thrust that it only left a slash in the Bailiff's gown, and in another moment had wrenched the knife from his hand. The assailant, finding himself overpowered and disarmed, writhed like a serpent through his captor's hold, dived under the horse's belly, and was gone in an instant.

Dorothy, rising from her place with a shriek, was about to rush down.

"No harm — no harm, dame!" cried Helpes, waving her back. Turning to his rescuer he spoke quickly:

"I thank thee, good fellow: thou hast done me the best service man can. I may not tarry now — come see me to-night — here's an earnest for thee."

"Hur takes no gifts from the Saxon," said the Welsh man, proudly, rejecting the proffered money: and, drawing his cloak round him, he turned away.

"'Fellow'! did hur say?" exploded the attendant, who, hemmed in by the crowd, had not at

first been able to reach his master. "Py faith, Owen ap Gnaut is goot gentlemans as stand here, ay, an 'twere ta Baily hurself, an — "

"Chut, tut, Tavy — no more worts," said the superior, adding something in their own tongue which reduced his follower to instant silence.

All this had passed so quickly that few were aware of what had happened. The slight gap in the procession was speedily closed up, and the Town Hall soon attained, where Helpes went through the ceremonies of installation with a coolness which bespoke the strength of his nerves.

By the time he came forth, however, the news of the attempt on his life was pretty generally blown abroad, and the people's solicitude would not be pacified until he had ascended the market-cross, and, in the sight of all, declared himself sound and whole.

The tearful anxiety of his family was next to be soothed, and yielding to Dorothy's entreaties, he at length acquiesced in a proposition made by the captain of the city guard — namely, that sentinels should be stationed around his house during the night. Half a dozen pikemen were accordingly told off for this purpose; and they were soon reinforced by a host of volunteers armed with 'clubs, who were but too happy in the opportunity of signalizing their devotion.

Torches were set at each door, and renewed every hour or two; and all night long their dim shifting radiance flashed and gleamed upon the soldiers' armor, and faintly illuminated the outer circle of townsfolk who kept watch and ward about the new made Bailiff of Tewkesbury.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"The winter snow and hail did never come so thick
As on the houses' sides the bearded arrows stick."
— DRAYTON.

It was the day after William Helpes' inauguration, and he walked with his old friend and namesake in that part of the common land of Tewkesbury known as the "Bloody Meadow"— the scene of that battle which gave what once seemed the final blow to the tottering house of Lancaster.

Shakespeare had intended to be present at the ceremonies of installation, but his purpose had been frustrated by delay upon the road.

"These be thy times of reverence," said he, "thy chair-days will come anon."

"Ay, ay," assented Helpes, "We have both gray in our beards, Will — my hair is grizzled, thine is gone. What then? We shall all grow old, but we have all been young."

"A good heart's worth gold," said the poet; "but thou art happier than I — hast sons to bear on thy name."

"And thou hast a name shall bear itself, without an help."

"Mayhap — but who comes here? Thy wife and eldest son, is 't not?"

"Thou'rt right," said Helpes with affectionate annoyance. "The foolish heart will scarce let me out of her sight since yesterday."

Dorothy came up, greeted Shakespeare, bidding

her boy pay his respects, and then clung upon her husband's arm.

"How dost thou, old Master William?" said Shakespeare, using the epithet the boy's early gravity had won from him, and taking his hand. "Wilt be a Bailiff, like thy father?"

"Nay," said the child, positively. "I will be a sailor or a farmer."

"I trust," said the mother, her eyes filling with tears, "he will never be aught that will place him in such peril as his father hath just passed through. Dost know, Master Shakespeare, the knife point broke his skin? I had been a wretched widow now, but for yon good Welshman, whom none can find, though William hath sent notice through the town, and sought him far and near."

"And the stabber, — canst not find him neither?"

"Nay," said Helpes. "Some chased him near the water side, and there they lost him; but the warrant's out for his arrest. He hath crossed me once or twice before — I doubt he's partly crazed. Tush, 'tis nothing; the poor knave thought my doublet ill-fancied, and sought to slash it after the newest fashion."

"Thou shouldst not jest thus, William," said Dorothy, with a half sob.

"Come, come, sweet," said her husband, looking on her with eyes where she still saw the lover, "take it not so to heart — sure, thou hast wept enough for two. But whom see I yonder?"

