

The DESERTER

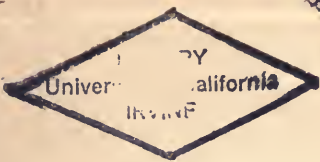


AND OTHER STORIES

By

HAROLD FREDERIC





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Jesse J. Colby
From Papa

Dec 25. 1899



"I'LL UNLOCK IT BIMEBY — MAYBE."

(See page 91.)

F. W. Merrill

THE DESERTER

AND OTHER STORIES

A Book of Two Wars

BY

HAROLD FREDERIC

AUTHOR OF "IN THE VALLEY," "SETH'S BROTHER'S WIFE"
"THE COPPERHEAD," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

MERRILL, SANDHAM, GILBERT GAUL
AND GEORGE FOSTER BARNES

BOSTON

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THE DESERTER.



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CHAPTER I.

DISCOVERIES IN THE BARN.

IT was the coldest morning of the winter, thus far, and winter is no joke on those northern tablelands, where the streams still run black in token of their forest origin, and old men remember how the deer used to be driven to their clearings for food, when the snow had piled itself breast high through the fastnesses of the Adirondacks. The wilderness had been chopped and burned backward out of sight since their pioneer days, but this change, if anything, served only to add greater bitterness to the winter's cold.

Certainly it seemed to Job Parshall that this was the coldest morning he had ever known. It would be bad enough when day-

light came, but the darkness of this early hour made it almost too much for flesh and blood to bear. There had been a stray star or two visible overhead when he first came out-of-doors at half-past four, but even these were missing now.

The crusted snow in the barnyard did throw up a wee, faint light of its own, for all the blackness of the sky, but Job carried, besides a bucket, a lantern to help him in his impending struggle with the pump. This ancient contrivance had been ice-bound every morning for a fortnight past, and one needn't be the son of a prophet to foresee that this morning it would be frozen as stiff as a rock.

It did not turn out to be so prolonged or so fierce a conflict as he had apprehended. He had reasoned to himself the previous day that if the pump-handle were propped upright with a stick overnight, there would be less water remaining in the cylinder to freeze, and had made the experiment just before bedtime.

It worked fairly well. There was only a good deal of ice to be knocked off the spout with a sledge-stake, and then a disheartening amount of dry pumping to be done before the welcome drag of suction made itself felt in the well below, like the bite of a big fish in deep water.

Job filled his bucket and trudged back with it to the cow-barn, stamping his feet for warmth as he went.

By comparison with the numbing air outside, this place was a dream of coziness. Two long lines of cows, a score or more on a side, faced each other in double rows of stanchions. Their mere presence had filled the enclosure with a steaming warmth.

The ends of the barn and the loft above were packed close with hay, moreover, and half a dozen lantern lights were gleaming for the hired men to see by, in addition to a reflector lamp fastened against a post.

The men did not mind the cold. They had been briskly at work cleaning up the stable and getting down hay and fodder,

and the exercise kept their blood running and spirits light. They talked as they plied shovel and pitchfork, guessing how near the low-mercury mark of twenty below zero the temperature outside had really fallen, and chaffing one of their number who had started out to go through the winter without wearing an overcoat.

Their cheery voices, resounding through the half-gloom above the soft, crackling undertone of the kine munching their breakfast seemed to add to the warmth of the barn.

The boy Job had begun setting about a task which had no element of comfort in it. He got out a large sponge, took up the bucket he had brought from the well, and started at the end of one of the rows to wash clean the full udder of each of the forty-odd cows in turn. In a few minutes the milkers would be ready to begin, and to keep ahead of them he must have a clear start of a dozen cows.

When he had at last reached this point

of vantage, the loud din of the streams against the sides of the milkers' tin pails had commenced behind him.

He rose, straightened his shoulders, and shook his red, dripping hands with a groan of pain. The icy water had well nigh frozen them.

It was a common thing for all about the barn to warm cold hands by thrusting them deep down into one of the barrels of brewers' grains which stood in a row beyond the oat-bin. The damp, crushed malt generates within its bulk so keen a heat that even when the top is frozen there will be steam within. Job went over and plunged his cold hands to the wrist in the smoking fodder. He held them there this morning for a luxurious extra minute, wondering idly as he did so how the cows sustained that merciless infliction of ice-water without any such comforting after-resource.

Suddenly he became conscious that his fingers, into which the blood was coming back with a stinging glow, had hit upon

something of an unusual character in the barrel. He felt of it vaguely for a moment, then drew the object forth, rubbed off the coating of malt, and took it over to the lamp.

It was a finger-ring carved out of a thick gutta-percha button, but with more skill than the schoolboys of those days used to possess; and in its outer rim had been set a little octagonal silver plate, bearing some roughly cut initials.

Job seemed to remember having seen the ring before, and jumped to the conclusion that some one of the hired men had unconsciously slipped it off while warming his hands in the grains. He went back with it to the milkers, and went from one to another, seeking an owner.

Each lifted his head from where it rested against the cow's flank, glanced at the trinket, and making a negative sign bent down again to his work. The last one up the row volunteered the added comment:

“You better hustle ahead with your spongin' off; I'm just about through here!”

The boy put the circlet in his pocket — it was much too large for any of his fingers — and resumed his task. The water was as terribly cold as ever, and the sudden change seemed to scald his skin; but somehow he gave less thought to his physical discomfort than before.

It was very funny to have found a ring like that. It reminded him of a story he had read somewhere, and could not now recall, save for the detail that in that case the ring contained a priceless jewel, the proceeds of which enriched the finder for life. Clearly no such result was to be looked for here. It was doubtful if anybody would give even twenty-five cents for this poor, home-made ornament. All the same it *was* a ring, and Job had a feeling that the manner of its discovery was romantic.

Working for a milkman does not open up so rich a field of romance that any hints of the curious or remarkable can be suffered to pass unnoticed. The boy pondered the

mystery of how the ring got into the barrel. For a moment he dallied with the notion that it might belong to his employer, who owned the barn and almost all the land within sight, and a prosperous milk-route down in Octavius.

But no! Elisha Teachout was not a man given to rings; and even if he were, he assuredly would not have them of rubber. Besides, the grains had only been carted in from town two days before, and Mr. Teachout had been nursing his rheumatism indoors for fully a week.

It was more probable that some one down in the brewery at Octavius had lost the ring. When Job had been there for grains, he had noticed that the workers were cheerful and hearty fellows. No doubt they might be trusted to behave handsomely upon getting back a valued keepsake which had been given up as forever gone.

Perhaps — who could tell? — this humble, whittled-out piece of gutta-percha might be prized beyond rubies on account of its

family associations. Such things had happened before, according to the story-books; and forthwith the lad lost himself in a maze of brilliant day-dreams, rose-tinted by this possibility.

He could almost behold himself adopted by the owner of the brewery—the fat, red-faced Englishman with the big watch-chain, whom he had seen once walking majestically among his vats. Perhaps, in truth, Job was a trifle drowsy.

All at once he roused himself with a start, and began to listen with all his ears. The milkers behind him were talking about the ring. They had to shout to one another to overcome the fact of separation and the noise in their pails, and Job could hear every word.

“I tell you who had a ring like that—Mose Whipple,” one of them called out. “Don’t you remember? He made it with his jack-knife, that time he was laid up with the horse kickin’ him in the knee.”

“Seems’s if I do,” said another. “He

was always whittlin' out somethin' or other—a peach-stone basket, or an ox-gad, or somethin'."

"Some one was tellin' me yesterday," put in a third, "that old man Whipple's sick abed. Nobody ain't seen him around for up'ards of a fortnight. I guess this cold snap'll about see the last o' him. He's been poorly all the fall."

"He ain't never ben the same man since Mose 'listed," remarked the first speaker; "that is if you call it 'listin' when a man takes his three hundred dollars to go out as a substitute."

"Yes, and don't even git the money at that, but jest has it applied to the interest he owes on his mortgage. *That's* payin' for a dead horse, if anything is in this world!"

"Well, Mose is the sort o' chap that *would* be workin' to pay for some kind o' dead horse all his life, anyway. If it wasn't one it'd be another. Never knew a fellow in all my born days with so little git-up-

and-git about him. He might as well be shoulderin' a musket as anything else, for all the profit he'd git out of it."

"A chip of the old block, if there ever was one. The old man always wanted to do a little berryin', an' a little fishin', an' a little huntin', an' keep a dozen traps or so in the woods, an' he'd throw up the best-payin' job in the deestrick to have a loafin' spell when the fit took him — an' Mose was like him as two peas in a pod.

"I remember one year, Mose an' me hired out in the middle o' March, an' we hadn't fairly begun early ploughin' before he said he wasn't feelin' right that spring, an' give up half his month's wages to go home, an' then what do we see next day but him an' his father down by the bridge with their fishpoles, before the snow-water'd begun to git out o' the creek. What *kin* you do with men like that?"

"Make substitutes of 'em!" one of the milkers exclaimed, and at this there was a general laugh.

Every one on the farm, and for that matter on all the other farms for miles round, knew that Elisha Teachout had been drafted the previous summer, and had sent Moses Whipple to the front in his place. This relation between the rich man and the poor man was too common a thing in those war times to excite particular comment. But, as Mr. Teachout was not beloved by his hired men, they enjoyed a laugh whenever the subject came up.

Job had gone over to the lamp, during the progress of this talk, and scrutinized the ring. Surely enough, the clumsily scratched initials on the little silver plate, obviously cut down from an old three-cent piece, were an M and a W.

This made it all the more difficult to puzzle out how the ring came in the barrel. The lad turned the problem over in his mind with increasing bewilderment.

He had known Mose Whipple all his life. His own father, who died some years ago, had accounted Mose among his inti-

mate friends, and Job's earliest recollections were of seeing the two start off together of a spring morning with shot-guns on their shoulders and powder-flasks hung round their bodies.

They had both been poor men, and if they had not cared so much for hunting—at least if one of them had not—Job reflected that probably this very morning he himself would be sleeping in a warm bed, instead of freezing his hands in the hard employ of Elisha Teachout.

It was impossible not to associate Mose with these recriminatory thoughts; yet it was equally impossible to be angry with him long. The boy, indeed, found himself dwelling upon the amiable side of Mose's shiftless nature. He remembered how Mose used to come round to their poor little place, after Job's father's death, to see if he could help the widow and her brood in their struggle.

After Mrs. Parshall had married again, and gone West, leaving Job to earn his

own living on the Teachout farm, Mose had always kept a kindly if intermittent eye on the boy. Only the previous Christmas he had managed, somehow, to obtain an old pair of skates as a present for Job, and when he had gone to the war in the following August, only the fact that he had to sell his shot-gun to pay a pressing debt prevented his giving that to the boy for his own.

The news that old Asa Whipple was ill forced its way to the top of Job's thoughts. He resolved that that very day, if he could squeeze in the time for it, he would cut across lots on the crust to the Whipple house, and see how the lonely old man was.

As the milkers said, old Asa had been "poorly" since his Mose went away. It was only too probable that he had been extremely poor as well.

Even when Mose was at home, theirs was the most poverty-stricken household in the township. Left to his own re-

sources, and failing swiftly all at once in health, the father had tried to earn something by knitting mittens and stockings.

It had looked funny enough to see this big-framed, powerfully built old man fumbling at his needles like some grandmother in her rocking-chair by the stove.

It occurred to Job now that there was something besides humor in the picture. He had been told that people were making woollen mittens and stockings now, like everything else, by machinery. Very likely old Asa couldn't sell his things after he had knit them; and that might mean starvation.

Yes, that very day, in spite of everything, he would go over and see.

He had finished his task now. The milkers had nearly finished theirs. Two of the hired men were taking the cloth strainers off the tops of all the cans but one, and fastening on the covers instead. He could hear the bells on the harness of the horses outside, waiting with the big

sleigh to rush off to town with the milk. It was still very dark out-of-doors.

Job put away his water-bucket, warmed his hands once more in the grains-barrel, and set about getting down a fresh supply of hay for the cows. Six weeks of winter had pretty well worn away the nearest haymow, and the boy had to go further back toward the end of the barn, into a darkness which was only dimly penetrated by the rays of the lantern.

Working thus, guided rather by sense of touch than of sight, the boy suddenly felt himself stepping on something big and rounded, which had no business in a haymow. It rolled from under his feet, and threw him off his balance to his hands and knees. A muttered exclamation rose from just beside him, and then suddenly he was gripped bodily in the clutch of a strong man.

Frightened and vainly struggling, Job did not cry out, but twisted his head about in the effort to see who it was that

he had thus strangely encountered. There was just light enough from the distant lantern to reveal in the face so menacingly close to his—of all unlooked-for faces in the world—that of Mose Whipple!

“Why, Mose!” he began, in bewilderment.

“Sh-h! Keep still!” came in a fierce whisper, “unless you want to see me hung higher than Haman!”

CHAPTER II.

A SUDDEN DEPARTURE.

THE man upon whose sleeping form Job had stepped in the haymow sat up and looked about him in a half-puzzled fashion, mechanically brushing the loose particles from his hair and neck.

“I s’pose it’s mornin’,” he whispered, after a minute’s silence. “How long’ll it be before daylight?”

Job, released from the other’s clutch, had scrambled to his feet, and stood staring down in astonishment at his old friend, Mose Whipple. He had regained his fork, and held it up as if to repel a possible second attack.

“What did you want t’ pitch on to me that way for?” he asked at last in displeased tones.

"Sh-h! Talk lower!" urged Mose under his breath. "I didn't mean to hurt you, sonny. I didn't know who you was. You come tromplin' on me here when I was fast asleep, and I took hold of you when I wasn't hardly woke up, you see, that's all. I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"No," Job admitted grudgingly. "But there wasn't no need to throw me down and choke me all the same."

"I thought it was somebody comin' to catch me," explained the other, still in a whisper. "But who else is here in the barn? What time is it gettin' to be?"

"They're just through milkin'," replied the boy. "They're gettin' the cans out into the sleigh. They'll all be gone in a minute or two. Time? Oh, it ain't six yet."

"That's all right," said Mose, with a weary sigh of relief. He added, upon reflection: "Say, sonny, can you manage to get me something to eat? I've gone the best part of two days now, without a mouthful."

“Mebbe I can,” responded Job, doubtfully. Then a sudden thought struck him. “Say, Mose,” he went on, “I bet I can tell what you did the first thing when you came into the barn here. You went and stuck your hands into the grains there — that’s how it was.”

The man displayed no curiosity as to the boy’s meaning. “Yes, by jiminy!” he mused aloud. “I’d ’a’ liked to have got in head first. I tell you, sonny, I was about as near freezin’ to death as they make ’em. I couldn’t have gone another hundred rods to save my life. They’d have found me froze stiff on the road, that’s all.”

“But what are you doing here, anyway?” asked Job. “You ain’t gone and deserted, have you?”

“Well,” said the other, doggedly, “you can call it what you like. One thing’s certain — I ain’t down South, *be* I?”

“Something else is pretty certain, too,” the boy put in. “They’ll hang you, sure!”

Mose did not seem to have much doubt

on this point. "Anyway, I'll see the old man first," he said. "It's pitch dark outdoors, ain't it?"

The boy nodded. "I must git along with my work," he commented, after another little silence. "What are you figgerin' on doin', anyway, Mose?" he asked gravely.

"Well, I'm goin' to sneak out while it's still dark," said the man, "and git across lots to our place, and just wake up the old man, and—and—well, see how he is, that's all. Mebbe I can manage it so that I can skip out again, and nobody be the wiser. But whether or no, that's what I'm bound to do. Prob'ly you've heard—is he—is his health pretty middlin' good?"

"Seems to me some one was saying something about his being kind o' under the weather lately," replied Job, with evasion. "I was thinkin' of goin' over this afternoon myself, if I could git the time, to see him. The fact is, Mose, I guess he *is* failing some. It's been a pretty tough

winter for old folks, you know. Elisha Teachout's been laid up himself with rheumatics now for more'n a fortnight, and he ain't old exactly."

"He ain't had 'em half bad enough!" cried Mose, springing to his feet with suddenly revived energy. "If he's let the old man suffer—if he ain't kept his word by him—I'll—I'll take it out of his old hide if I have to go to jail for it!"

"You've got enough other things to go to jail for, and get hung for into the bargain, I should think," said Job. "You'd better not talk so loud, either."

Surely enough, one of the hired men seemed to have remained in the barn, and to have caught the sound of voices—for the noise of his advancing footsteps could be heard on the floor between the stanchions. Mose threw himself flat, and rolled under the hay as best he could. Job began to sing in a low-voiced, incoherent way for a moment, and then loudly. Prying up a forkful of hay, he staggered under the bur-

den back to the cows, singing as he came toward the intruder.

It was only Nelse Hornbeck, an elderly and extra hand who worked at starvation wages during the winter, chopping firewood and doing odd chores about the house and barns. When he saw Job he stopped. He was in a sociable mood, and though he leaned up against one of the stanchions and offered no sign of going farther, displayed a depressing desire for conversation.

The boy came and went, bringing in the hay and distributing it along under the double row of broad pink noses on either side. He made the task as long as he could in the hope of tiring Nelse out, but without avail.

“I dunno but I’m almost sorry I didn’t enlist myself last fall,” drawled Hornbeck, settling himself in an easy posture. “So far’s I can make out, Mose Whipple and the rest of the boys are having a great sight better time of it down South, with nothin’ to do and plenty o’ help to do it,

than we are here to hum. Why, Steve Trimble's brother-in-law writes him that they're havin' more fun down there than you can shake a stick at; livin' snug and warm in sort o' little houses built into the ground, and havin' horse-races and cock-fights and so on every day. They ain't been no fightin' since Thanksgivin', he says, and they're all gittin' fat as seals."

"Well, why *don't* you enlist then?" demanded Job, curtly, going on with his work.

"I dunno," said the hired man in a meditative way. "I guess I'm afeard o' git-tin' homesick. I'd always be hankerin' to git back and see my folks, and they won't let you do that, nohow. A lot of 'em tries to sneak off, they say, but Steve's brother-in-law says they've got cavalry-men on horseback all around outside the camps, and they just nail everybody that tries to git out, and then they take 'em back to camp and shoot 'em. That's what they do—lead 'em out before breakfast and shoot 'em down."