A white-haired, tottering old man was slowly approaching them. Everything about him showed that he had arrived at the extremest verge of human life. With a stick in either hand, he travelled like some heavy-footed quadruped, mov-

ing each member but a few inches at a time, looking fixedly on the ground, and seeming momentarily on the point of falling to rise no more, while the bow and arrows on his back but mocked his feeble form.

"One of the bedesmen," said Dorothy, as the blue gown caught her eye. "Yes — if I see aright, 'tis old Hinckley."

"What, doth he live still? He was old when I was a lad."

"Ay, he is near five-score. He can still see and hear, but his mind plays him false full oft. I hear he strays out on sunny days like this."

The ancient had now drawn quite near them.

"Your servant, gentles," said he, trying to indicate a bow. "Many good morrows to ye, Master — Master — "

"Helpes," said William, depositing rather than interjecting the word.

"Ay, Master Helpes; or I crave pardon, my lord: they tell me thou'rt lord o' th' town now. I bid ye joy, if an owd man may make bold. An' th' same to my lady here; I mind her bonnie face when she would win to t' bedehouse wi' my poor young suster Annot, as died unwedded: but she comes no more — there's none to think on t' owd man now — "

"I was there but a sennight since," said Dorothy.

"But for sure, lords and ladies ha' much else to mind — an' t' other noble gentleman, an' little master here — my duty to ye all."

"Thanks, old friend," said Helpes, giving him some money. "Here's for thy good wishes. I trust they make thee easy where thou art?"

"Well enow, my lord — thank ye, my lord —

poor folk mun be thankful; but to be sure, t' house was set for owd failed bodies like me; an' nowadays, th' way they let in stout lads o' threescore an' less, 'tis a shame to be seen."

"And how old art thou, friend?"

"I'll speak ye true, my lord — I'm none o' these owd knaves that mounch on lies when their teeth be gone — I'm ninety-six last Whissuntide, as ever were."

"'Tis a great age."

"Ay, an' my feyther were aughteen the time o' th' gret battle, in this very mead. Your honors be scholars, can say how long time ago?"

Bearing the Tewkesbury Chronicle in mind, rather than these very imperfect data, Helpes replied, "An hundred and thirty-six years."

"Ay, an' 'twere nigh thretty year arter that when feyther wedded; 'twere long or he found a maid could bear th' sight o' th' gash on 's face. Will your honors be pleased to hear th' tale o' th' fight, as he towd it me many a time?"

"If thou hast a few minutes, spend them on him, Will," whispered Dorothy. "'Twill do him more good than money — they will scarce let him ope his lips at the bedehouse."

Looking at Shakespeare, and receiving his assent, Helpes replied, "We shall be glad to hear thee, friend."

A slight flush of pleasure came to the old man's face. Quickly stringing his bow, and handling it as he spoke, he began his tale, both his voice and demeanor gradually growing firmer as he proceeded.

"An 't please your honors, my feyther were Sir Folk Bury's man, nigh hand here — th' family's all gone down now, but gret lords then. An' one eve near May-day, as feyther came fro' th' plow,

an' were thinking on naught, as he unyoked his team, but o' dancing round th' May-pole wi' the maid he loved best, up steps th' captain o' th' men-at-arms fro' th' gret house, and says he, 'Jenkin, be ready to follow us at sunrise to-morrow, wi' thy harness, weapons and provender.' Feyther were clear mazed: but he made ready, as reason were, an' he an' th' other yeomen marched up an' down wi' Sir Folk for a week or more, an' th' Queen an' th' young prince joined their force. At last the camp were set by this mead, an' all said there would be a sore strife on th' morrow.

"I' th' morn th' false king's troops came up, an' th' trumpets sounded, an' soon th' arrows 'gan to fly. Feyther said he ne'er saw sleet i' winter thicker than th' shafts stuck on one cottage wall. A troop o' horse tried twice to ride down th' band o' yeomen where he stood, an' twice they failed. The arrows struck through shield an' mail, an' yon hollow lane were filled wi' th' riders, like a rut wi' stones. At last their shafts were spent, an' then th' fag o' th' horsemen broke in on them, fiery-fierce. Their leader, as had his thigh skewered wi' one o' feyther's arrows, cut him down wi's axe, an' left him for dead.