"SH-H! TALK LOWER!"

“I thought they hung deserters,” said Job, pausing with his fork in air.

“Some they hang and some they shoot,” replied Nelse. “I don’t see as it makes much difference. I’d about as lieve be one as the other. I guess they make it a rule to hang them that gits off into the North and has to be brought way back again. That’s only reasonable, because they’ve give ’em so much extry trouble.”

Job was interested. “But suppose a man does get up North—I guess they ain’t much chance of their ever findin’ him after that.”

“Ain’t they?” exclaimed the hired man, incredulously. “Why, it’s a thousand to one they catch him! They’ve got their detectives in every county just doin’ nothin’ but watchin’ for deserters. They git paid for every one they catch, so much a head, and that makes ’em keep their eyes peeled.”

“But how can you tell a deserter from any other man,” pursued Job, “so long as

he's got ordinary clothes on and minds his own business and keeps away from where he's known?"

"Oh, they always point for home—that's the thing of it. What do they desert for? Because they're homesick. So all the detectives have got to do is to watch their place, and nab 'em when they try to sneak in. It's as easy as rollin' off a log. They always git caught, every mother's son of 'em."

Tiresome Nelse Hornbeck was still talking when Job came to the end of all possible pretexts of employment in the cow-barn, and was only too obviously waiting to accompany the boy over to the house to breakfast. At last Job had to accept the situation and go.

The boy dared no more than steal for a moment back into the hay, feel about with his foot for where Mose lay hidden in the dark, and drop the furtive whisper, "Going to breakfast. If I can I'll bring you some."

Then, in company with Nelse, he left

the barn, shutting and hooking the door behind him. It occurred to him that Mose must have effected an entrance by the door at the other end, which was fastened merely by a latch. Otherwise the displacement of the outer hook would have been noticed.

It was lucky, he thought in passing, that Elisha Teachout did not have padlocks on the doors of his cow-barn, as he had on those which protected his horses and wagons and grain. If he had, there would have been the lifeless and icy body of Mose, lying on the frozen roadside, to be discovered by the daylight.

Poor Mose! he had saved his life from the bitterly cold night, but was it not only to lose it again at the hands of the hangman or the firing party?

Job remembered having seen, just a few weeks before, a picture in one of the illustrated weeklies of a deserter sitting on his own coffin, while files of soldiers were being drawn up to witness his impend-

ing punishment. Although the artist had given the doomed man a very bad face indeed, Job had been conscious at the time of feeling a certain human sympathy with him.

As his memory dwelt now on the picture, this face of the prisoner seemed to change into the freckled and happy-go-lucky lineaments of Mose Whipple.

The boy took with him into the house a heart as heavy as lead.

Breakfast was already well under way in the big, old-fashioned, low-ceiled kitchen of the Teachout homestead. Three or four hired men were seated at one end of the long table, making stacks of hot buckwheat cakes saturated with pork fat on their plates, and then devouring them in huge mouthfuls.

They had only the light of two candles on the table. So long as there was anything before them to eat, they spoke never a word. The red-faced women over at the stove did not talk either, but worked in

anxious' silence at their arduous task of frying cakes fast enough to keep the plates before the hungry men supplied.

For once in his life Job was not hungry. He suffered Nelse Hornbeck to appropriate the entire contents of the first plate of cakes which the girl brought to the table, without a sign of protest. This was not what usually happened, and as soon as Nelse could spare the time he looked at his companion in surprise.

"What ails you this mornin'?" he asked, with his spoon in the grease. "Ain't you feelin' well?"

Job shook his head. "I guess I'll eat some bread 'n' butter instead," he made reply. He added after a pause, "Somehow, I kind o' spleen against cakes this mornin'."

"They ain't much good to-day, for a fact," assented Nelse, when he had eaten half-way through his pile. "I guess they want more sody. It beats me why them women can't make their cakes alike no two days

in the week. First the batter's sour, and then they put in more sody; and then it's too flat, and they dump in a lot o' salt; and then they need more graham flour, and then the batter's too thick, and has to be thinned down with milk, and by that time the whole thing's wrong, and they've got to begin all over again."

Nelse chuckled, and looked up at Job, who paid no attention.

"If we men fooled around with the cows' fodder, every day different," Nelse went on, "the way the girls here do with ours, why, the whole barnful of 'em would 'a' dried up before snow blew. But that's the way with women!" Mr. Hornbeck concluded with a sigh, and began on the second heap of cakes.

The boy had not listened. A project had been gradually shaping itself in his mind, until now it seemed as if he had left the cow-barn with it definitely planned out. As soon as the other men, who for the moment were idling with their knives

and forks, had been supplied with a fresh batch of cakes, he would put it into execution.

“Why, you was feelin’ first rate a few minutes ago,” remonstrated Nelse, between mouthfuls, “singin’ away for dear life.”

“Remember how Mose Whipple used to sing?” put in one of the others. “The’ was one song o’ his, ‘The Faded Coat o’ Blue’—seems’s if I could set and listen to him singin’ that all day long. He sung it over at Steve Trimble’s huskin’, I remember, and Lib Truax let him see her home, just on account of it. She wouldn’t so much as looked at him any other time. She told my sister afterward that if he’d ’a’ popped the question then, with that singin’ o’ his in her ears, as like as not she’d ’a’ said yes.”

“Lucky for her he didn’t, then,” remarked another. “I give Mose credit for one thing, though. He had sense enough not to git married—and that’s more’n most shiftless coots like him have. He

always said that as long's the old man was alive, he'd keep a roof over his head, and let everything else slide. Whatever else you may say, there's no denyin' Mose was a good son to the old man."

"If I was old," said a third, "and was dependent on my son, I'd think a good deal more of him if he shinned around, and worked stiddy, and put somethin' by for a rainy day, even if he did marry into the bargain, instid o' bein' bone-lazy like Mose, and never knowin' one day where the next day's breakfast was comin' from."

"Not if you was old Asa Whipple," rejoined the first speaker. "Mose was jest after the old man's heart. I never see father and son so wrapped up in one another as them two was. Seems's if they didn't need no other company—they was company enough for themselves. That's what made it so rough on the old man when Mose 'listed."

"He couldn't help himself," said Nelse

Hornbeck; "there was the interest comin' due on the mortgage, and how else—"

"Sh-h! can't ye!" muttered one of the others, kicking Nelse under the table, and giving a backward nod of the head toward the women by the stove. "Want them to tell 'Lishe Teachout you're blabbin' about his affairs, you sawney?"

Nelse bent hastily over his cakes, and the others busied themselves at making way with the steaming fresh supply which had accumulated while they talked.

Job's opportunity had come. He rose with as fine an assumption of carelessness as he could manage, and walked up to the other end of the table, where the big loaf of home-made bread and the butter-dish were.

He cut off two thick slices; the butter which he tried to spread upon them had become hard with the night's intense cold, and had not been near enough to the fire to be softened. So Job could only distribute it in lumps over the soft surface

of one slice, and then put the other on top of it.

Then, watching his chance in the dim light, he conveyed the bread to his jacket pocket. Nobody at the table had observed him, he was sure.

He turned to discover that the sitting-room door close at his back had been opened wide, and that Elisha Teachout was standing in the doorway, looking at him with all his eyes.

It was Elisha Teachout's habit to look very closely at everything and everybody—and his was at the best of times a somewhat uncomfortable gaze to sustain. Job felt that this was not one of the best of times.

His employer was in all seasons an austere and exacting man, coldly suspicious of those about him, and as pitiless in his treatment of his hired help's shortcomings as he was vigilant in looking out for them. But in the winter, when rheumatism put its dread touch upon the marrow of his

bones, he was irascible as well, and led his household what they used to describe outside as "a life of it."

His lean, small figure did not seem as much bent as usual this morning — probably he was better, Job thought — but his little steel-colored eyes had an abnormally piercing effect. His pallid face, hairless and wrinkled, with its sunken lips and sharply hooked nose, was of a yellower and sourer aspect than usual, too. The boy felt himself turning very red.

It turned out to be a needless alarm. Mr. Teachout diverted his gaze from Job to look at his old silver watch, which he took from his fob, and then ostentatiously held it in his hand.

"Milk late again this morning?" he demanded, raising his querulous voice with a snap.

"No, it got off in good season," replied the head hired man, nonchalantly.

He had answered the same question now every day for several years, and was at

home with it. As a matter of fact the milk from the Teachout farm was never late, but this had not prevented the master's query becoming a formula.

"Then breakfast ought to 'a' been out of the way half an hour ago!" he exclaimed, in the same high, snarling tone. "If I didn't get up and come out, sick as I am, I suppose you'd be settin' here gorging yourselves till noon! And you women, you jest aid and abet 'em in their laziness and gormandizing!"

Job stayed to hear no more. Relieved from his fear of detection, he had taken advantage of the attack upon the others to get his cap and sidle unobtrusively from the room.

Once outside he scampered headlong across the frozen ruts and hummocks of the yard to the cow-barn. There was a perilous show of pink and lemon lights in the eastern sky. Very soon it would be daylight.

He groped his way past between the

stanchions to the hay, and began feeling about with his feet.

“Here you are, Mose!” he called out. “It’s almost daylight! Here’s something to eat.”

No answer came. The boy trampled foot by foot over the whole mow in vain. Mose Whipple was gone.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND SON.

IT is not likely that anything whatever remains standing now of the Whipple house. It must be a dozen years ago that I shot a black squirrel as it whisked its way along over the ridge-beam which had once been Asa Whipple's roof-tree; and the place then was in ruins. The rafters had fallen in; what was left of the sides were dry-rotten under a mask of microscopic silver-gray moss. Tangled masses of wild-brier and lichens surrounded its base, and pushed their way in through the open, dismantled doorway.

Even at that time, the road which once led past the house had fallen into disuse. I suppose that to-day it would be as hard to find the house under the briers as to

trace the ancient highway beneath the carpet of grass and sorrel.

Even during the war, when human beings thought of it as a home, the Whipple place was a pretty poor sort of habitation. The lowliest of Elisha Teachout's live-stock were considerably better housed and better sheltered from the weather than old Asa and his son Mose.

The house, as I remember it, used to interest me because it was so obviously a remainder from the days when the district round about was still a veritable part of the Adirondacks. Whether Asa built it or inherited it from his father, a Revolutionary soldier who took up his land-patent in these primitive parts, I never knew. It looked old enough, though, to have been erected by Hendrik Hudson himself.

There must have been a sawmill on the creek at the time, however, for it was not a log house but a frame building, with broad planks nailed roughly to its sides,

and the joinings of these covered over with weather-strips.

The frames of the door and the two front windows also came from this mill, wherever it was; the window on the north side was of rude construction, and was evidently the work of some person not greatly skilled in the use of carpenters' tools; perhaps it was made by old Asa himself.

There was a legend that the roof had once been shingled; in my time it was made of flattened breadths of spruce bark, which must have leaked sadly in rainy seasons. There was no cellar under the house, but a rough lean-to woodshed at the back served to shelter any overflow of possessions which might trouble the Whipples. This lean-to was given over chiefly to traps, fishpoles, netting gear, and the like.

There was a barn, but it was roofless and long since disused.

I dare say the original Revolutionary Whipple aimed at being a farmer, like the

rest of his neighbors. Like the others, he cleared his land, got in his crops, built a barn for his cattle and produce, and ran up rail fences. Perhaps he even prospered thus, as prosperity was measured in those lean, toilsome times.

But either in his day, or when his son Asa was a comparatively young man, the hand of fate was laid on the Whipple place. The black moss came!

Strong and intelligent farmers, with capital behind them, can successfully fight and chase off nowadays, they say, this sinister scourge of the thin-soiled northern farm lands on the forest's edges. But forty years ago, and even much later, it was a common saying that when the moss came, the man must go.

Asa Whipple did not go. He let farming go instead. When the moss had seized upon pasture and meadow alike, nothing was simpler than to sell the cows, and allow the barn to fall to pieces. Much better than taking anxious thought about

the farm, it suited Asa to turn to the woods — the kindly, lazy, mysteriously tempting woods.

Here were no back-aching ploughs and scythes, no laborious hoeing of corn and grubbing for roots, and painful wrestling with rain and drought and frost — and worst of all, the moss — for pitiful coppers. Here instead were luscious trout for the hook, and otter, mink, and even an occasional beaver for the trap; here in the greenwood, to the trained hunter, was spread a never-ending banquet of rare and toothsome meats, from the game birds, the raccoon, and the squirrel, up to the fleet-heeled deer and the black bear, lounging his clumsy way through the undergrowth.

Like father, like son. Time came, indeed, when the woods were no longer what they had been, and when the influence of advancing civilization compelled Mose to eke out a scanty living for his father and himself by hiring out a week or two

now and then during busy seasons on the farms roundabout.

He did this as seldom as he could, however, and he never pretended that he liked to do it at all.

Of their own land, the Whipples for years had cultivated only a garden-patch close about the house, and this in so lukewarm a fashion that the net results — some potatoes, a little sweet corn, a few pumpkins, and so on — never by any chance saw them through the winter.

Why they did not sell this unproductive land to Elisha Teachout, who evidently wanted it, instead of borrowing money from him on it to pay taxes for it, I could never understand. Very likely they did not try to explain it to themselves.

But it was the fact, nevertheless, that in July of 1863 they owed Mr. Teachout something over three hundred dollars in accrued interest upon the mortgages he held, and that to prevent his foreclosing and evicting them from the house, Mose

Whipple went to the war as Teachout's substitute.

This year of 1863 had still a week of life before it on the morning in question — when Mose returned from the war.

He had made across the stiff-crusted level wastes of snow from Teachout's straight as the bee's flight, even before the dawn began to break. He had heard the talk in the barn about the certainty of his capture, but it made little impression on his mind. It did not even occur to him that the matter concerned him. What had stirred him was Job Parshall's roundabout and reluctant admission that all was not right with the old man.

He had waited only a few minutes in the haymow after Job had gone to the farm-house before the temptation to be off again toward home mastered him. It was silly to linger here for food when the goal was so close at hand.

He took a couple of English turnips from one of the fodder bins to eat on the way,

and let himself cautiously out by the rear door of the cow-barn.

It was still quite dark and bitterly cold, but he started briskly off. After he had left the barnyard an idea occurred to him. His father might be perishing of hunger! He turned and bent his steps back across the yard to the hen-house, opened the door, and crept in. A cackling murmur fell upon the darkened silence, rising all at once into a harsh and strident squawking, then ceasing abruptly.

Mose emerged upon the instant, shut and hooked the door, and started to run, stuffing a big, limp and shapeless object into his coat pocket.

When he had rapped upon and rattled vigorously for a third time the window on the north side of the house he had journeyed so far and risked so much to return to, Mose was conscious of a heavy, sudden sinking of the heart. That was the bedroom window; how was it his father had not heard him?

He knocked once more, more loudly than before, and bent his head to listen. No answer came.

After a minute's waiting he walked around to the front of the house. In the broad daylight which had spread itself now over the white landscape, he noticed something he had missed before. There had been no path cut through from the house to the road. The frozen drifts lay packed as they had fallen upon the doorsill. There was no mark of footsteps save his own. The window-panes were opaque with frost.

Mose tried the latch. It yielded readily, and he entered. The light inside was so dim, after the morning glow on the snow without, that it was hard at first to make out the room, familiar as it was to him. Apparently there was no one there.

A curious change of some sort there had been, though. Mose shut the door and walked across to the stove, instinctively holding his hands over it. So dull a semblance of warmth radiated up from

the griddles that he put a finger on the metal. It was only blood-warm.

Some one had left a fire here an hour ago. Where was his father? What had happened?

Then Mose saw what it was that had at the outset vaguely puzzled him. The straw tick had been brought from the bed in the other room and spread there on the floor behind the stove. It was covered with bedding and old clothes, and under these—

In a flash Mose was on his knees beside the improvised bed, and had pushed away the coverings at the top. There was disclosed before him the head of a man asleep—a head which he scarcely recognized at first sight, so profuse and dishevelled were its masses of white hair and beard, so pinched to ghastliness the waxen features.

“He is dead!” Mose heard himself say aloud, in a voice that sounded not at all his own.

But no; there was warmth, and a feeble flicker of pulse at the shrunken wrist which he instinctively fumbled for under the bedclothes.

“Father! Father!” Mose called, bending till his lips touched the white hair. “Wake up! I’ve come back! it’s me — Mose!”

The faintest stir of life passed over the corpse-like face, and old Asa opened his eyes. It did not seem as though he saw his son, or anything else. His whitened lips moved, emitting some husky, unintelligible sounds. Mose, stooping still lower, strained his ears to piece together these terrible words:—

“Starved—many days—don’t tell Mose!”

With a cry of rage and horror Mose sprang to his feet. The things to be done mapped themselves, in the stress of this awful situation, with lightning swiftness before his brain. He strode to the woodshed door and opened it. Two sides of the old lean-to were gone, and the snow was drifted thick across the floor.

Mose realized that the shed had gone for fuel, and in another minute he had torn down half the roof, and was crushing the boards to splinters under his heels.

With the same fierce haste he started the fire blazing again; got out an old frying-pan from under the snow, and put it, filled with ice to be melted into water, on one of the open griddle holes; hacked the remaining turnip into slices, and then began at the fowl, stripping the feathers off in handfuls, and dismembering it as fast as he cleared the skin from joint to joint, filling the rusty old pan to the brim.

Even as he worked thus, and after the water was steaming, and the rude stew under way, he kept an eager and apprehensive eye upon the bed behind the stove. No token of life was forthcoming.

He could not hear his father breathe, even when he bent over him; but no doubt that was on account of the prodigious spluttering and crackling which the fire kept up. Through the other griddle

hole he continually thrust in fresh, dry kindlings to swell the blaze.

He had learned some new things about cooking in the army—among others the value of a pot-lid in hurrying forward the stew. He looked about for a cover for the frying-pan. There was no such thing in the house, but he found in the shed an old sheet-iron snow-shovel, and made the blade of this serve, with a nail-hole punched through it to let out the steam.

In his researches he was glad to run upon some salt; because it would help toward making the mess on the stove palatable. But it would not be easy to tell with what emotions he discovered that there was absolutely not another eatable thing in the house.

The room had grown decently warm again, under the influence of the roaring fire, and now it began to be filled with what Mose believed to be a most delicious odor.