"When he came to, some one were rolling him aside. They were clearing away th' bodies, that lay thick as swaths o' grass e'er did, to pitch th' false king's tent. Feyther might not rise, an' he thought 'twere better to hold his peace than have a dagger sheathed in him. They set up th' tent, an' as it chanced, he lay just within th' edge, an' might see all. Th' crook-backed duke an 's brother came in, an' bade raise a throne. Some empty arrow chests were piled together, an' then a cry were made, 'Here's his majesty!' an' they

lacked a step to th' throne. So they haled in a corpse, an' laid it in place, threw broidered cloths o'er all, an' th' false king came an' took his seat.

"'Bring in the prisoner!' says he.

"An' they brought him in — that were the true prince, ye mind — wi' 's hands bound, but as bold as a lion. There he stood among those that dought to take his life, an' eyed 'em all as they were grooms set to do his bidding.

"'How durst ye come here? What do ye here?' says th' false king at last; but his words came thick, an' he looked aside.

"'I came to gain my father's crown, and mine own heritage,' says the prince.

"He ne'er said word more. Th' other flung his glove at him, an' th' crook-back duke an' his brother struck their daggers in his side. Down he fell, just by where my sire lay: here, gentles — this is feyther's very bow — see ye this ruddy spot near th' tip? 'Tis a gout o' th' brave young prince's blood."

All drew round and gazed with interest. Old Hinckley caught his breath and went on.

"When th' night fell, feyther crept away fro' th' tent, an' hapt on a house where they cared for him, though much as their lives were worth. 'Twas many a day or he drove th' plough again: but at last he got back to th' land, and there I were born. When a' died, a' left me his bow, an' bid me be always ready to draw it for th' right. An' I ha' drawn it for owd King Hal agen th' rebels' an' for th' Queen — ay — th' Red Rose shall ne'er fade —".

Flushed with his tale, and borne up by the brief strength of excitement, the old man had thrown his sticks aside, and was now marching up

and down, pausing occasionally and making futile efforts to draw his bow-string home. He had rolled up his sleeves and torn open his collar, disclosing his yellow, veiny neck and arms.

"Come, Gaffer," said Dorothy coaxingly, "'tis time thou went home to thy supper."

But he gave no heed.

"Hinckley," said Helpes, in the sharp tone of command, "thou must not stay here — march on."

"Ay, my lord,— ay!" cried the bedesman, "I know my duty — I'll stand guard here — none can say I e'er slept on my post —" And he burst into a fit of excited raving.

"What to do?" said Dorothy. "Sure, he will kill himself."

"Dame," said the Bailiff, "Master Shakespeare will abide with us to-night. Take him home and give him some victual — he hath ridden far. And hark ye," in a lower tone, "send up two of the lads from the house, as soon as may be, to carry this old babbler home."

Dorothy turned away with Shakespeare and her little boy, her mind confused between pity, apprehension, and hospitality.

"Master Shakespeare," said she presently, with an effort to select some new topic, "those sonnets whereof William showed me so many in our courtship — didst thou indeed write them all upon him?"

"They were writ for their only begetter, Mr. W. H.," replied the poet, gravely smiling; nor would he say more.

Meanwhile William Helpes remained watching over Hinckley as he rambled up and down, endeavoring to soothe him into a more amenable frame.

"Yonder were where feyther's troop were set," cried the old man, "there came th' horsemen, an' here — ay, here, my lord, stood th' false king's tent."

As William looked down on the deepest dyed spot of the Bloody Meadow, he was aware of a slight movement and rustle in a clump of bushes some forty yards away. Old Hinckley faced suddenly round. "For t' prince!" he cried, and

laying an arrow in place, drew it to the head. The thin hard sinews flashed out like harp strings over his withered arms and chest, as he glanced along the shaft, and then let it fly. He stood for a moment gazing after the missile, as if to be sure whether it had found the mark, then dropped on his knees, wavered like a severed stem, and with a long gasp fell forward on his face. The two 'prentices now appeared, running at full speed.

"Hither! This way!" cried Helpes, raising the

old man's head. The lads came up, and relieved their master: but life was evidently extinct.

"Take him to the next house, call a leech — somewhat may yet be done," said Helpes. "But soft: I must look yonder a moment."

He walked towards the tuft of bushes where the arrow had struck, followed by two or three strollers whom the bustle had attracted. Half concealed among sallows lay the body of a man, pierced from breast to back by Hinckley's bolt.

"Why, sure," cried one of the company, "'tis the same drew a knife on your Honor in the street yesterday!"

"Ay, I know him now," murmured Helpes, gazing down on the corpse.

It was indeed the wretched Tuff — his features set in despairing rage, and the loaded pistol and smoking match which lay beside him proving that the old archer's arrow had just anticipated a last effort at vengeance.

Other citizens now came up, and a gate being procured, both bodies were laid thereon, and borne towards the town.

The Bailiff, with Hinckley's bow in his hand, walked hastily on to assure Dorothy of his safety: but as usual, the news had flown before, and she came rushing in terror to meet him.

"I shall never rest again! never!" she wailed.

"Sooth, sweetheart," said her husband, "I think thou mayst be easy now. Mine only enemy is gone — I have 'scaped him once more, thanks to the bedesman, or rather," raising his hat and looking upward, "where they are more justly due. Both these bodies shall have decent burial, and I will be at charge for a headstone for old Hinckley — he died in harness. Methinks I may keep his

bow — he had no heir living, and many have heard him say I should have it when he was gone. Now, Doll, let us sup."

Danger and violence, once past, left no long impression on the minds of that day: and after the feast Helpes and his guest were merry over their wine, and "old Master William" heard for the first time some tales of his sire's exploits in Charlecote Park.

CHAPTER XXV.

"And when life's sweet fable ends,
Soul and body part like friends."
— Richard Crashaw.

Nearly a score of years had elapsed since Hinckley and Tuff had been laid in their graves, the smooth and easy reign of James was over, and King Charles sat firm in his place.

It was late spring, and the Avon had been up in spate; many a fair field was buried deep in mud, drowned cattle and sheep lay against the hedgerows, and more homesteads than one were in

ruins. The stream was now slowly contracting into its accustomed channel, but its usually clear waters were turbid and brown, while thousands of little affluents seemed bearing to it the very life blood of the land.

On the bank stood two farmers, comparing notes as to their losses.

"'Tis a sorry sight, Higg," said the younger.

"Look on t' meads an' hedges, coated with mud, as a brown snow had fell."

"T' grass will grow all t' better, Trinlay, soon or late. Thou knowest t' owd say:

'When Severn seeks Avon,
There's hay for the havin',
When Avon seeks Severn,
The corn grows to heaven.'"

"Ay, hay enow, I'll go bail," grumbled Trinlay; "an' few mouths to put it in. I ha' lost nine sharrags, three lambs — most o' them were folded on hill — an' a fine calf. A worser flood I ne'er saw. Feyther would tell as how it came to yon stone in his time, a foot higher than this; but I n'ot to see 't."

"They do say," observed Higg, sinking his voice to a whisper, "as there've been a ban on Avon flow ever sin' good Master Wyclif's ashes were sent down 't; an' yon barn fallen, were my share o' loss."

"Were 't in that Master Helpes got 's hurt?"

"Nay — at neebor Jackson's. He were up to 's belt in water, tryin' to free some o' th' beasts, when a bulk o' timber struck him o' th' spole an' bore him under. He were up in a breath, but they say as he were done for then. He's sinkin' fast, same as th' stream. I ha' sent my little lad up this morn, to see what the word may be, an' that's what I'd do for few townsmen."

"Ay, there's many without Tewkesbury 'ud grieve for him. But I mun take a shovel in hand, an fy out some o' th' ditches."

As Higg had said, William Helpes, in his efforts to aid the sufferers, had received some injuries which, little noticed at first, were tending to a fatal termination.

Round his door stood messengers from all parts of the town, waiting in ever lessening hope: and when at length the doctor came forth, saying he could do no more, a burst of lamentation rose from the women, while more than one sturdy fellow, who had not wept since he could see across a table, followed their example.

Within the sick man lay among his pillows, the minister at the bed foot, and his younger sons, George and Richard, on either side.

"Hath not Will come yet?" he asked feebly.

"Nay, father; he hath been sent for with all haste; but thou knowest his farm is far hence."