The conviction, though to any one else it might well have seemed unwarranted,

was pardonable in Mose perhaps, for he himself had tasted his last warm meal nearly sixty hours before.

He munched the turnip peelings almost contentedly as he recalled this fact. Perhaps there would be some of the stew left, after the old man had eaten his fill. If not, there were parts of the fowl which could still be utilized.

An absurd sort of fantasy—a kind of foolish day-dream—began all at once to rise before him. He seemed to see himself eating the whole of that glorious stew, lingering with all his soul over the luxury of each piping-hot mouthful, and giving his father none at all.

This visionary thing grew so upon him, so gripped and enthralled his mind, that it made him dizzy and faint to put it away from him. When, a few minutes later, the smell of burning warned him that the cooking was done, and he lifted the pan from the stove, this brutal temptation rushed savagely at him again. He

set the pan on the table, and walked away, not daring to lift the cover.

There were two or three old plates on the shelf, and a tea-cup. Mose got them all down, and arrayed them on the table, with such cutlery and spoons as he could find. He made a motion then to take off the improvised lid from the frying-pan, but once more drew back. It was as if he could not trust himself.

He knelt by the bedside again, now, and putting his arm under his father's neck sought to raise him to a more upright posture. Old Asa opened his eyes as before, and made an effort to whisper something, but he lay an almost inert weight in his son's arms.

Mose swung the tick round, propped the end of it up against the wall and raised his father into a half-sitting posture.

In this position the old man's face took on a sudden expression of interest and reviving intelligence. He had begun to smell the savor of the food.

Looking upon that pallid, vacant, starved face, and wasted, helpless form, Mose, starving himself, felt strong enough to defy the most appetizing stew in the world. He took off the cover with decision, and dipped the tea-cup up half full of the smoking contents. It was too hot, evidently, to be given to the old man at once, and it was also very thick.

Mose took it out to the dismantled woodshed, and spooned in snow until it seemed of the right temperature and consistency. He dipped a little finger into it to further satisfy himself, but he would not even lick that finger afterward. It was too dangerous to think about.

Mose fed his father as a mother might a baby — watching solicitously to see that he did not eat too fast or choke himself. After the first cupful, he brought a chair to sit in, and held the tick against his knee while old Asa, leaning more lightly upon it, helped himself.

There was a little left at last for Mose,

and he swallowed it gravely, with a portentous rush of sensations within, but keeping up as best he could an indifferent exterior. It left him still hungry, but he had much more important things to dwell upon than that.

The meal worked wonders upon the old man. The combined influences of food and warmth seemed for a few minutes to send him off to sleep again.

Mose sat looking down upon him in silence, and noting that something like color was stealing back into his face.

All at once, however, Asa Whipple sat upright, lifted his hands to brush back the hair from his forehead, and, turning his face up to look at his son, smiled. There was no lack of comprehension in his gaze. He had regained his tongue as well. He patted Mose's knee as he spoke.

"Mose," he said, in a voice strangely altered and aged, but clear enough, "I'm kind o' 'shamed to tell it, but I'd laid down here just to go to sleep for good.

I thought for quite a spell there, after you come in, that I was dreaming—sort o' out o' my head, you know."

"How did you come to let yourself down like this, dad?" was the only reply Mose had at hand.

"Rheumatiz," Asa explained. "It laid me up—I couldn't git around, an' nobody come near me. I ain't seen a soul since the big snowfall—up'ards of a fortnight. But—but it's all right now, ain't it, Mose? An' to think o' your comin' home here like this, right in the nick o' time. How did you come to git off, Mose?"

For answer there fell the crunching sound of footsteps on the crusted snow outside, then of a loud, peremptory knock on the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "MEANEST WORD."

MOSE WHIPPLE had lifted his head in apprehensive inquiry at the sound of the footsteps outside the door of the cabin. He sprang to his feet when the sharp knock on the door followed. Holding a hand downward with outspread fingers as a warning to silence, he tiptoed out to the middle of the room, then paused and listened.

The knock came again, bolder and more peremptory still.

Vague notions of resistance were shaping themselves in Mose's mind. He glanced up at the shot-gun hanging on the chimney behind the stovepipe, and in another instant had it down, with his thumb on the hammer.



"GIMME THAT GUN!"

"Loaded?" he asked in a whisper, testing the percussion-cap with his nail.

The old man nodded. Then he, too, laboriously rose to his feet. Bent as his form was, he stood a taller man than his son. He rested one hand on the table for support, and stretched out the other with a masterful gesture.

"Gimme that gun!" he said, in brusque command. Then covering Mose from head to foot, he added, slowly, "I'd ruther have starved a hundred times over than had you do this sort o' thing!"

Mose had sheepishly laid the weapon on the table. He walked now with a sullen air to the door, lifted the hook, and put his hand on the latch.

"Let me in out of the cold, can't ye?" a shrill voice complained outside. "It's only me, you 'gump!"

Mose's face brightened. "Why, it's only young Job Parshall, after all!" he said, and threw the door wide open.

The boy pushed past Mose without a

word, and marching across the room to the stove held his red fingers over the griddles. He lifted them a little for inspection after a minute's silence, and screwed his shoulders about in token of the pain they gave him.

"I couldn't run with my hands in my pockets," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if they was froze. That's just my luck."

Mose advanced to the stove, and looked at Job's hands critically. "That little finger there is a trifle tetched, I guess," he said. "It'll be sore for a day or two, that's all. The rest are all right." Then he added, noting the boy's crimson cheeks and panting breast, "Why, sonny, you must 'a' run the whole way!"

Job nodded assent, and turned his hands palm upward. "Every inch of the way," he said between heavy breaths.

Old Asa had sunk again into a chair, and sat gazing in turn at Mose and the boy. The fire which had glowed in his eyes when he had confronted his son had died away again. He was visibly striving not

to tremble, and the glance he bent from one to the other was wistful and shame-faced.

"I suppose you've brought some news," he remarked at last to Job.

The boy nodded again, twisting his fingers experimentally in the heat. "When I catch my breath, I'll tell ye," he said.

There was a moment's awkward silence; then Asa Whipple, speaking in low, deliberate tones, rid his mind of some of its burden.

"My son Mose here," he said gravely, "didn't use to be a coward. I didn't bring him up to be no coward. Seems to me you can bring up a boy so't he'll be honest and straightforward and square right up to the last minute, and then lo and behold! he cuts up some low-down, mean dido or other that makes you 'shamed to look folks in the face.

"My father fit in the Revolution, and so did my mother's father and his brothers,—their name was Lapham, and they lived

in Rhode Island,—and my older brother, Jason, he was killed up at Sackett's Harbor in the 1812 War before he come of age; and they ain't one of 'em but 'ud turn in his grave to think they was a coward and a deserter in the family!"

Mose stood behind the stove, stealing furtive glances at the old man during this harangue. Once or twice he opened his lips as if to speak, but either no words would come, or he thought better of it.

But Job listened with obvious impatience. He had quite regained his breath. "Mose ain't no coward!" he broke in vehemently. "It took a mighty sight more pluck to light out there, of a night, and come way off up here just to see how you were gettin' on, and have to hide for his life, than it would to have stayed right still where he was, with no fightin' and no work, and three square meals a day."

"You might say four, a'most, countin' supper," Mose suggested softly.

Old Asa Whipple seemed impressed with

this view of the situation, and pondered it for a little in silence.

"What I come over to say was," remarked Job, more placidly, "that they're out lookin' for you, Mose. Two men drove up in a cutter just after breakfast — one of 'em's Norm' Hazzard, the deputy marshal down at Octavius, and the other fellow's name is Moak, I b'lieve, and they've stopped to Teachout's to breakfast. They started from Octavius before daylight, and they was about froze solid by the time they got to 'Lishe's. They took out their horse, and they've got so much thawin' out to do themselves, I reckon they ain't more'n about started now, if they have that."

"You come straight?" asked Mose.

"Well, you'd better believe I did! I scooted 'cross lots like greased lightnin' the minute they went in t' the house. It's a good hour 'round by the road, even when it's all open. It's drifted now all the way from the sash factory down to Taft's place, and it's slow work gettin' through the

fields. As I figure it, you've got more'n an hour's leeway."

The two men looked at each other as they listened, and they kept up the mutual gaze after the boy had stopped.

"'Pears to me, dad," Mose finally ventured in a deferential way, "that you don't seem to take this thing quite in the right spirit. I tell you straight out, if it was the last word I ever spoke, I ain't done nothin' I'm ashamed of. A man can't say no more'n that."

"Accordin' to the way I was brought up," replied old Asa, doggedly, "they ain't no other such an all-fired, pesky mean name for a man in the dictionary as 'desarter.'"

"Well, anyway," retorted Mose, "I'd ruther be called 'desarter' myself than have you be called 'starved to death.' So far's I can make out, if it hadn't ben one, it 'ud ben t'other."

The old man's glance abruptly sought the floor, and lingered there. The others,

as they watched him, could see the muscles of his down-bent face twitching.

"Besides, they didn't need me down there just now," Mose went on in more voluble self-defence, "no more'n a frog needs a tail. An' besides that, they played it monstrous low-down on me. That German fellow that used to work at the tannery, he was my sergeant, and he kept them big eyes of his skinned for me all day long. Him and me never hitched very well down at the mills, you know, and he took it out of me whenever he got a chance.

"He got all the officers down on me. One day they'd say I'd burnt the coffee, and the next day that my gun was dirty, and after that that I was a 'malingerer,'—that's officers' slang for a shirk,—and so on; and every time it meant that some of my pay got stopped. That's why I never sent you any money.

"They worked it so't I never got more'n about ten shillings out of my thirteen dollars, and that I owed twice over before I got it."

Old Asa was looking into his son's face once more, and he nodded comprehendingly as the other paused. "We never did git a fair show, like other men," he remarked.

"But I could 'a' stood all that," continued Mose. "What riled me was when Bill Rood got a letter sayin' that you was poorly, and you stopped writin'; and then I took pains and behaved extra well, so't even the Dutchman couldn't put his finger on me. And then I got a chance one day, and I asked one of the lieutenants that I'd kind o' curried favor with, doin' odd jobs for him and so on, if he couldn't git me a furlough, just to run home and see how you was gittin' on."

"I reckon *you* never got that, Mose."

"No, dad. They was givin' 'em right and left to other fellows, and the lieutenant said he guessed he could manage it. I don't know how hard he tried, but a few days after that I see the Dutchman grinnin' at me, and I felt in my bones

that the jig was up. Sure enough, they wouldn't let me have a furlough because I'd been euchred out of my pay. They wa'n't no other reason."

"No," said the old man, "that was always the way. I guess me and you ought to be pretty well used to gittin' the worst of it, by this time. There's a text in the Bible that's our own private family property, as much as if it had 'Whipple' marked on it in big letters. It's that one that says that when a man ain't got anything, he gits took away from him even what he's got. That's me, Mose, and it's you, too."

Mose had quite recovered his confidence now.

"Of course, if there'd ben any fightin' goin' on, it'd ben different," he explained, "but right in the middle of our winnin' everything along in November, after we'd chased the Johnnies across the Rappahannock and the Rapidan, and was havin' it all our own way—and in spite of the

rain freezin' as it fell, and no shelter and marchin' till your feet was ready to fall off, we all liked it first-rate—along come orders for us to go back again to winter quarters around Brandy Station. So far as I could see, it was all station and no brandy. And then the new drafted men, they behaved like sin in camp, and orders got stricter, and my Dutchman piled it onto me thicker and thicker, and I got to frettin' about you — and so — so I — I lit out."

"You'd better begin figgerin' on lightin' out agin," said the practical Job. "I suppose you'll take to the woods, won't you?"

Mose nodded, and reached his hand out for the gun. "Yes," he said, "five minutes' start'll be all I need. Once I git across the creek I'm all right. One thing's lucky, there's plenty of powder and shot in the cupboard there, I see. I suppose, if worst comes to worst, I could get through the woods up to Canada. But see here,—this is a good deal more important,—what are you going to do, dad, after I'm gone?"

Old Asa had hardly given this important question a thought before. As it was forced upon him now, his mind reverted mechanically to that strange awakening, when he lay in the starved half-stupor on the very threshold of death, and Mose came in, like some good angel of a dream, to bring him back to life again. A rush of tenderness, almost of pride, suddenly suffused the old man's brain.

"Mose," he said, all at once, "I guess I talked more or less like a fool, here awhile back. Perhaps some folks are entitled to blame you for turnin' up here, this mornin'—but I ain't one of 'em, and I ought to know better. I'm stronger, my boy, ever so much stronger, for seein' you and—eatin' a good meal again. You'll see—I'll be as sound again as a butternut. I bet I could walk this minute to the bridge without a break."

"But that wouldn't feed you, after you got there," objected Mose. "Of course if I could hang around in the neighborhood,

and drop in every now and then to keep an eye on you, it 'ud be different. But they're sure to watch the place, and with me caught you'd be worse off than ever. I'd give myself up this minute if only I knew you'd be all right. But that's the hang of it. There's no mistake, dad," he added, with a rueful sort of grin, "the last bell was a-ringin' for you when I turned up here, this mornin'."

It was characteristic of these two men, born and bred here in the robust air of the forest's borders, that as they confronted this dilemma, not the shadow of a notion of that standing alternative, the county-house, crossed either mind. Even if Mose could have thought of it, he would never have dared suggest it to Asa.

"Come, you'd better be gittin' together what you're goin' to take with you," broke in Job, peremptorily. "You've got none too much time to spare."

"Yes, I know," said Mose, with hesitation; "but the old man here — that worries me."

"You just 'tend to your own knittin'," was the boy's reply. "Asa and me'll manage for ourselves all right."

Old Asa Whipple opened his eyes wide — not at surprise at hearing his Christian name fall so glibly from the boy's tongue, for that is the custom of the section, but with bewilderment at his meaning.

"What on earth are you drivin' at?" demanded Mose, no whit less puzzled.

"Well," said Job, with deliberation, "I've kind o' soured on that Teachout job of mine. I've had it in my mind to quit all along, when I got the chance, and I guess this is about as good as any. I've got along toward twenty dollars saved up, and there's three days' work a week for me at the cheese-factory whenever I want to take it, and I could go to school the other days, and both places are handier to git at from here than they are from Teachout's. So I'll rig up a bed and so on here, and I'll look out for the old man. But do you go ahead, and git out!"

It is another custom of these parts to be undemonstrative in the face of the unexpected.

Mose merely clapped his hand on Job's shoulder, and said, "You won't ever be sorry for it, sonny," which had much more of loose prediction than of pledge about it, yet seemed quite sufficient for them both.

The old man said nothing at all, but sat bending forward in his chair, his gaze fastened upon every move his son made about the room. For everything Mose did now spoke plainly of another parting, more sombre and sinister than the last. A soldier may come back, but how can one hope for the return of a deserter?

Mose's old instincts as a woodsman rose superior to the exigencies of a life and death flight. He prepared as if for a holiday camping jaunt into the wilderness — in a hurried manner, but forgetting nothing.

He made a pile of things on the table

—all the powder and shot in the house, most of the salt, some old stockings, a tin cup, fork and spoon, and what matches he could find—and then stowed them away in flasks and his pockets, along with a whole tangled mass of lines, hooks and catgut fishing gear.

From under the snow in the dismantled shed he unearthed a smaller frying-pan and two steel traps, and slung these with a string through handle and chains across his shoulder. Then he took up the gun and was ready.

"I guess this'll see me through," he said lightly.

Old Asa gazed at him through dimmed eyes. "No, you must take a blanket, Mose," he said. "I won't hear no for an answer—you must! There's plenty more for us. If they ain't, we can git more. They're cheap as dirt. And Mose," the old man rose from his chair as he spoke, "I was a-goin' to ask you to sing for me afore you went, but I—I guess we'd better

let that go till we meet again. You'll be all right in the woods—"

"Why, I know twenty places," put in Mose, "where I'll be as snug as a bug in a rug. I'll make straight for a deer yard. Mebbe"—he chuckled at the thought—"I'll be bringing you in some venison some o' these nights. Prob'ly I'll hang it up on a tree—the old butternut by the fork—so't Job can come out and git it in the mornin'. And in the spring—why you must come in the spring and—and be with me in the woods."

The old man's strength had waned once more, and he seated himself.

"Mebbe," was all he said, in a dubious voice, and with his head bowed on his breast.

He did not lift his head, when Mose shook hands with him; he did not raise his glance to follow him, either, when, with the traps and frying-pan clattering about his neck, Mose let himself out by the shed door and was gone.

He did not even seem to hear when, two or three minutes later, the reverberating crack of revolver shots — one! two! three! four! five! — set the echoes clamoring all around the Whipple house.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEPUTY MARSHAL.

AS soon as Job Parshall heard the sound of firearms outside the Whipple cabin, he darted to the nearer of the front windows, scratched away some of the thick frost from one of its panes, and put his eye to the aperture.

A horse and cutter had come to a halt on the road, a few rods short of the house. The animal had been frightened by the firing, and was still showing signs of excitement, with lifted ears and stiffened forelegs.

The man, whom Job understood to be Moak, stood at the horse's head, holding the bridle tightly, but looking intently the other way across the fields in the direction of his companion, the redoubtable deputy marshal, who was not in sight.

The boy stole to the other end of the room, and cautiously opened the shed door by as much as the width of his face. Here he could cover at a glance the flat, gently sloping waste of snow which stretched unbroken backward from the house to the gray fringe of woods that marked the edge of the ravine. Beyond that belt of timbered horizon, with its shadows silvery soft in the brilliant morning sunlight, lay sunken in its hollow the ice-bound brook.

If Mose passed this stream there was before him the real forest—and safety.

The black figures of two running men moved upon this broad and dazzlingly white landscape. The farther of the two was now so far away that he seemed a mere dark speck, like the object seen from the gun-line of a turkey shoot. Perhaps this simile was suggested to Job by the fact that the other, pausing now for a moment in his race, straightened an arm and sent five more shots flashing after the fugitive.

Tenfold that number of echoes came rolling in upon one another's heels through the nipping air as the second man started again to run. He seemed not to be catching up with his prey — yes! now Mose was lost to sight in the woods, and his pursuer was not half-way there. Yes! and now the marshal had stopped, hesitated, and turned about.

The deputy marshal retraced his steps over the broken crust slowly, and with an air of dejection. He hung his head as he walked, and it took him a long time to reach the house. When he came into the yard he seemed not to look toward the house at all, but made his way straight past as if bound for the road, with his attention still steadfastly fixed on the snow in front of him.

But just as Job had jumped to the conclusion that he had not been observed, the deputy marshal called in a loud, peremptory aside over his shoulder: —

“Come along out here, boy!”

The lad had no course but to obey. He stole a quick, backward glance to where old Asa still sat motionless with bowed head near the stove. Then noiselessly shutting the shed door behind him, he followed out into the road.

“It’ll be all right,” the deputy marshal was saying to his companion as Job came up. “He can’t take a step on this crust without leavin’ a mark, ’specially now that it’s goin’ to melt a little. I’ll land him in the stone jug before night, or you can call me a Dutchman!”

Norman Hazzard, the deputy marshal, was a thin, lithe, active man, somewhere in the thirties, with a long, sun-browned face and a square jaw. Although his keen eyes were of a light, bluish gray, one thought of him as a dark-complexioned person.

Ever since Job could remember, this man had been arresting people, first as a sheriff’s officer, then as an army detective. Looking furtively at him now as he stood

at the horse's head, with his sharp glance roving the distant landscape and his under lip nursing the ends of his sparse moustache in meditation, the boy felt that that was what nature intended that Norm Hazzard should be.

The whole country knew him by sight, and talked about the risky things he had done in the line of his duty, and the stern, cold-blooded pluck with which he had done them.

As the deputy marshal stood thus pondering the situation, he rattled together with his hand some heavy metallic objects in one of his overcoat pockets. The clanking sound they gave forth fascinated the boy.

"I s'pose them's handcuffs you've got there in your pocket?" he found himself suddenly impelled to remark. It was only after the words were out that he realized the boldness of speaking in this fierce presence without having been spoken to.

Hazzard turned his head obliquely down-

ward, and regarded Job with a sort of ironical scowl.

“They ain’t for you, anyway,” he remarked. “I guess the horsewhip’ll about suit *your* complaint.”

“No, you don’t!” replied Job. “You dassent lay a finger on me unless I’ve done something—I know that much.”

The deputy marshal emitted a chuckle of amused contempt.

“Why, you blamed little runt, you!” he said. “You’ve done mischief enough this mornin’ to git thrashed for it within an inch o’ your life, and go to state’s prison into the bargain. You mind your p’s and q’s now mighty sharp, or it’ll be the end o’ you!”

“I don’t see, myself,” put in Moak, a bearded, thickset, middle-aged man, who drawled his words lazily, but looked as if he might be a tough customer in a fight, “I don’t jest make out how you’re goin’ to catch up with him, even if he does leave tracks. He’s got a big start, and

has pretty good reasons for humpin' himself, and if he can keep ahead till dark, he knows the woods in the night-time a plaguy sight better'n any of us do."

Hazzard curled his lips in a faint, momentary grin of superiority.

"Can't we get snow-shoes?" he asked.

The word had an evil sound to Job's ears. They would run Mose down, sure enough, with those terrible aids to the pursuit.

"The only question is," the deputy marshal ruminated aloud, "where'll be the nearest place to git the shoes. We'll hitch the horse here to the fence, and take a look at the house. Did you ever see such a tumble-down place in all your life? Here, you boy, mog along there in front o' me, and watch what you do! Or no, wait a minute!"

The deputy marshal had led the horse off the roadway toward the sprawling remains of a rail fence at the side. He paused now, communed with himself for

an instant, then brought the horse and cutter back again, and tossed the blanket he had taken out upon the seat once more.

“No,” he said briefly to Moak, “you jump in and drive to Juno Mills as fast as you can, and git two pairs of snowshoes somewhere,—you’re bound to find plenty of ’em; the hotel-keeper’ll know who’s got ’em,—and race back here again. Don’t whisper a word to anybody—and we’ll have him out in no time.”

So it happened that as the cutter with its jingling bells receded from vision and hearing down the road, Job Parshall found himself marching back in embarrassed state toward the front door of the Whipple house, with the firm tread of the deputy marshal crunching on the snow close at his heels.

He could catch the sinister rattle of those handcuffs in Hazzard’s pocket at every stride the man took. He tried not to dwell upon it in his mind, but it was

a fact that Norm Hazzard had killed two men, one of them a member of a famous local gang of horse-thieves, whom he had shot where he was ambushed behind the grain bags in his barn, the other a wife-murderer, who had escaped from jail to the woods.

How was it, Job wondered, that he had missed all ten of his shots at Mose? Perhaps they were not all misses. Men did run sometimes, it was said, after they had been struck by a bullet. What if Mose, after all, was lying there, somewhere in the woods, wounded and helpless in the bitter cold!

The manacles behind him ground together with a cruel, rasping noise as this picture rose in his brain.

He pushed the door wide open and went in, closely followed by the other.

Old Asa sat where he had left him, his tall frame settled down supinely in the armchair, his head bent on his breast, motionless and apparently asleep.

“Here’s somebody to see you, Asa,” Job said, as he heard the door close behind him; but the old man did not stir.

The deputy marshal walked forward, brusquely pushing the lad aside, and laid a heavy hand on Asa Whipple’s shoulder. He paused then, as if puzzled by what his grasp felt. Then he put his other hand, not so ungently, into the old man’s beard and lifted his head up.

“Say! I wasn’t figurin’ on this!” was his bewildered exclamation. “Here, quick, you! run and bring some water. Maybe it’s only a faint.”

This indeed it turned out to be — a deep swoon, the result of long privation and weakness, accented by the sudden relief and the subsequent strain of excitement.

Hazzard could not rouse the old man from his comatose lethargy, with all his rubbing and slapping of hands, and liberal use of snow upon the temple and lips. But he did satisfy himself that there was no imminent danger, and he went to work to

spread out the bed again behind the stove, loosen old Asa's clothes, and stretch him out to sleep at his ease, comfortably tucked in with Hazzard's own overcoat, which the marshal had stripped off for the purpose, quite as if his mission in life had been to nurse rather than arrest people.

He had taken out of the overcoat pocket, before spreading it across the bed, a big navy revolver, a parcel or two, presumably of ammunition, and a couple of curious steel wristlets, linked together with a chain; Job looked at these latter, as they lay on the table, with profound interest.

Job had never seen handcuffs so near, and he longed to ask the great man to show him how they worked. Finally, after he had obeyed his curt instruction to put more wood on the fire, and the deputy marshal had seated himself by the stove with his feet balanced on a stick just inside the oven door, and a pipe in his mouth, Job ventured to lift the manacles from the table and inspect them.

As this passed without protest he went to the length of opening one of the bands on its hinge, and then shutting it about his wrist. The two parts went together with a clicking snap, and the boy, after a few fruitless efforts to open them or to slip his hand through, began to guess that he would have to ask the help of the deputy marshal to release him.

He would not humble himself thus, however, before it was a matter of sheer necessity; and he tugged away at the lock in dogged silence, until his wrist was red and sore. The consciousness that the official was grinning at him only made the thing worse.

“If I’d had the sense to do that myself,” remarked Hazzard after a time, “when I first laid eyes on you this morning, and then nailed the chain up to the barn door-post, I’d have saved myself a heap of trouble. Leave it alone, or you’ll swell your wrist out o’ shape. I’ll unlock it bimeby — maybe.”

He smoked silently for a minute, dividing his ruminative gaze between the steaming leather in the oven, and the rueful countenance of the boy in the handcuffs.

“You’re Hank Parshall’s boy, ain’t you?” he asked at last.

Job nodded and held his imprisoned hand forth to hint, without saying, that he had had enough of the handcuff.

The other paid no heed to the gesture. “What’s the matter with the old man, here?” he inquired with a downward nod.

“He ain’t had enough to eat,” said Job, bluntly. “That’s what’s the matter with him. He told me himself he laid down there last night to starve to death.”

Mr. Hazzard pointed a thumb to the greasy frying-pan, and the remains of the chicken on the table beside Job.

“People don’t go to work that way to starve,” he commented dryly.

“Mose brought him that—I guess I know pretty well where he got it, too. The old man allowed that that was what saved

his life. They hadn't been a soul near him before since the snowfall — and he laid up. Oh, that reminds me!" Job finished by taking the two slices of bread from his pocket, and putting them on the table.

"Bring that for the old man?" queried the deputy marshal.

Job shook his head.

"No, it's my own breakfast. I was goin' to give it to Mose," he replied stoutly. "Say, take this thing off, won't you?"

Norm Hazzard laughed outright. "No!" he said. "Guess after that I'll have to put the other one onto you, too." His tone lapsed to seriousness as he went on: "Maybe you know somethin' about it — didn't I hear that this Mose Whipple went to the war as substitute for your man — Teachout?"

"Yes, sir, he did — and Teachout didn't give him not a dollar, but jest let it go on to the mortgage, and he promised to look out for old Asa here, and he didn't — and he'd begrudge him this bread here, if he knew it."

The deputy marshal nodded comprehendingly, and blew the smoke through his pipe.

“Charged me and Moak thirty-five cents apiece for our breakfasts this mornin’, and twenty cents for the horse,” he said, in a musing tone. “Reckon he’s about the tightest old skinflint on the whole turnpike — and that’s sayin’ a good deal. So he got drafted, did he? Should ’a’ thought he was too old.”

“He ain’t as old as he looks,” explained Job. “He’s a good deal meaner, though. I’m glad o’ one thing, anyway. I ain’t goin’ back there any more, except to git my clothes and my money. I’m goin’ to hive in here with the old man, and kind o’ look after him. I promised —”

“Promised Mose, eh?” broke in the deputy marshal.

“Yes — if you want to know — I did promise Mose! You can’t touch me for that!”

“Why, that’s skinnin’ alive, that is — jest for that alone,” said Hazzard, with porten-

tous gravity, "to say nothin' of scootin' over here to give warnin', and bringin' that bread there in your pocket, and so on. Why, it'll puzzle a Philadelphy lawyer to find punishments bad enough for you."

Job looked him searchingly in the eye for a full minute, then held up the fettered hand again.

"Say, unlock this, will you?" he said, unabashed. "I knew you was foolin' all the time," he added, as the other produced the key from his pocket and turned the lock. "I could tell it right from the start."

"Me? me foolin'?" asked Hazzard, with simulated surprise. "Why, you're crazy, boy!"

"No, I spotted it right off," Job replied, eager to put into words the idea that had suddenly come to him. "Why, anybody could tell that. A sure-enough dead shot like you wouldn't fire ten shots at a man and not hit him once, if he wasn't foolin'. It was as plain as the nose on your face — you didn't really want to catch poor Mose.

That's what made me take a shine to you, right off."

Norman Hazzard blew more smoke through his pipe, and grinned to himself, and even gave an abrupt little laugh aloud, shifting on the instant to an air of grave imperturbability.

"You mustn't talk like that — that is, outside," he said. "It might give folks wrong notions. Besides, I tell you you're mistaken. I never fired more to kill in all my life. But of course — the old man here — p'r'aps that does make it a little different."

He looked down as he spoke to where old Asa lay, under the overcoat, and Job felt sure that there was a change on his face — a change toward kindness.

"Well, anyway," the boy persisted, "you wouldn't fire to kill now, if you was to catch up to Mose, and what's more, I don't believe you're goin' to try to catch up to him, neither."

"I ain't, eh?" broke in the deputy marshal. "You wait till Moak gets back with

the snow-shoes. We'll run him down in no time. He ain't got no more chance than a lame mud-turtle."

The words sounded savage enough, and Job, scanning the lean, tanned face of the speaker, found his mind conjuring up again visions of those two other wrong-doers whom this hunter of men had shot down.

And yet, somehow, there seemed to be a sort of relenting twinkle in those sharp, cold, gray eyes of his.

CHAPTER VI.

A HOME IN THE WOODS.

THE pursuit of Mose Whipple had to be postponed, as it turned out, whether the deputy marshal relented or not.

It was late, for one thing, before Moak returned from his quest after snow-shoes, and what was worse, he came back empty-handed. He had driven about, over and through the drifted roads, for miles, directed by local rumors and surmise, to one after another of the isolated farm-houses scattered over the district, but had found no snow-shoes.

He was too cold and stiff, and too much annoyed with the day's experiences, to listen to any further delay, but sat doggedly in the sleigh, out on the road in front of the Whipple house, until the deputy marshal, followed by Job, came out to him.

“No, I ain’t goin’ to get out again, Norm,” he said querulously. “I’ve had enough of this fool’s errand. I’m froze solid now in one position, and I’m gittin’ used to it. I don’t want to climb out and limber up, and then have to freeze stiff all over again in some new shape. Just you give it up for a bad job, and come along. We can get to Octavius by supper-time if we look sharp.”

“I never got beat like this before!” growled Norman Hazzard, kicking into the crust. “I hate to give up a thing this way. But,” he added after a pause, “I s’pose you’re right. It *is* a fool’s errand, and I guess we’re the fools, sure enough.”

With a reluctant sigh he knocked the snow off his boots against the runner, as he was about to step into the sleigh. He seated himself beside Moak, and drew the buffalo-robe up over his breast, and said, “All right, go ahead!”

Moak grinned, in spite of his ill-temper.

"I didn't think it'd be as bad as that, Norm," he chuckled, "drivin' you clean out of your senses. Why, man, you're goin' away without your overcoat!"

"No. You mind your own business, Moak!" rejoined the deputy marshal, getting one of his shoulders under the robe.

"Shall I run in and get it for you?" suggested Job, half-turning to hasten on the errand.

"You mind *your* business, too!" said Hazzard, with affected roughness, but with an undertone of humane meaning which both his hearers caught and comprehended. "And look here, boy, if you and the old man find yourselves in need of help, why, you know where I'm to be found. Meanwhile you'd better take this." He handed something to Job.

Mr. Moak cast a look of hostile suspicion at the urchin by the roadside.

"Guess he's more likely to know where Mose Whipple's to be found!" Moak said. Then he drew the reins tight with a jerk,

gave a loud, emphatic cluck to the horse, and the sleigh went dashing southward amid a defiant jingling of bells.

The boy stood watching till the vehicle had become a mere dwindling point of blackness on the sunlit waste of snow.

Then he turned his attention to the greenback which the deputy marshal had given him, and looked meditatively at the big and significant "5" on its right-hand corner.

When he lifted his eyes again the sleigh had disappeared. The pursuit of poor Mose was at an end.

When the spring of 1864 came slowly up on the bleak tablelands skirting the Adirondacks, it found the Whipple homestead undoubtedly better off than it had been a year before. Neighbors from Juno Mills who drove by, after the road had settled into usable condition, noticed that the place had been "spruced up," and looked considerably more shipshape than it had ever done in Mose's time. There

was even a report down at the Corners that old Asa was going to borrow Taft's two-horse cultivator and put in some crops!

People said "old Asa," but every one knew that this rumor, and all other comments upon the improved appearance and prospects of the Whipple place, really referred to young Job. Even in this hard-working and tireless region, accustomed as it has always been to energetic and capable boys, men talked this spring approvingly of what the "Parshall youngster" had done, and bragged about having predicted from the start that he had the right stuff in him.

When one comes to set down in words what it was that Job had done, it does not sound very great. He had worked three days a week at the cheese factory, and gone to school the other three days — that is all. But the outcome of this was that April found old Asa Whipple once more, to all outward appearances, a hale and strong man for his years, and revealed the young

lad who had adopted him, so to speak, as an enterprising and efficient member of the sparsely settled community, who had plans for doing things, and worked like a beaver, and paid ready money at the Corner grocery store.

When the talk of the neighborhood drifted to the subject of Mose Whipple's desertion and his supposed flight to Canada, it ended usually in the conclusion that old Asa had made a good exchange in getting such an industrious and go-ahead chap as Job Parshall in Mose's place.

Asa Whipple and Job were at work in the field across the road from the Whipple house one afternoon in mid-May. Job had come back early from the factory to finish a job upon which he had expended all the spare labor of a week. There was a patch of land, some rods square, from which he had uprooted the black moss. He had ploughed and fertilized it, and sown it with oats.

He had resolved to put this reclaimed

land to grass later on, and to this end was now dragging across it a heavy tree bough, old Asa following behind him with a bag of grass seed, which he scattered over the loosened earth as he walked.

Job glanced over his shoulder from time to time to note the uneven way in which the old man cast the flying handfuls to one side.

“Seems to me I ain’t ever goin’ to make a good farmer of you,” he said at last, good-naturedly enough, but still with a suggestion of impatience in his tone. “You’ll see that grass come up all in wads and patches. Open your hand more, and try and scatter it regular like. Let me show you again.”

The old man stopped, and submissively lent himself afresh to the lesson which Job sought to teach; but at the end he sighed and shook his white head.

“No, I’m too old to learn, Job,” he said. “I never was cut out for a farmer, anyway. Besides, what’s the use? The black moss’ll be all back agin by next spring.”

“By that time, if we had good luck with this, we could be keepin’ a cow, and p’r’aps a horse to do the work,” remonstrated the boy. “If I had a horse, I’d knock that moss endwise, or know the reason why.”

A noise from the road close behind them attracted their attention. They turned, screening their eyes against the declining sun to see who was seated in the buggy which had halted there across the tumble-down rail fence. Then old Asa pointed a lean forefinger toward the newcomer.

“That’s the reason why!” he said, bitterly.

Job could make out now that it was Elisha Teachout who sat in the buggy. The boy had not seen him since the eventful day of Mose’s return and escape, when he had gone over to the big farm-house toward dusk and got his clothes and the money due him. This had not been so easy or pleasant a task that he was rejoiced now to see Mr. Teachout again.

The rich farmer, thinner and yellower and more like a bird of prey than ever against the reddening flare of sunlight, looked over at the pair with an ugly caricature of a smile on his hard, hairless face.

“I happened to be drivin’ past,” he called out at last, snapping the shrill words forth with a kind of malevolent enjoyment, “and I jest thought I’d stop and mention that I’m going to foreclose on this place in four days’ time. I’ve entered judgment for one hundred and six dollars and seventy-three cents, countin’ interest and all. I jest thought that mebbe you’d like to know. The sheriff’ll be on hand here bright and early Monday mornin’. It jest occurred to me to speak of it as I was passin’.”