"He must come soon an' he would see me. Look ye, Dick, yesterday I flattened yon pewter cup in one hand — now I can scarce lift it."

Another hour wore slowly away. Then the tramp of a horse was heard without, and the eldest son entered, splashed and stained with clay from head to heel.

The first greetings over, the father motioned all to stand before him, and then looked around as if in search of someone else.

"Where is he?"

"Whom, father?"

"Mine old fellow — Will Shakespeare. Tush, I forget; he hath lain in Stratford church this ten year."

A little cordial was given him, and he went on with clearer voice and thought.

"I reckoned to live many a year yet, lads — but 'tis as well — the salt has gone from life since your mother passed; I trust I am ready. For worldly gear — Will, thou hast the land, and George the business, and Dick, a portion may keep him well. Thou shalt have yon bow, Will; remember,

Shakespeare bent it once, and it hath saved thy father's life. And further, here be three nots, one apiece. Seek not too eagerly for gold — it leaveth all its rust in the heart of man. Spare not, in a good cause, nor purse, nor strength, nor pain, nor life. And lastly, fear not. This is no place for boasting, yet few there be have seen my back in strife. But none knoweth how oft a man hath failed, save he himself: and truly I may say, never did I turn from peril, but I rued it sorely. A faint heart undoes all. In the front of yonder Book ye may read how Adam's first word after he fell was a dastard speech; and at its end, foremost among those who may not enter heaven are named the cowards. Fear is not meant for man — give all ye have on 't to God — keep none back."

He paused, joined the minister awhile in prayer, then lay back exhausted, and sank gradually into stupor.

Minute after minute passed away, while the white shadow grew upon his face. At last he began groping feebly upon the blankets.

"Dorothy," he murmured, "Dorothy — gift of God — where art thou? Thy hand — bring me to the light."

All present fell on their knees, as the pastor began the commendatory prayer.

Soon a sobbing messenger sped away toward the church, and ere long three score and six strokes of the bell told Tewkesbury that the stout burgess' soul had passed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Cras ingens iterabimus æquor."

HORACE.

IT was a cold, blustering morning. The long black bar of cloud which lay on the eastern horizon turned no golden edge toward the world, nor gave a hint of the light it concealed, until the sun pushed slowly upward, and announced the twentieth of March, 1630.

The good ship "Mary and John," Captain John Squeb, master, lay at anchor in Plymouth harbor, pointing her bow to the northerly breeze, and gently rocking on the waves; while far away to the south a spot of foam marked the reefs which, seventy years later, were to bear up the Eddystone lighthouse.

The pilot, temporary master of the vessel, stood in solitary greatness near the helm, and Captain Squeb, for the nonce a mere supercargo, chatted affably with the passengers and visitors.

"Ay, ay; 'tis a fair wind at last; we sail this day without doubt, Master Davon. Thou'lt be glad to know we have two worshipful ministers aboard, goodwife Fullafere. Master Clap, I hear 'tis thy purpose to write a story of the voyage; fail not to speak a good word for the tight craft."

"An 't please you, Master Squeb, when set we forth?" asked one of the men.

"'Tis flood an hour ere noon; then we weigh anchor."

"And, by your leave, are all on board?"

"Nay, one company is yet to come. But if they wait four hours more they shall find an empty berth. Stay, methinks I see them now."

A small boat so crowded with passengers that the rowers could scarce use their oars, pushed off from shore, and slowly approached the "Mary and John."

"Help's good in time of need," jested the Captain, "and here be seven, what think ye o' that?"

The wherry pulled up to the ship's side, made fast, and three children were handed up one after the other.

"Poor little maids," said a compassionate woman, "I pity them, thus thrust into the wilderness."

Dame Helpes was next assisted up the ladder, and was followed by her husband William — the same whom we saw in Tewkesbury mead as a child of eight. He was now nearly thirty-five, but his thinning hair, hollow cheeks, and grave demeanor gave him the appearance of being much older; while, though of a tough and wiry build, he evidently had not inherited all his sire's strength.

The two unmarried brothers, George and Richard Helpes, reached over a collection of small articles (conspicuous among which were an ancient long-bow and a brass warming-pan) and then ascended themselves.

"The settlers," said Captain Squeb, speaking apart, but quite loudly enough to be heard, "bid me bring them o'er a cargo of hoes and spades, and instead I fetch the vessel loaded with Helpeses as deep as she can swim."