With these mocking words still on the air, Mr. Teachout turned and drove down the road a few yards. A thought occurred to him, and he halted long enough to call out, more shrilly than before:—

“That Parshall boy needn’t come back

and whine around my place to be taken back! I won't hev him!" Then he put whip to his horse and was off.

The two workers in the field looked each other in the face for one dumb moment of bewilderment. Then old Asa took the seed-bag off his arm and deliberately held it upside down, till the last grain had sifted out to the little pile at his feet.

"I don't sow for Elisha Teachout to reap — not if I know myself!" he remarked, grimly.

"Can he do it? Is it as bad as all that?" demanded Job.

Asa nodded his head.

"I s'pose it is," he said. "They ain't no use tryin' to buck against a man like him. He's got the money, and that means he's got the law and the sheriff on his side. No, the jig's up. They ain't nothin' for it but for us to git out Monday."

Job had tossed the heavy bough to one side, and walked to the fence, where he was putting on his coat.

“Oh, yes, there is,” said he.

“What do you mean, Job?” queried the old man, advancing toward him, “what else kin we do?”

“Git out before Monday,” answered the boy, laconically.

They walked in silence across the road, and through the front yard to the house, without exchanging further words. Once indoors, they began to empty drawers, clear cupboards and shelves, and gather the portable belongings of the household into a heap on the table in the living-room. It was not a long task, and they performed it in silence. It was only when they rested upon its completion that the old man said, with a little quaver in his voice:—

“Almost the last words *he* spoke before he went was, ‘And in the spring you must come and be with me in the woods.’ Them was his identical words. You remember ’em, don’t you, Job?”

The boy nodded assent.

“We’ll kill the chickens— all five of ’em,

and roast 'em to-night. They'll keep that way, and they'll see us through the whole tramp. If you'll see to that, I'll sort this stuff over, and see how much of it we really need. We can burn the rest.

"His grandfather and my father," the old man went on, "started here together, both poor men. He's managed it so that he's got everything and I've got nothing. But he can't prevent my bein' an honest man, and I'll go away not beholden to him for a cent. That was one of his chickens that my boy brought me here, when I was sick and pretty nigh starved to death. Very well, I'll leave one chicken in the coop when we go. It sha'n't be on my mind that I owe Elisha Teachout so much as a pinfeather."

Almost nothing was said between them, either then or during the evening, about Mose. Though they were starting to join him in the morning,—turning their backs upon civilization and the haunts of men,—the reserve which through all these months

since his disappearance they had observed about him and his offence still weighed upon their tongues.

But in the dead watches of the night — this last night to be spent under the Whipple roof — Job woke up, where he lay wrapped in his blanket, and heard old Asa's voice softly murmuring, whether in his sleep or not the boy never knew: "In the spring you must come and be with me in the woods!"

Away in the recesses of the forest primeval, in a mountain nook linked by a sparkling band of spring-fed streams and a chain of cascades to the silent thoroughfare of the Raquette water, Mose Whipple had chosen his hiding-place, and built for himself a log hut. Thither came to him now, after a toilsome three days' journey, — by creek-bed and steep, boulder-strewn ravine, by lonely, placid, still water, and broad, reed-grown beaver-meadow, where the deer fed unalarmed on the lily pads, and the great tracks of the moose lay on the black mud, — old Asa and Job.

There was an idyllic charm in the first few weeks of this reunited life to both father and son. Mose took an excited delight, after months of solitude, in this new companionship, and in the splendid renewal of youth and high spirits which the free life and air of the wilderness brought to his father.

Job showed his practical character in fixing up a well-built lean-to at the side of the shanty, putting a new roof of spruce bark on the whole structure, and constructing a fishing raft to float on the still water up the outlet.

One day in early July, a chance wanderer in the forest—a Canadian who was looking about with a divining rod for minerals on the mountain range, and who stopped at the shanty overnight—left behind him a month-old copy of a New York weekly newspaper. In this paper, after breakfast, old Asa, sitting out on a log in the sunlight with his pipe, read the horrible story of the three days' fighting—one might say butchery—at Cold Harbor.

Mose and Job had already started out on a fishing excursion to new waters across the divide. When they returned, along toward four o'clock, they found awaiting them one who seemed scarcely recognizable for Asa, so old and bowed had he once more become.

The change was apparent as they entered the clearing, and beheld him seated by the doorway a full hundred yards away.

"He's had a stroke or something!" Mose exclaimed, and they both started on a run toward him.

As they came up, the old man lifted his head and looked his son in the face, with a glance which the other dimly recalled as belonging to that bitter December day when he had first come home.

"Mose," cried Asa, holding the paper out as he spoke, "it's all wrong! There's no pretendin' it ain't! We've been enjoyin' ourselves here, foolin' ourselves into forgettin', but it's all wrong! There ain't been so much as a word dropped sence the

boy and me come here, about this thing, and it seemed as if the whole affair had just slipped our mem'ries—but it won't do. I've been sittin' here ever sence you went away, thinkin' it over—thinkin' hard enough every minute for the whole five months—and it's all wrong. Here, you read this for yourself."

Mose took the paper, and spelt his way through the long, blood-drenched narrative, without a word. When he had finished he returned his father's glance, with a look of mingled comprehension and assent in his eyes.

"All right," he said simply. "I feel the same as you do about it. I'll go!"

Both seemed to feel intuitively that this great resolve, thus formed, could not wait an instant for fulfilment. Hardly another word was spoken until Mose, his pockets filled for the journey and his blanket strapped, stood ready in front of the cabin, to say good-by.

"It's no good waiting till to-morrow,"

he said then. "The sooner it's over the better. You can get along first-rate here by yourselves. Job can take in skins and so on, and a mess of trout now and then,—he knows the way,—and bring back ammunition and your tobacco and so on. You'll be all right."

He paused a moment, and then took from his finger the little rubber ring which Job had restored to him in Teachout's cow-barn months before, and handed it to Asa.

"Here," he said, "that's a kind of keepsake. Good-by, dad. Good-by, Job."

Half an hour or more had elapsed, and Asa still sat on the log by the doorway, his head buried in thought. He could hear the strokes of Job's axe, from where the boy was cutting firewood for the evening on the edge of the clearing. As they fell on the air with their sharp, metallic ring, one after another, the old man's fancy likened them to the deadly noises of the battle-field, whither his boy was making his way.

But he regretted nothing—no, nothing, save that the act of reparation, of atonement, had not been made long before.

There came with abrupt suddenness another sound—the unfamiliar sound of a stranger's voice addressing him. Asa looked up, rousing himself from his reverie with difficulty. He saw that two men with rods, and fishing baskets, and camping packs on their backs, were standing in front of him. Their faces were in the shadow, but he slowly made out the foremost one to be the deputy marshal, Norman Hazzard.

“So here's where you moved to, eh?” the deputy marshal was asking, by way of not unfriendly salutation.

Asa stared hard for a minute at this astonishing apparition. Then his bewildered tongue found words.

“If you're lookin' for my son,” he said proudly, “he's gone back to jine his regiment—to do his duty!”

Hazzard stared in turn. "Gone!" he exclaimed, "when?"

"This very day," rejoined Asa, "not an hour ago. He saw it was right, and he went!"

The deputy marshal threw up his hands in a gesture of despairing amazement. "Why, man alive!" he cried, "they'll shoot him like a dog!"

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER CHASE AFTER MOSE.

ASA WHIPPLE and the deputy marshal gazed in a dumbfounded way at each other through a cruel minute of silence, broken only by the echoing strokes of Job's axe out in the undergrowth beyond. It was the third man who first found his tongue; and Asa, looking dumbly at him, saw that he was no other than Nelse Hornbeck.

"Downright cur'ous that we should 'a' happened to hit on you like this, ain't it?" Nelse began. "If we'd ben tryin' to find you, we'd never 'a' done it in this born world! Norm and me, you see, we've ben fishin' up Panther River three days, and then we followed up the South Branch outlet, and I'd ben figgerin' on makin'

a camp by the lake there, an' workin' down the other branch; but the flies were pretty bad, and Norm here, he took a fancy to this 'ere outlet, and our oil of tar was about give out, and so I—”

“Oh, shut up!” broke in the deputy marshal, impatiently. “Look here, Asa Whipple, is that straight what you're telling me—that Mose has started off to give himself up?”

The old man rose from the log and stood erect. He had never seemed so tall before in his life, and he looked down upon the more lithe and sinewy figure of the deputy marshal almost haughtily.

“No, not to give himself up. ‘To jine his regiment,’ was what I said.”

Norman Hazzard snorted out an angry laugh.

“Were there ever two such simpletons under one roof?” he cried. “‘Jine his regiment!’ Why, man, I tell you, they'll simply take him and shoot him! They can't do anything else, even if they wanted

to. That's the regulations. He can't jine anything, except what the newspapers call the 'silent majority.' Do you mean to tell me — a man of your age — you didn't know *that?*"

"All I know is," said Asa, doggedly, "that Mose seen his duty, and he done it. He left his regiment because there was nothin' doin', and some mean Dutchman who had a spite agin him wouldn't let him git a furlough, and he was scairt to death about me, — and you know as well as I do that if he hadn't come just as he did I'd been a gone coon, — and then he come off up in here, and we follered him, and there was so much to do, fixin' up this new place, that we hadn't time to do much thinkin' about what was right and what was wrong till only this mornin' I happened to git hold o' that paper there, and it seems the war's about ten times worse than ever, and when Mose came in and I showed it to him, and he read it through, he jest give me a look, and says he,

'You're right. I ain't got no business here. I'm off.' And off he went. That's all; and I'm proud of him."

The deputy marshal groaned. "Don't I tell you they won't have him? The minute they lay eyes on him he's a dead man. I don't believe the President himself could save him."

"Why don't you save him yourself?" put in a new voice, abruptly.

Mr. Hazzard turned and beheld Job, who had come up with his axe and a huge armful of wood. He threw these down, brushed his sleeve, and nodded to the deputy marshal.

"How'd do, Norm," he said now. "Why don't you go and stop him yourself?"

Hazzard half-closed one of his eyes, and contemplated Job with a quizzical expression. "Hello, youngster!" he remarked. "You're lookin' after these loons, heh? Well, I wonder you didn't put a veto on this tomfoolery. You're the only party in this camp that seems to have any sense."

"They wouldn't have listened to me," rejoined Job. "They were both too red-hot about the thing to listen to anybody. I thought it was foolishness myself, but they didn't ask me, and so I went and chopped wood and minded my own business. But it'd be different with you. If you could manage to overtake Mose, he'd listen to you. You can catch him if you run."

The deputy marshal on the instant had tossed aside his rod, and was hurriedly getting off his basket and pack.

"I'll have a try for it, anyway," he said. "But it'd be jest like Mose to put his back up and refuse to come, even after I'd caught him."

"Tell him his father wants him to come back," suggested Job. "That'll fetch him. Here, Asa," the boy continued, "give us that ring there. Norm can take that and show it to him as a sign that you've changed your mind. That's the way they do it in the story-books. That's all rings are for, accordin' to them."

"But I don't know as I *hev* changed my mind," old Asa began hesitatingly, but with his fingers on the ring.

"Well, you'll have time to do that while Norm's gone," commented Job.

With grave insistence he took the old rubber ornament from Asa's hand and gave it to Hazzard. "Keep on this side of the outlet," he added. "There's a clear path most of the way. You can get down the big falls by the stones if you go out close to the stream. You'll catch him easy this side of the Raquette."

The deputy marshal wheeled and started down the clearing on a long-stride, loping run, like a greyhound. Almost as they looked he was lost to sight among the trees beyond.

It occurred to Nelse Hornbeck now to relieve himself of his pack and accoutrements, and to make himself otherwise at home. He lighted his pipe, and stretched himself out comfortably on the roots of a stump by the doorway.

“Well,” he remarked after a little, “I allus said I’d ruther have a pack of nigger bloodhounds after me than Norm Hazzard if I’d done anything that I wanted to git away for. But of course this is different. I don’t know how much good he’ll be tryin’ to catch a man that ain’t done anything. I s’pose it would be different, wouldn’t it? But then of course he could pretend to himself that Mose had done something—and for that matter, all he’s got to do is to play that Mose is still a deserter; and of course if you come to that, why, he *is* a deserter.”

“He ain’t nothing of the kind!” roared old Asa, with vehemence.

“Well, of course, Asy, if you say so,” Nelse hastened to get in, with a pacific wave of his pipe, “I don’t pretend to be no jedge myself in military affairs; I dessay you’re right. Of course Mose is in one place, and the army’s in another, but that don’t prove that it wasn’t the army that deserted Mose, does it? I’m a man of

peace myself, and I don't set up to be no authority on these p'int's."

"Well, then, what are you talkin' about?" interposed Job, severely. "Don't you see old Asa's upset and nervous about Mose? Tell us about things you know something about. How's old Teachout?"

"Well, now, cur'ous enough," said Nelse, thoughtfully, "that's jest one of the things I don't know about at all, and nobody else knows, either—that is, this side o' Jordan. 'Lishe Teachout's ben dead of inflammation o' the lungs now—le's see—up'ards of a month. Why, come to think of it, Asy, why, yes, he ketched his cold goin' out to attend the sheriff's sale at your old place, and that daughter of his that run away with the lightnin'-rod agent—you remember?—she's come in for the hull property, and they say she's goin' to sell it and live down in New York. I guess she'll scatter the money right and left. And 'Lishe worked hard for it, too!"

Old Asa cast a ruminant glance over the

little shanty, and the clearing full of warm sunshine, and the broad belt of stately dark firs beyond rustling their boughs in soft harmony with the tinkle of the stream below, and swaying their tall tops gently against the light of bright blue overhead. Then he drew a long, restful breath.

“There’s things a heap sight better than money in this world,” he said.

Mose had started out on his impulsive errand buoyantly enough. He made his way down the side hill to the outlet with a light, swinging step, and pushed along on the descent of the creek-bed, leaping from boulder to boulder, and skirting the pools with the agility of a practised woodsman, almost as if his mission were a joyful one.

At the outset, indeed, his ruling sensation was one of relief. He had had four months and more of solitude here in the woods, from New Year’s through till the weary winter broke at last, in which to think over his performance.

He could not bring himself to regret having come home; the thought that it had saved his father's life settled *that*. But side by side with this conclusion had grown up an intense humiliation and disgust for the necessities which had forced upon him this badge of "deserter." Granted that they were necessities, the badge was an itching and burning brand none the less.

The excitement and change involved in the coming of Asa and Job had drawn his attention away from this for a time, but the sore remained unhealed. With the chance occurrence of the newspaper, and the sight of its effect upon his father, the half-forgotten pain reasserted itself with such stinging force that the one great end in life seemed to be to escape from its intolerable burden.

In this mood of shame and self-reproach, Mose had jumped with hot eagerness at the notion of returning to the ranks, and rushed with unthinking haste to put it into effect.

As the thought came to him now that perhaps this haste had also been unfeeling, he unconsciously slackened the pace at which he was descending the ravine. His father was once more in good health and vigor, no doubt, and was as eager as he himself about having the odium of desertion washed from the family name, if not more eager than he; but Mose began to wish that they had talked it over a little more — that he had made his leave-taking longer and less abrupt.

The war seemed to have become a much bloodier and deadlier thing than he had known it. That paper had spoken of a full hundred thousand men having been lost between the Wilderness and Cold Harbor. It was quite likely that he now, as he swung along down the waterway, was going to his death. In his present mood this had no personal terrors for him, but it did cast a chill shadow over his thoughts of his father.

They two had chosen their own life to-

gether — with all the views and aims of other men's lives put quite at one side. Their happiness had not been in making money, in getting fine clothes, or houses, or lands, but just in being together, with the woods and the water and the sky about them.

Oddly enough, Mose remembered now, for the first time almost since his escape from the lines at Brandy Station, that if it had not been for that wretched Teach-out mortgage, he need never have gone to the war at all. The draft would have exempted him, as the only support of an aged father. That seemed at first sight to justify him in leaving as he did, and he walked still more slowly now to think this over.

But no, nothing justified him. Perhaps his father's suffering condition excused him in some measure — gave him the right to say that under the circumstances he would do the same thing again; but that wasn't a justification.

So Mose worried his perplexed mind with the confusing moral problems until in sheer self-defence he had to shake them all off, root and branch, and say to himself, "At any rate I'm on my way back; I'm started, and I'll go."

He had halted, as he grasped this solution of the puzzle, to draw breath and look about him. He stood on a jutting spur of naked granite, overhanging the steep, shelving hillside, and commanding a vast panorama of sloping forest reaches, with broken gleams here and there of the Raquette waters way below, and with range upon range of fir-clad mountain cones rising in basins beyond.

It dawned upon him, as his glance wandered over this stupendous prospect, that he had heard at intervals a curious noise in the woods over at his left, as of some big body making its way through the underbrush in haste. If he had had a gun with him he reflected now that he might have investigated the matter.

The sounds seemed more like those made by a bear than by a deer—perhaps more like a moose than either. Mose had never had the fortune to see a moose. It would be just his luck, he thought, with a half-grin, to see one now, when he had no gun, and was quitting the woods forever.

Hark! there was the noise again, below and ahead of him now, but still to the left. He thought he almost saw a dark object push through the bushes, hardly a dozen yards away.

Mose leaped lightly down upon the moss at the base of his perch, and crept cautiously along under the ledge of rock, the cover of which would protect him quite to within a few feet of these bushes. Reaching this point, he lifted his head to look.

His astonished gaze rested upon no moose or bear, or other denizen of the wild wood, but took in at point-blank instead the lean and leathery countenance of Deputy Marshal Norman Hazzard. It in no wise lessened Mose's confusion to note

that this unlooked-for countenance wore a somewhat sardonic grin.

"Well, Mose," Mr. Hazzard observed, "I learnt last winter that a stern chase was a long chase, and I thought this time I'd make a slicker job of it by headin' you off, and gittin' 'round in front. See?"

"Yes, I see," said Mose, mechanically; but in truth he felt himself quite unable to see at all. This sudden intrusion of the officer of the law between him and his patriotic resolve, this apparition of the man who had hunted him into the wintry woods with a revolver, seemed to change and confuse everything.

There rose in him the impulse to throw himself fiercely upon the deputy marshal; then, oddly enough, he was conscious of a chuckling sense of amusement instead.

"Guess I got the laugh on you this time, Norm," he said. "You've had your hull trip for nothin'. I'm on my way now, of my own motion, to jine my regiment, or enlist somewhere else, I don't care which."

Mr. Hazzard ostentatiously drew a revolver from his pocket.

"I ain't got any handcuffs with me," he remarked, "but you'll do well to bear in mind that I ain't at all shy about firin' this here, if there's any need for it."

"But I tell you I'm goin' of my own accord!" Mose expostulated. "If you had a hull battery of twelve-pounders with you, I couldn't do no more'n that, could I? You can come along down with me if you like—the hull way—only there's no use o' your bein' disagreeable and goin' round pullin' revolvers."

The deputy marshal did not put up the weapon, and the grin on his face grew deeper.

"Nobody, to look at you," said he, "would think you'd give an officer like me more trouble than any other man in the district. I had about the hottest run on record to chase you safely into the woods here. And now, by gum, here I've had to gallop myself all out of breath, barkin' my

shins and skinnin' my elbows in a rough-and-tumble scoot through the underbrush, all to keep you from makin' a fool of yourself agin! It's enough to make a man resign office."

Mose stared at the speaker — puzzled by the smile even more than by this unintelligible talk.

"See here," Norman Hazzard went on, "I represent Uncle Sam, don't I? Well, then, Uncle Sam has to be pretty rough on fellows that shirk, and run away, and behave mean — but he's got a heart inside of him all the same. He knows about you, and he understands that while you did a very bad thing, you did it from first-rate motives. So he says to himself, 'Now if that fellow Mose comes around and pokes himself right under my nose, I'll be obliged to shoot him jest for the effect upon the others; but if he's only got sense enough to lay low, and keep on my blind side, why, I won't hurt a hair of his head.' *Now* do you see?"

“You mean that I’m to stay here?” asked Mose, in bewilderment.

“I mean that you’re a dead man if you don’t,” replied Hazzard. “Of course my business is to arrest you, and take you back to be shot. But I ain’t workin’ at my trade this week — I’m fishin’. And so I tell you to come back with me, and cook us some trout for supper and shut up, that’s all.”

“But my father,” stammered Mose, “he was as sot on my goin’ back as I was — this ‘deserter’ business has been a-stickin’ in his crop all winter.”

“No, it’s all right,” said Hazzard. “I’ve explained it to him. Here’s the ring you give him — to show that he understands it. The fact is, he and you ain’t got any business to live outside the woods. You’re both too green and too soft to wrastle ’round down amongst folks. They cheat you out of your eye-teeth, and tromple you underfoot, and drive you to the poorhouse or the jail. Jest you and Asa stay up here

where you belong, and don't you go down any more, foolin' with that buzz-saw that they call 'civilization.'"

Then the two men turned and began together the ascent of the outlet.

That is the story. A good deal of it I heard from Mose Whipple's own lips, at different times, years after the war, when we sat around the huge fire in front of his shanty in the evening, with the big stars gleaming overhead, and the barking of the timber wolves coming to us from the distant mountain side, through the balmy night silence.

Generally Ex-Sheriff Norman Hazzard was one of our fishing party, and he never failed to joke with Mose about the time when he fired ten shots at a running target, and missed every one.

I picked up from their numerous conversations too,—for Mose, like all the old-time Adirondack guides, would rather talk any time than clean fish or chop fire-wood,—that Asa lived to be a very old Asa

indeed, and that young Job Parshall, whom Hazzard took away with him, saw through school, and then set up in business, was already being talked of for supervisor in his native town.

A DAY IN THE WILDERNESS.

A DAY IN THE WILDERNESS.



CHAPTER I.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

THE rising sun lifted its first curved rim of dazzling light above the dark line of distant treetops just as the brigade band began a new tune — “The Faded Coat of Blue.” The musicians themselves, huddled together under the shelter of a mound of rocks where the road descended into the ravine, did not get their share of this early morning radiance, but remained in the shadows.

Only a yard or two away from the outermost drummer-boy these shadows ended, and a picture began that was full of action and color, and flooded with golden sunshine.

The bandsmen, as they played, observed

this picture, and thanked their stars they were no part of it. Better a whole life spent in the shade, than sunlight at such a price as was being paid for it out there in the road!

This road had never before been anything but a narrow, grass-grown, out-of-the-way track for mule-carts. Now it had become the bed of a broad, endless, moving human flood—filling it compactly from side to side, with ever a fresh wave of blue-coated men entering at the rear, where the scrub-oak opening began, and ever a front wave gliding off downward from view with that sinister slipperiness which arches the brow of a cataract.

The sense of motion conveyed by these thousands of passing men was at its perfection of rhythm just opposite the band. They were marching in eights, so close together that they trod continually on any lagging heel.

The ranks, when they first came in view, seemed pressing forward without much

order. Then, as they drew close to the musicians, they fell into step instinctively, swung along in swaying unison for a few rods, and again lapsed into jagged irregularity as they swept downward behind the rock.

It was indeed only this shifting section of the dozen nearest ranks that could catch the strains of the band. The others, whether in van or rear, moved on with their hearing numbed by a ceaseless and terrible uproar which came from the ravine in front, and, mounting upward, seemed to shake the earth on which they trod.

The musicians might blow themselves red in the face, the drummers beat the strained sheepskins to bursting, and make no headway against this din of cannon.

The men of Boyce's brigade, as they came into the little space where they could hear the music above the artillery, and caught the step it was setting, hardly looked that way, but pushed forward with eyes straight ahead, and grave, drawn faces on which the cheerful sunlight seemed a mockery.

When the band had finished "The Faded Coat of Blue" the sky was still clear overhead, but from the gully below a dense cloud of smoke had spread upward to choke the morning light. While the bandsmen paused, blowing their instruments clear and breathing hard, this smoke began to thicken the air about the rock which sheltered them.

In a minute more the front figures of the endless moving chain before them seemed to be walking off into a fog, and the atmosphere was all at once heavy with the smell of gunpowder.

Curiously enough, the men's faces brightened at this. There came a block now somewhere on the road ahead, and the column halted. The regimental flags, with the color-guard, were just abreast of the band. The sergeant took out his knife to cut one of the furling strings that was in a hard knot, and untied the rest, shaking out the silken folds of the banners.

"I always untie 'em when we get into the smoke," he said, speaking at large.

The drummer-boy nearest the road moved over to study the flags. He held his head to one side and scrutinized them critically.

"No bullet holes in 'em yet, to speak of, I notice," he remarked to the sergeant, raising a clear, sharp young voice above the universal racket. "Guess you'll get enough to-day to make up!" he added.

The old sergeant nodded his head. "Something besides flags will get holes in 'em, too," he returned, lifting his voice also, like a man talking in the teeth of a roaring gale.

"What are you? Michiganders?" shouted the boy.

"No — Ohio!" the sergeant bawled back. "When they changed the corps, they brigaded us all up fresh, so that we don't know our own mothers. We've got in with some New Yorkers that ain't got no more sense than to chew fine-cut tobacco. You can't raise a plug in a whole regiment of 'em. Regular pumpkin-heads!"

"They'll show you fellows the way, down

below there, though!" retorted the boy, his injured state pride adding shrillness to his tone. "Ohio's no good, anyhow!"

He instinctively moved beyond reach of the sergeant's boot, as he passed this last remark. Some of the men in the crowded ranks close by laughed at his impudence, and he himself was grinning with a sense of successful repartee, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. He looked up, and found himself confronting a young, fair-faced officer, who was regarding him with gravely gentle eyes.

"Don't say that about any men who are going out to die," this officer said; and though he did not seem to be speaking loudly, the words fell very distinctly. "I've got a brother at home about your size. So have lots of the rest of us here. We want to carry down there with us a pleasant notion of the last boy we saw."

"I was only fooling!" the drummer-boy rejoined.

There was no time for further words, as

the preparatory rattle on the drum-edge behind warned him. In another minute he was back in his place, and the band was hurling forth into the general uproar the strains of "The Red, White, and Blue."

The column had begun to move again. The flags, the color-guard, the young officer with the sad, gentle eyes, had passed downward out of sight, and company after company of their regiment came pressing onward now.

The boy, as he kept up with his part of the familiar work, watched these Ohio men swing past. They seemed young fellows, for the most part, and their uniforms were significantly new and clean. Everything about them showed that they were going under fire for the first time, though they pushed forward as stoutly as veterans. The boy found himself hoping that a good many of these Ohio men would come back all right—and most of all that young officer who had a brother about his size.

All this while a group of field officers

had been standing on the ridge up above the rocky mound which sheltered the band. Their figures, with broad hats and big-cuffed gauntlets, had grown indistinct against the sky as the smoke thickened. Now they gave up trying to follow through their glasses the movements in the vale below, and turned to descend.

Their horses, which men had been holding near the musicians, were hastily brought forward, and the general and his staff sprang into the saddle and trotted over toward the road.

The end of the column was in view, with its disorder of servants, baggage-carriers, soldiers who had lost their places, and behind, the looming canvas covers of ambulance-wagons and the train. Into the thick of this straggling mass General Boyce, sitting splendidly erect and with a bold smile on his rosy-cheeked face, spurred his way, and the staff in turn clattered after him down out of sight. The brigade had passed, and the band stopped playing.

Files of mules, heavily laden with stacks of cartridge-boxes, were still pouring along the road and being whacked down the ravine path; but the big wagons, as they came, halted, and were drawn off into the field to the left. Tall poles were taken out and set up. Coils of rope were unwound, stakes driven, and huge cylinders of canvas unrolled on the grass.

Soon there arose the gray outlines of tents — one dominating structure fully thirty yards long, and around it, like little mushrooms about the parent stool, a number of smaller tents, some square, some conical. The drummer-boy, his task ended, sauntered over with his companions toward the tents.

He paused to watch the heavy folds of canvas being hauled up to the ridge-pole of the big one. In one way it recalled those preparations on the old circus-ground at home which he used to watch with such zest. But in another way it was strangely different.

While some men tugged at the ropes or drove in stakes for the guy-lines, others were busy bringing from the wagons rolls of blankets and huge trusses of straw. Even before the roof was secure scores of rude beds were being spread on the trampled grass underneath.

Bearded and spectacled men, dressed after the fashion of officers, yet clearly not soldiers at all, were directing everything now. Among them, here and there, flitted young women, clad also in a sort of uniform, who seemed busiest of all.

No, this was decidedly different from a circus tent. The thunder of the batteries on the other side of the ridge was alone enough to throw a solemn meaning over this long, barn-like house of ropes and cloths. It was the brigade hospital-tent, and the hundreds of active hands at work could hardly hope to have it ready before it was needed.

It was the morning of the second day of the Battle of the Wilderness. The

men of Boyce's brigade knew only vaguely, by hearsay, of what had happened on that terrible yesterday. They themselves, forming the rear-guard of the great army, had been nearly the last to cross the Rapidan on the swinging pontoon bridge of Germania ford. They had had a night's forced march; a two hours' nap in the open starlight; a hasty bite of rations at half-past three in the morning, and now this plunge in the chilly twilight of sunrise down into the unknown.

There had been, just before the general advance across the Rapidan, a wholesale shaking-up of army organization. Two whole corps had been abolished, and their strength distributed among the three remaining corps. Regiments found themselves suddenly torn from their old associates, and brigaded with strangers. Their pet officers disappeared, and others took their places whom the men did not know and were disposed to dislike.

To add to this discontent, there was an

understanding that their leaders had been entrapped into this Wilderness fighting. Certainly it was no place which an invading army would have chosen for battle.

It was a vast, sprawling forest district, densely covered with low timber, scrub-oak, dwarf junipers, and tangled cedars and pines, all knit together breast-high and upward with interlacing wild vines, and foul underfoot with swamp or thicket.

In this gloomy and sinister wilderness men did not know where they were, nor whom they were fighting. Whole commands were lost in the impenetrable woods. Mounted orderlies could not get about through the underbrush, and orders sent out were never delivered.

Though gulches and steep ravines abounded, cutting sharp gashes through the forest, there were no hills upon which a general and his keen-eyed staff might perch themselves and get an idea of how the land about them lay. The Confederates had plenty of this local knowledge,

and used it to terrible purpose. The invaders could only put their heads down, and strive to crush their way blindly through.

After a little, the drummer-boy put his snare-drum in the wagon where the other instruments were, and started off up the ridge, to see what the general and his staff had been observing earlier in the morning.

As he neared the summit, he noticed that the roar of the cannon directly in front seemed to have died down a good deal. There were still angry outbursts, but one had to wait for them now; and a new kind of noise, made up of peal after peal of crackling musketry fire, was rising from the gully farther to the left.

The boy had come now to the top of the ridge, only to find it crowned with a thick fringe of alders which completely shut out his view. From the roots of the farther bushes the hillside dropped precipitously. He worked his way along until, by a cleft in the rocks, an opening offered itself.

Here, stooping low and bending aside the alders, he could creep out upon a big, flat, moss-grown boulder, which overhung the ravine like a balcony. He had not thought he was so high up. The other side of the gulf spread out before him could not be seen for the smoke—but the tops of tall pines growing on its bottom were far below him.

The steepness of the descent made him dizzy. The rock on which he stood seemed to be suspended in mid-air. He drew back a little. Then curiosity got the upper hand. He laid himself face down on the boulder, and edged cautiously forward till he could peer over its front.

The fog-like smoke was so dense that at first he could see nothing. Even when the bearings of the land below, masked as it all was under forest, began to be apparent to him, his ears were still the best guide to what was going on. The confused sound of men's shouts and yells mingled now with the intermittent volleys

of musketry to the left. The cannon-firing had stopped altogether.

He discovered all at once that a good many of the tree-tops in front of him seemed to have been broken off very recently. Some were hanging to the trunks by their bark; everywhere the splinters were white and fresh. Now that he listened more intently, there were weird whistling noises among these shattered boughs and an incessant dropping of leaves and twigs.

Suddenly a big branch not far away shook violently, then toppled downward. At the same moment a swift ringing buzz sounded just over his head, and a bunch of alder-blossoms fell upon one of his hands. He pulled himself back abruptly.

Crawling backward out through the alders, he did not venture to lift his head until there was a comfortable wall of rocks between him and that murderous ravine. Then, getting to his feet, he looked amazed down upon the brigade camp, which he

had left an hour before. The big tent, and the little ones about it, only a while ago the scene of such bustling activity, were all deserted.

Some of the wagons could be seen rolling and bumping off toward the road to the left under drivers who stood up to lash their teams. The white, canvas-hooped tops were the centres of wild confusion.

Other drivers were scurrying off on horseback, leading with them in a frantic gallop groups of the team horses, pulled along by their bunched reins. The people on foot—doctors, nurses, camp-guards and the rest—were all racing pell-mell toward the road for dear life.

Thunderstruck at the spectacle, the boy turned to the right. A long, double line of men had come out through the woods in which the ridge lost itself, and were advancing upon the camp at a sharp run. They seemed dressed in a sort of mud-colored uniform, and they raised a sharp

whoop of triumph as they came. At the farther end of the line, some of these men lifted their guns as they ran, and fired into the receding mass of fugitives.

Down in front, meantime, the foremost of the advancing line had reached the camp and entered upon possession. They had begun overhauling the captured wagons, and were tossing out loaves of bread and hardtack boxes, which their comrades fell upon eagerly. The boy reflected now that he himself was hungry, and he scratched his head with perplexity.

The sound of panting breath close beside him made him turn swiftly. A man had clambered up the side of the ridge, away from the camp, and had rushed up to him, his eyes starting from his head with excitement. He waved something like a short stick, with wild gestures, and tried to shout, but could only pant instead.

He stopped as he came up, stared at the boy, then shook his head dolefully as he gasped for breath.

"Is dot you, Lafe?" he managed to groan. "Oh, my jiminy priest!"

"Look out!" cried the boy. "Lie down!"

Some of the men below had caught sight of them, and two or three sparks and jets of smoke told that they were being fired at. Though they were probably beyond range, it was safer behind the alders, so the two crawled out on the overhanging ledge.

"I say, Foldeen, have they scooped the old band wagon? I couldn't see from here," was the boy's first remark.

"Dey von't get 'em my flute, anyhow," the other responded, holding proudly forth the ebony stock with its silver keys, which he had been waving so vehemently. "I don't catch me putting him in de bant vagon."

Even as he spoke he clutched the boy fiercely by the arm, with a smothered exclamation of horror. The rock on which they crouched had stirred from its foundations, and as the two instinctively strove to turn themselves, it lurched outward, and went crashing down the steep declivity.

CHAPTER II.

LAFE RECONNOITRES THE VALLEY.

ON the river road below the tannery, away back in New York State, there stood for many years a small house, always surrounded in summer by sunflowers and hollyhocks and peonies that enwrapped it as in a beautiful garment. It seemed that flowers grew nowhere else as they did for the Widow Hornbeck.

There was no other such show of lilacs in Juno Mills as that which early May brought for her front yard. The climbing roses which covered the whole front and side of the poor little house were only of the simple, old sorts, — the Baltimore Belle, the yellow Scotch and the ordinary pink brier, — but they bore thick clusters of delightful blossoms. And in the fall, when

the frosts had nipped and blackened other people's flowers, the asters and nasturtiums and gladiolus in this wee patch appeared unhurt by the weather.

When there was to be a wedding in the village, or some celebration at the church or the school-house, the children always went to the Widow Hornbeck to beg for flowers. Often they found her sitting out in her yard among the plants she loved — a mild-faced, patient little woman, with thin, bent shoulders and hair whitened before its time; and she would be poring through her spectacles over the same big Book spread open on her knees.

The spectacle of Mrs. Hornbeck and her family Bible, framed like a picture, in vines and flowering shrubs, grew pleasantly familiar to everybody in the district. Strangers driving past used to stop their buggies and admire the place; and they, too, seeing the white-haired owner sitting there, would feel that her presence added to the charm of the scene

The widow died suddenly one day in the autumn of 1863. She was found quite lifeless, seated as of old in the garden, with the old patient, wistful half-smile on her face, and the old Book spread open in her lap.