William's wife and children soon went below, but the three brothers remained conversing on deck.

"Truly our course seems set for the West at last," said the eldest. "I hear there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed, and I would fain have a share therein. Thou knowest, George, my taste is for the fields, as thine for trade; but I like not to be cap in hand to lord and duke, for lease and feu — I seek to sit upon mine own ground, as well as under mine own vine and fig-tree."

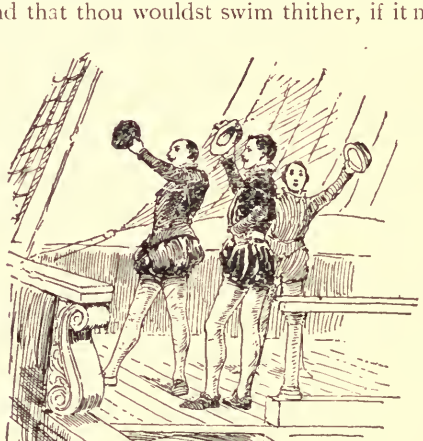
"Ay, ay," said George, "thy foot on the land, and a book in thy hand — 'tis ever thy way, Will. For me, I had never stirred, were the business now as in our father's time; but I see 'tis drifting away from poor Tewkesbury, and a wise man will sell out while he may. I have scraped together some few score pounds, which I trust to turn over at profit in the Colonies: I hear they have many saints there, but few angels."

"Thy jest, George," said William gravely, "savors of certain superstitions, which I hope we have escaped for ever — but let it pass. An we believed in omens, doth not all seem to favor us? The season is prosperous, the sky is clear, and we shall be speedily borne down the Channel by this gallant breeze."

"'Tis something of the keenest," remarked Richard, the youngest brother, pulling up his collar, and gazing apprehensively out to sea. "I' faith, I like not all this salty drink: a good pot of ale by a snug fireside is liquor enow for me. I heard marvellous tales of the salvages' cruelty in the tavern last night — we shall do well to overlive ten years. Marry, I had thriven better to abide by my English luck: but I was over-persuaded, like many another, and must now suffer for 't."

"Brother Richard," said William, turning to him in some heat, "this discourse profiteth not at all.

Over-persuaded? Did I not lay all before thee, and tell thee to count the cost, and that if thou wert minded to stay behind I would make over the leases thou wot'st of, and put thee in a fair way of life? And didst thou not thump stoutly on thy breast, and avouch that all thy hopes lay in America, and that thou wouldst swim thither, if it might



not otherwise be reached? This is no valley of Moreh, Richard, from the which thou mayest turn back like one of Gideon's ten thousand; neither, Richard, I must needs say, is an infirm purpose made stronger by backing it with 'marry' and 'i' faith.'"

Richard thrust both hands deeply into his pockets, and humming a tune, went under hatches.

William, looking somewhat ashamed of his easy victory, began walking up and down the small, clear space he could find on deck. Soon the mournful chant of the sailors was heard, as they swung the anchor loose from English soil. The foresail was spread, and the bark, veering slowly round, ploughed her way toward the harbor mouth, both waves and prospects widening as she went.

"If thou'lt be guided, Master Helpes," said the Captain as he passed them, in a tone already more authoritative, "go below, and stow thy stuff — we are rarely cumbered wi' 't, and two hours hence thou mayest have small heart for heaving of chests."

Obeying this injunction, the brothers went below, where they were long occupied in preparations for their ten weeks' voyage.

It was nearly sunset when William Helpes came again on deck. Despite the Captain's presage, though now at sea for the first time, he experienced none of the ills which assail most novices in that position, and verified the boast of his youth, that he would be sailor if not farmer.

The vessel, a fair wind on her quarter, was speeding down the Channel, and the pilot-boat was already a dim speck in the distance; while the British coast, faint and blue across the tumbling water, seemed like a shapeless, impenetrable cloud, which knew not port, or river, or home of man. A few distant toiling sails were the only bright spots within the emigrant's vision.

Behind him lay the graves of his parents, before him the land which was to be the birthplace of his son. Balanced betwixt hope and memory, he stood gazing eastward until the last gleam of daylight had died away, and Shakespeare's England faded forever from his sight.

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