The village was sad for a day or two, and gently touched for a fortnight. Then the widow had been forgotten, and the family Bible had vanished. The cottage was taken for the mortgage upon it, and its meagre contents went the way of humble, ownerless things. Mrs. Hornbeck had been very poor, and nothing was left for her son.

In that family Bible had been written the names of some score of Hornbecks. Against all these names but two a date of death had also been inscribed. One of these two names, the last in the list, was that of the boy, now made an orphan, the Benjamin of the widow's flock. He was described on the yellowed page, in his mother's scrawling hand, as "Washington Lafayette Hornbeck, born April 30, 1850."

In real life he had always been known as "Lafe."

He grew up a brown-skinned, hardy sort of ordinary boy, whose face might suggest some acuteness and more resolution, but whom nobody thought of calling good-looking.

He turned out to be the best wrestler among the village lads of his age, and he was also the strongest swimmer of all the lot who used to go down, of a summer evening, to dive off the spring-board into the deep pool below the mill-dam. This raised him a good deal in the esteem of the boys, but somehow their elders were not so much impressed by "Lafe's" qualities.

He had to work, and he did work, but always at some new job — now berry-picking, now stripping willows for the basket factory, now packing "heave-powders" for the local horse-doctor. He had been employed in the mills and in the tannery, and he had once travelled for a month as the

assistant of a tin-peddler, not to mention various experiments in general farm-work.

People hardly blamed Lafe for this lack of steadiness in employment. They said it was in his blood. All the Hornbecks since any one could remember had been musicians—playing the fiddle or whatever else you liked at country dances, and some of them even journeying to distant parts as members of circus or minstrel bands.

It was felt that a boy from such a roving stock could scarcely be expected to tie himself down to regular work.

Doubtless Lafe felt this, too, for as soon as he began thinking what he should do, after the shock of his mother's death, he found himself wishing to be a drummer-boy. The notion struck all the neighbors as quite appropriate. Lafe was a capital drummer. Kind old Doctor Peabody went with him to Tecumseh, saw the head recruiting officer at the big barracks there, and arranged matters for him.

Lafe was sent forward to New York, and

thence to headquarters at the front. Men liked him, and his lifelong familiarity with instruments made him a handy boy to have about. Before long he was taken out of the little company drum-corps, and promoted to the big brigade band.

This very morning, when he went up from the hospital camp to the ridge where he hoped to see the fighting beyond, he had been thinking whether this promotion had been what he wanted.

All his dreams had been of action — of brave drummer-boys who went into battle with the fifes, and stood through it all by the side of the file-leader, valiantly pounding their sheep-skins as the shot and shell screamed past, and men pitched headlong, and officers were hurled from their horses, and the fight was lost or won.

Alas! a brigade band never got so much as a whiff of actual warfare, but tamely stayed about in camp, playing selections outside the general's headquarters while he ate his dinner, or contributing its

quota to the ceremonial of a Sunday dress-parade.

Perhaps nothing more was to be looked for during the long winter in peaceful quarters at Brandy Station; but now that spring had come, and the grand advance was begun, and battles were in the air all about them—even now the bandsmen merely gave the warriors a tune or two to start them off, and then ingloriously loafed around the camp till they returned, or did not return, as the case might be. One might almost as well have stayed at home in Juno Mills!

The great rock on which Lafe and the German flute-player Foldeen had taken their station gave way beneath them, as was stated in the last chapter, and smashed its way down the steep hillside, crushing the brush and rooting up vines as it went, snapping saplings like pipestems, and bowling over even trees of a larger growth. It brought up almost at the bottom of the hill, in the heart of a clump of sturdy cedars.

A long gash of earth laid bare and of foliage ripped and strewn aside stretched up the incline to mark the track of the fallen boulder. Half-way up this pathway of devastation a boy presently appeared.

Lafe had crawled up out of the débris of saplings, boughs, and tangled creepers into which he had been hurled, and clambered over now to the open space. Then he stood looking up and down in a puzzled way, rubbing his head. His clothes were torn a good deal, he had lost his cap, and he was conscious of numerous bruises under these damaged clothes of his.

There was blood on the palm of his hand, which had come from his head. So far as feeling could guide him, this, however, was nothing but a scalp scratch. He cared more about the tremendous bark one of his shins had got, close up under his knee. When he took his first aimless steps, this had already stiffened, and was hurting him.

Suddenly he remembered that he had

not been alone on the rock. Foldeen Schell had been with him, and had grabbed his arm just as everything gave way under them. His wits were still wool-gathering under the combined scare and tumble, and he began mechanically poking about among the underbrush at his feet, as if the missing flute-player might be hidden there. Or was he hunting for his cap? For a dazed minute or two he hardly knew.

Then the sense of bewilderment lifted itself, and was gone. Lafe straightened himself, and looked comprehensively about him.

“Foldeen!” he shouted shrilly, and then bent all his powers of hearing for a reply. There came no answering call.

The air was full of other sounds—the rattling echoes of musketry-firing and the boom of bigger guns, some far off, others seemingly near, all mingling here among the thicket recesses in a subdued, continuous clamor. Perhaps shouting was of no use.

Lafe climbed up the hill a dozen yards or so, to a point where he could go no farther, and scrutinized his surroundings carefully. The impenetrable wall of foliage shut out the valley from him even more completely than when he was on the ridge. He called again and again, and explored the bushes on either side, to no purpose.

Limping slowly down the track cleared by the passing rock, he continued his search to the right and left. He knew so little of how he himself had escaped death that there was nothing to help him guess how it had fared with his companion.

He had not known much about this missing bandsman heretofore, save that he seemed to be the best fellow among the three or four German musicians which the band contained. The boy, like the rest, spoke and thought of all these alien comrades as "Dutchmen," and he was far from comprehending that that outlandish name "Foldeen" was only a corruption of "Valentine." But a common misfortune binds

swift ties, and Lafe, as he kept up his quest, began to think of Schell quite affectionately.

He recalled how good-tempered he had always been; how he alone had made jokes on the long march, when the cold and driving rain had soured every one else, and empty stomachs grumbled to keep company with aching bones.

Reflecting upon this, Lafe realized that he was very fond of the "Dutchman," and would be in despair if he had come to grief.

"Foldeen!" he yelled out again.

"Sh! sh! geeb quiet!" came a guttural reply, from somewhere near by.

The boy's heart lightened on the instant. He looked hastily about him with a cheerful eye, trying to trace the direction of the voice. "Where are you?" he demanded, in a lower tone.

For answer, the blue-coated German rose from a cover of brush, away down the hill, and beckoned him, enforcing at the same time by emphatic gestures the importance of coming noiselessly.

Lafe stole down furtively, and in a minute was bending close beside Foldeen in shrubby shelter.

"Get hurt any?" Lafe asked, subduing his voice almost to a whisper in deference to the other's visible anxiety.

Foldeen shook his head. "It is much worse," he murmured back. "I have my flute lost."

The boy could not but smile. "We can thank our stars we weren't both smashed to atoms," he observed.

"Sh-h! don't talk!" Foldeen adjured him, and indicated with a sidewise nod of the head that special reasons for silence lay in that direction.

Lafe edged himself forward, and looked out through the bushes. They were on the crest of a little mound which jutted out slightly from the descending face of the hillside. The bottom of the ravine lay only thirty feet or so below them.

Save for scattered clumps of dwarf firs, hardly higher than the mullein stalks about

them, the ground was clear, and the short grass told Lafe's practised eye that it was pasture land. Beyond, there was the gravelled bed of a stream, along which a small rivulet wandered from side to side.

At the first glance his eye had taken in various splashes of color dotting the grass, which suggested bluebells. He saw now that these were made by the uniforms of men, who lay sprawled in various unnatural postures, flat on the green earth. Most of them were on their faces, and not one of them stirred. Lafe moved his head about among the screening bushes, and was able to count twenty-six of these motionless figures.

The boy had seen such sights before, and had even helped bring in the wounded from the field of Payne's Farm during the most of a long, cold night in the previous November. This experience guided him now to remark a curious thing. No muskets, knapsacks, or canteens were scattered about beside these fallen men. And another odd detail — they were all barefooted.

"Some one's been along, after the fighting was over, and skinned everything clean," he muttered to his companion.

Foldeen nodded again, and once more held up a warning hand. He himself was intently watching something beneath, from his side of the leafy cover. The boy shifted his position, and craning his neck over the other's shoulder, saw that just below them, where the ascent began, there stretched a rough, newly made ridge of sods, fence rails and tree-tops, which had evidently been used as a breastwork.

Behind this there were other human forms, also lying prone, but clad in gray or butternut instead of blue. Here, too, there was no sign of life, but only that fixed absence of motion to which the remote thunder of gun-fire gave such a bitter meaning.

"Anybody there?" whispered the boy.

"I dink so," returned Foldeen, under his breath. "Dere is some, what you call it, hanky-banky, goes on here. Look yourself!"

He moved aside, and Lafe crowded into his place, and put his head out cautiously through the bushes. In one corner of the breastwork there was to be seen a big pile of accoutrements — knapsacks, muskets, swords, water-bottles, and the like, as well as a heap of old boots and miscellaneous foot-gear.

“Vell, how you make it out?” asked Foldeen.

Lafe drew in his head. “The way I figure it,” he whispered, “is first, that they held this place against our men, and drove ’em off. Then they went out, and gathered up these traps, and brought ’em in there. Then some more of our men came along, and chased them out. That’s what it looks like.”

“Well, den, vare is gone dem second men of ours?” the German demanded.

“They’ve gone after ’em, up the valley, there.”

Foldeen shook his head. “Dey don’t do such foolishness,” he objected. “Ven dey

take some place like dis, den dey shtick to him. I know so much, if I do blay mid the band."

"There'd be rations in the knapsacks," mused Lafe, after a pause. He had never been so hungry before in his life.

"What do you say to sneaking down there, and trying to find something to eat?" he suggested. "Come on!" he added persuasively. "There's nobody down there that—nobody that we need be afraid of."

"Vell, I am afraid, dot's all," responded Foldeen.

"They can't do more than make us prisoners," urged the boy, "and that's better than starving to death. Come on! I'm going to make a try."

The German took his companion by the arm. "See here," he explained; "ven dey catch you, dot's all right. You are prisoner; dot's all. Ven dey catch me, den it goes one, two, dree—bang, und den Foldeen Schell addends his own funeral. Dot's the difference by you und me."

“Nonsense!” said Lafe. “They don’t shoot anybody in the band.”

“Anyhow, dey shoot me out of de band,” persisted Foldeen, gloomily. “I was in dot oder army myself, sometimes.”

The boy drew a long breath of enlightened surprise, which was almost a whistle.

“Well, then, you stay here,” he said, after a little, “and I’ll take a look at the thing by myself.”

Suiting the action to the word, Lafe laid hold of the stoutest saplings, and lowered himself down by his arms to the ledge below. The footing was not quite easy; but by hanging to the vines he managed to work his way obliquely across the face of the declivity, and yet keep pretty well under cover of the bushes.

Suddenly, emerging from the thicket, he found himself quite inside the breastwork, which he had entered from the open rear. The more terrible signs of the conflict which had been waged here a few hours

before forced themselves upon his attention, first of all.

He braced himself to walk past them, and to go straight to the heap of knapsacks piled up among the branches in the corner.

Lifting one of the haversacks, he opened it. There was a tin cup on top, and some woollen things which might be socks. Pushing his hand under these, he came upon some bread, and paused to express his content by a smile.

“Drop it—you!”

A loud, peremptory voice close at his shoulder caused the boy to turn with alarmed abruptness. A burly man, with a rough, sandy stubble of beard about his face, had come into the breastwork—or perhaps had been hidden there all the while.

Lafe's first impulse was one of satisfaction at noting that the stranger wore the blue Union uniform.

Then he looked into the man's face, and the instinct of pleasure died suddenly away.



“DROP IT—YOU!”

CHAPTER III.

THE BOUNTY-JUMPER.

WHEN Lafe Hornbeck looked into the countenance of the strange man who appeared thus unexpectedly before him in the deserted breastwork, it needed no second glance to tell him that he had to deal with a scoundrel. A threatening and formidable scoundrel he seemed, too, with his heavy, slouching shoulders, his long arms ending in huge, hairy hands, and the surly scowl on his low-browed, frowzy face.

He wore the dark-blue jacket and light-blue trousers of the Federal infantry, and their relative newness showed that he was a fresh recruit. His badge was the Maltese cross of the Fifth Corps, and its color, red, indicated the First Division. This was the corps and division of Boyce's brigade.

Even in the first minute of surprised scrutiny of the fellow Lafe found himself thinking that he probably belonged to that Ohio regiment which he had seen bringing up the rear of the line forming for battle.

"Drop it, I say!" the man repeated, harshly.

Lafe drew his hand from the haversack slowly and reluctantly.

"There's enough more of 'em here," he protested, nodding at the pile in the corner of the earthwork. "I haven't had a mouthful since before sunrise, and I'm hungry."

"Where'd you come from, anyway, and what business have you got here?" the other demanded, with an oath and a forward step.

"I'm Fifth Corps, same as you are," replied Lafe, making an effort to keep his voice bold and firm, "and I came here by tumbling head over heels down that hill there, right spang from top to bottom." He took courage from the indecision apparent in the man's eyes to add, "And

that's why I'm going to have something to eat."

The stranger gave a grunt, which, bad-tempered though it was, did not seem to forbid the action, and Lafe drew forth the bread again. It was dry and tasteless enough, but he almost forgot to look at his unwelcome companion in the satisfaction which he had in gulping down the food.

The man lounged over to the pile of haversacks, muskets, and clothing, and seemed to be trying to make out whether anything was missing. He grunted again, and turned to Lafe just as the last crust was disappearing.

"You're a drummer, ain't you?" he said roughly. "Where do you belong?"

Lafe held up his hand to signify that his mouth was too full to talk. "Boyce's brigade," he explained, after a little.

"That ain't what I asked. What's your regiment?"

"Haven't got any regiment," replied Lafe. "I'm in the brigade band."

“Oh!” growled the man, and turned on his heel. The information seemed to relieve his mind, for when he had taken a few loitering steps about the enclosure, and confronted Lafe again, his tone was less quarrelsome. “Left the hospital camp up there, eh?” he asked, with a sidelong nod of his head toward the top of the hill.

“Well, yes — and no,” responded the boy. “It was there when I left it, but it ain’t there now. Or rather, it *is* there, but *we* ain’t there.”

“What are you driving at?” the man demanded, once more in a rougher voice.

“The rebs have gobbled it,” said Lafe. “Our folks were skedaddling and the rebs were coming in the last I saw.”

The man gave a low whistle of surprise and interest. He began walking about again, bending his ugly brows in thought meanwhile. From time to time he paused to ask other questions, as to which way the people of the brigade camp had fled,

how large was the force which had captured the camp, and the like.

The news evidently impressed him a good deal. Lafe got the idea that somehow it changed his plans. What were these plans? the boy wondered. The whole thing was very hard to make out. More than once he had had it in mind to say that he had left another member of the band, a very nice fellow indeed, up on the side-hill above them, who must also be hungry, and to suggest that he should call him down.

But every time, when this rose to his tongue, a glance at the evil face of the man restrained him. He could not but remember what Foldeen had hinted, that there was some "deviltry" going on down below here. What was it?

"There must have been some pretty tough fighting right here," he ventured to remark, after a while.

"You bet there was!" the other assented. He seemed not averse to a little

talk, though his mind was still on other things.

"I don't quite figure it out," the boy went on, cautiously. "Of course, wrestling round in the woods like this, you can't make head nor tail of how things go, or who's on top, or where—but how does it stand—right here, I mean? We're in our own lines here, ain't we?"

The stranger fixed a long, inquiring glance upon the boy's face. Lafe returned the gaze with all the calmness he could muster. He could not help feeling that there was a good deal of stupidity in the stare under which he bore up. The man was not quick-minded; that was clear enough. But it was also plain that he was both a stubborn and a brutal creature.

"Yes," he growled, after he had stared Lafe out of countenance, "yes, these are our own lines."

The phrase seemed to tickle his fancy, for something like the beginning of a grin stirred on the stubbly surface about his

mouth. "Yes—our own lines," he repeated. How strange it was! All at once, like a flash, Lafe remembered having seen this man before. That slow, sulky wavering of a grimace on his lips betrayed him. Swiftly pursuing the clue, the boy reconstructed in his mind a scene in which this man had played the chief part.

It must have been in the early part of the previous December—just after the army went into winter quarters behind the line of the Orange railroad, cooped up in its earth-huts all the way from Culpeper Court House to Brandy Station. Lafe had gone over on leave one afternoon to the corps headquarters—it must have been of a Thursday, because there was to be a military execution the next day, and these were always fixed for Friday.

The army was then receiving almost weekly large batches of raw recruits, sent from the big cities, some the product of the draft, others forwarded by the enlistment bureaus. Among these new-comers

were many good citizens and patriots; but there were also a great many cowards and a considerable number of scoundrels who made a business of enlisting to get the bounty, deserting as soon as they could, and enlisting again from some other point.

To prevent wholesale desertions, both of the cowards and the "bounty-jumpers," the utmost vigilance was needed. Their best chance to run away was offered by picket duty, when they found themselves posted out in comparative solitude, in the dark, on the very outskirts of the army line.

To checkmate this, a cordon of cavalry had to be drawn still farther out than the pickets — cavalry-men who slept all day, and at night patrolled the uttermost confines of the great camp, watching with all their eyes and ears, ready on the instant to clap spurs and ride down any skulking wretch who could be discovered attempting his escape.

Even in the teeth of this precaution,

the attempts were continually made, and it was the rarest event for a Friday to pass without the spectacle of summary punishment being meted out to some captured deserter on the corps' shooting-ground. Often there were more than one of these victims to martial law.

Lafe now remembered how, with a boy's curiosity, he had prowled about the provost marshal's guard quarters, fascinated by the idea that inside the log shanty, where the two sentinels with fixed bayonets walked constantly up and down, there were men condemned to be shot at six the following morning.

Standing around, and gossiping amiably with these sentinels, who shared the common feeling of the army in making pets of the drummer-boys, he had managed at last to get a glimpse at one of these fated prisoners.

A face had appeared at the little window, square-cut in the logs. It was a bad, unkempt face, with a reddish stubble of

beard on jaws and cheek. There may have been some rough jest passed by the other prisoners inside the hut, for as the boy watched this face, a grim, mean sort of smile flickered momentarily over it.

Then the face itself disappeared, and left the boy marvelling that a man could grin in presence of the fact that he was to be shot on the morrow.

The smile, and the countenance it played upon for that instant of time, burned themselves into his memory. Lafe racked his brain now for some recollection of having heard that these particular prisoners were reprieved, or had succeeded in escaping from their log jail. His memory was a blank on the subject. Yet he felt sure that the face he had seen at that window was the identical face he now saw before him.

For the life of him, he could not resist the temptation to venture upon this dangerous topic.

“You’re one of the new regiments

brought over to us from the old First Corps, ain't you?" he asked, with an effort at an ingratiating tone.

The man nodded his head in indifferent assent. He seemed to be listening intently to the sounds of battle in the air. These were reduced now to faint, far-away cracklings of rifle-firing, as if only distant sharpshooters were engaged.

"Suppose this is about the first time you've been under fire, then," Lafe remarked. He added, with a bragging air: "I was all through the Payne's Farm and Mine Run racket last November! That was hot enough, I tell you!"

The man made that inarticulate grunt of contempt which we try to convey by the word humph! "So was I," he growled, "and plenty more fights worse than them."

"Oh, got your discharge and 'listed again?" commented the boy.

Again the stranger turned upon him that steady, dull stare of inquiry—like the gaze of a vicious ox. He seemed satisfied at

length with the artlessness of Lafe's countenance, but did not trouble himself to answer his suggestion.

"What do you figure on doin' with yourself?" he abruptly asked the boy, after a pause.

"How do I know?" retorted Lafe. "I'd try and join brigade headquarters, if I knew where they were, but I don't. The next best thing is to try and find some other brigade's headquarters. It's all clear enough outside here now. I guess I'll take some bread with me, and make a break through the woods down the run there. I'll fetch up somewhere, all right."

He bent over the pile of knapsacks, as if to pick one of them up.

"No," the man called out. "Leave 'em alone! You can't take no more of them rations, and you can't go down the run. You can't go anywhere."

Lafe straightened himself. "Why not?" he asked, with an assumption of boldness.

"Because you can't," the other retorted curtly.

“What can I do, then?” Lafe inquired defiantly.

The man looked him over. “You can turn up your toes to the daisies in about another minute, if you don’t mind your own business. . That’s what you can do,” he remarked, with an ugly frown.

“What’s the use of talking that way?” said Lafe. “I haven’t done you any harm, have I?”

“No—and you ain’t going to, either,” was the reply.

The stranger, as he spoke, took a two-barrelled pistol from his inside jacket-pocket. It was a beautiful weapon, ornamented with a good deal of chased silver. Lafe had seen pistols like this before, in the possession of officers, and knew that they were called Derringers. Private soldiers were not likely to carry weapons of that sort.

He was sure that this man must have stolen the pistol, and the conviction did not assist Lafe to calmness, as he observed the man push one of the hammers back

with his thumb to full-cock. It is as bad to be shot by stolen firearms as by those which have been bought and paid for.

The stranger drew from another pocket a gold watch, with a long loop of broad black silk braid hanging from its ring. He held it in the palm of his free hand, and glanced at its open face.

"It must be getting along toward noon," Lufe had the temerity to remark. There were cold shivers through his veins, but he managed to keep his tongue steady. If "cheek" could not help him, nothing could.

"About as nigh noon as you're ever likely to git," said the other, making a pretence of again consulting the watch.

Instinct told the lad with a flashlight swiftness that this looking at the watch was buncombe. Men who really meant to kill did not parade timepieces like that.

"I haven't got anything on me that would be of any use to you," he said, with an immense effort at unconcern.

“Even if I had, you wouldn’t need a gun to take it away from me.”

“You’ve got a mouth on you,” said the man, eyeing him, “and it’ll be of use to me to shut it up.”

He lifted the pistol as he spoke, and Lafe instinctively closed his eyes, with a confused rush of thoughts in which he seemed to see his old mother sitting in the garden with the Book on her knees, and also the young Ohio officer, who somehow came in among the tall flowers beside her, and these flowers themselves were the regimental flags which the color-sergeant was unfurling.

Then, as nothing happened, the boy opened his eyes again, and found himself able to look into the two black disks of the Derringer’s muzzle without flinching.

He could even look beyond the muzzle, as the barrels sloped downward toward him, and he now saw distinctly that the two little upright steel nipples bore no caps. The discovery made him annoyed

at his own cowardice. It was easier now to be bold.

“What’s your idea, anyway?” he asked the man, with an added effrontery in his tone. “If you’d been going to shoot, you’d have done it long ago. This thing doesn’t scare me at all, and I don’t see how it does you any good. What are you getting at, anyhow?”

“I’d as soon shoot you as look at you!” the other declared with angry emphasis, but lowering the weapon.

“Yes, but seeing you ain’t going to shoot, what are you going to do?” Lafe put in.

The ruffian eyed him again. “If I agree not to hurt you, will you do what I tell you?” he demanded.

“Well, maybe I will,” replied the boy. His spirits rose as his contempt for this slow and shilly-shallying sort of scoundrel increased. “What is it you want me to do?”

“I want you to help me carry some things I’ve got together over there, on the other

side of the creek. We'll go over now, and bring 'em back here."

"I'll take another bite of bread, first," it occurred to the boy to say. He lifted a haversack, and shoved in one hand to burrow among its contents, while with his foot, as if by accident, he pushed one of the muskets lengthwise so that he might grab it the more readily if occasion required.

Biting in leisurely fashion on the new crust he had found, Lafe felt emboldened to make the conversation personal.

"That's a mighty fine watch you've got there," he remarked, affably. "I suppose it went with the pistol—sort o' thrown in, like."

The man put the watch back into his trousers pocket. He seemed for a moment disposed to annoyance. Then the furtive, mean grin curled over the lower part of his face. "Yes—it was thrown in," he replied, almost with a chuckle. "Come on," he added. "You can chew that bread as you go along."

“But what am I to get?” the boy queried, slowly turning the crust over to select a place for the next bite. “Do I come in for any watches and silver-mounted Derringers, too?”

“You jest help me for all you’re worth,” replied the man, after a moment’s pause, “and I’ll see to it you git something worth your while.”

“It’s got to be something pretty good,” said Lafe, meditatively chewing on the hard bread. “A fellow can’t be expected to risk the chance of being shot for nothing.”

“There ain’t no danger of gittin’ shot,” the other replied.

“Well, hung, then,” Lafe said impudently.

“What’s that you say?” the man growled, with reawakened suspicion. “Who said anything about hangin’? What kind o’ nonsense are you talkin’, anyway?”

It might be a desperately foolish thing to do, but Lafe could not hold himself from doing it—and for that matter didn’t try.



LAFE AND THE BOUNTY-JUMPER.

“Why, they hang men caught robbing the dead on battle-fields, don't they—specially when they're bounty-jumpers to begin with?”

He had called this out as swiftly as he could, holding himself in readiness as he spoke, and now he pounced downward, and clutching the musket, lifted it for defence.

The man sprang forward with a quicker motion than the boy had counted upon, and before Lafe had got erect he felt the stifling grasp of big, hard fingers around his throat.

CHAPTER IV.

RED PETE IN CAPTIVITY.

THINGS grew black before Lafe's eyes as the iron clutch about his throat tightened. He strove desperately to twist himself loose, using in a frantic way the wrestling tricks he knew; but the grip of the bounty-jumper was too powerful. Lafe's head seemed swelling in the effort to burst, and feeling in all his body below that fatal circlet became numb. There was room for but a single thought — this was what being choked to death meant!

Afterward it never seemed to the boy that he entirely lost consciousness. He could remember that there was a violent sidewise jerk at his neck, and then the sense of intolerable squeezing there ceased.

But there was still an awful buzzing in-

side his head, and midnight blackness, shot with interlacing lines of crazy light, spread itself indefinitely about him.

Gradually he perceived that he was breathing again, and that he could feel his arms and legs once more to be parts of him. He knew that he was exceedingly tired and sleepy, and felt only that the one desirable thing was to lie still, just as he was. He mentally resolved that he would not stir nor open his eyes for anybody.

"How vas it mit you, Lafe?"

The words were undoubtedly in the air. He realized that, and lay very still, lazily confident that he would hear them again.

Things began to assort themselves in his brain. Foldeen and he had been on a big, overhanging rock, which had tumbled with them, and by some chance they hadn't both been killed, and now Foldeen was looking for him. But he would lie still and rest.

"Wake up! Lafe! Wake up!"

The boy heard these words, too. The

heavy drowsiness upon him seemed to be lifting, and he felt some one fumbling at his breast, inside his shirt. On the instant he was awake and sitting up, wonderingly staring.

A tall figure had risen away from him as he opened his eyes. The sun had come out, and was falling warm and full upon the mass of young green which covered the hillside. This erect standing figure was for a moment or two very indistinct against the dazzling light. Then Lufe made out that this was Foldeen.

Almost in the same glance he saw that he was sitting among the heap of knapsacks and battle-field débris in the corner of the breastwork. Close beside him—so near that he felt he must have been lying upon him when he recovered consciousness—sprawled the burly figure of the bounty-jumper, face downward, and quite still.

Lufe was so contented with the spectacle on which his eyes rested that it did not occur to him to ask what had happened.

It was pleasanter to look at Foldeen's honest face, beaming satisfaction back into the boy's slow and inquiring regard. The German said nothing, but just smiled at Lafe.

As the boy's memory cleared itself, the fact that Foldeen had had no breakfast, and that he had left him in his covert on the hillside with very little compunction, rose above everything else.

Lafe pointed to the knapsacks, and attempted to speak. His throat and windpipe, the roots of his tongue and everything else involved in vocal sounds, seemed at the effort to shrivel up in pain. At first he thought he could not manage to utter a syllable. Then, at the cost of some suffering, he forced out the words, "Bread — there." They sounded quite strange in his ears.

Foldeen nodded his head, still with the jubilant grin on his round, kindly face. "Ya vole," he said, in a matter-of-fact way. "But first I fix me up dis fellow dight."

He sorted out of the pile of stolen property

two officers' sashes of knitted crimson silk, and kneeling down beside the outstretched form of the bounty-jumper, proceeded calmly to bind his legs together at the ankles with one of them.

Then, with some roughness, he dragged the prostrate man's arms together till their wrists met on the small of his back, and there tied them securely.

"He ain't dead, then?" commented Lafe, his throat feeling easier.

"Vell, maybe he is," said Foldeen. "I hit him shtraight by the top of his head mit dot gun-barrel, und he vent down like if he vas a tousand bricks. But it makes nodding. Ven he is dead, den he is good tied up. Ven he is alive, den he is much better tied up. Now ve eat us our breakfast in kviet. Bread, you say? Show me dot bread."

Foldeen needed no showing, but was on the instant wolfing huge mouthfuls from the half-loaf which the nearest haversack furnished. Lafe leaned back and watched him, his mind filled with formless emotions of thanksgiving.

In such intervals as he could spare from the bread, Foldeen lightly told what had happened. From his perch up on the hill-side he had seen everything, and though beyond earshot, had been able to follow pretty well what was going on.

When the rascal drew the pistol, Foldeen slipped out from his hiding-place, and began letting himself noiselessly down the hill. He had entered the breastwork just at the critical moment, and had dealt Lafe's assailant a crushing blow on the skull with a gun he picked up. That was all. It was very simple.

"And mighty lucky for me, too!" was the boy's heartfelt comment. "Foldeen, do you know what this fellow here's been doing?"

"I haf some brains on my head. I haf seen his business. He is a dief."

"He got these things together here," said Lafe, "and he told me there was a lot more over on the other side of the creek. He was going to make me help him bring them here. That was what he had the pistol out

for. But what beats me is, what did he expect to do with them? A man can't get out of the lines with a load of traps like this, even if he could carry 'em."

For answer Foldeen rose, and turned the sprawling, inert form of his captive over on its back. The pallor of the thief's face, contrasted with the coarse, sandy hair and stubble of beard, made it seem more repellent than ever.

The German bent over to examine this countenance more carefully.

"By jiminy priest! I bet me anydings I know dot man!" he exclaimed, staring downward intently. "Vake up dere, you!" he called out, pushing the recumbent figure with his foot. "I know you, Red Pete! Dot's no use, your making out you vas asleep! Vake up, kvick now!" and he stirred him with his boot again.

"I bet he's dead," said Lafe.

No! The man half opened his eyes and moved his head restlessly. The color came back into his face, the muscles of which

were drawn now into an angry scowl by pain. He fell back helpless after an instinctive effort to lift himself to a sitting posture. Then, shifting his head, he discovered the two friends, and fixed upon them a stolid, half-stupefied stare.

“How you like him, dot Red Pete, eh?” Foldeen burst forth, with exultation, never taking his jubilant glance from the face of the wretch on the ground. “Dot’s a beauty, ain’d it? Dot’s a first-glass Ghristmas bres-ent, eh, to find in your shtocking! Or no, he is too big. Ve hang him on a dree, eh? A nize Ghristmas-dree, all by ourselves, eh? O Red Pete, you vas git the best place by dot dree, right in front, on the biggest branch!”

The man on the ground had been staring upward at the speaker in a puzzled fashion. He had slowly taken in the situation that he was disabled, bound hand and foot, and at the German’s mercy. At last he seemed to recall who it was who was talking to him.

“I never done you no harm!” he growled.

“So-o!” ejaculated Foldeen, with loud sarcasm. “Dot vas no harm, eh, dot vas only some little fun, eh, to make me on fire und burn me up mit the rest in dot shteam-boat? Just some funny joke, eh? Vell, den, now I will haf me *my* funny liddle jokes mit you.”

Speaking with such swift volubility that Lafe followed with difficulty the thread of his narrative, Foldeen unfolded a curious tale. Before the war he had drifted about in the South a good deal, playing in orchestras in New Orleans some of the time, and then for whole seasons travelling up and down the Mississippi in the bands of the old passenger steamers.

This man, Red Pete, was a well-known character on the river, too well known all the way from Cairo to the last levee. Sometimes he was in charge of a squad of slaves, sometimes travelling on his own account as a gambler, slave-buyer, or even for a trip as minor boat officer—but always an evil-minded scoundrel.

One night, when they were lying at the wharf under the bluff at Natchez, the cabins of the steamer had been robbed, and fire set to the boat in several places. Those on board barely escaped with their lives, and when they found that Red Pete was missing, every one knew well enough that he was the thief and would-be murderer.

Foldeen believed there had been some search for him, but those were rough times, and he was never tracked down. Then the war came, and Foldeen perforce went into the band of an Arkansas regiment—until the opportunity of making his escape to the Union lines occurred.

During that period of reluctant service with the band which played "Dixie" and "The Bonnie Blue Flag," he had more than once heard of Red Pete as a sort of unattached guerilla, who, like many other river ruffians, played for his own hand between the lines.

"Und now it looks like dot game of his

was pretty near blayed out, eh?" Foldeen concluded with a chuckle.

Lafe gazed down with loathing upon this burly and powerful desperado, lying in such utter helplessness. He told Foldeen in turn how he had seen this very man in the Fifth Corps "quod" only last winter, condemned to death.

"So-o!" exclaimed the German. "I remember dot. All five deserters und bounty-chumpers dug deir vay out, und gilled a sentinel, und skipped in the night. So-o! Ve don't have us dot private Ghristmas-dree, after all. Ve make Red Pete a bresent to Cheneral Boyce, instead."

"Yes, but where shall we find General Boyce?" Lafe put in.

Moved by a common impulse, the two turned their backs on their prisoner, and went outside the earthwork.

The sky was overcast with shifting clouds again, and gave no hint as to the points of compass. The little valley, strewn with motionless, blue-clad figures,

lay wrapped in such silence that they could hear the murmur of the rivulet beyond. On both sides the hills rose steeply, covered with thick, tangled verdure.

Behind and before them the valley lost itself a hundred yards away in dense thickets. A sharp wind had risen, under which the tree-tops moaned. Above the noises of the gathering gale, faint sounds of distant firing could be heard.

“We’d better stay where we are,” the boy suggested. “There’s been rough-and-tumble fighting all around here, and there’s no way of figuring out where our people are. I guess they don’t know themselves. If we go hunting round, we’re as likely as not to walk into a hornets’ nest. I tell you what we’ll do. If we can find a piece of white cloth, we’ll put it up on a pole out here, and we’ll bury these men of ours. Nobody’ll touch us, if they come along and find us doing that. Besides, it’s the right thing to do.”

They turned back into the breastwork, and Lafe, rummaging among the knapsacks, speedily found a roll of bandage-linen which would serve his purpose. He got out more bread as well, and found a scrap of fried bacon. The two ate standing; now that they had a plan, they were all eagerness to put it into operation.

Red Pete had closed his eyes again, and was lying perfectly still. The excitement of his capture having died away, they now scarcely gave him a glance.

"I wonder what time it's got to be," Lafe remarked, as they were finishing the last mouthful. "Oh, I forgot — he's got a gold watch in his pocket, and I think it's going."

Foldeen knelt, and feeling about for it, drew the watch from Red Pete's trousers pocket. "By jiminy priest! it's near four o'clock!" he exclaimed. Then rising, he looked more attentively at the watch, turning it over in his hand admiringly, and prying open the back of the case with his nail.

There seemed to be an inscription on the inside of the cover, and Foldeen held the watch sidewise to decipher this more readily, while Lafe peered over his shoulder to look.

"It's in writing," he said; "let me take it. I can make it out easier, perhaps."

The legend inside the gold case was delicately engraved in small running script. Lafe, reading with increasing surprise, discovered it to be this:—

*Presented to
Lieut. Lyman Hornbeck,
January 22, 1864,
by his friends and admirers
Of St. Mark's Church,
Cleveland.*

"Say, Foldeen," Lafe burst forth, "I bet that's a relation of mine. I've got an uncle —"

"So everybody has got some uncles," put in the musician.

"No, but look here," the boy insisted. "That says 'Lyman Hornbeck.' Well, my

father's brother was Lyman Hornbeck. I've heard talk about my Uncle Lyme ever since I could remember. He left home years ago, before I was born. They always said he was out West, somewhere. I bet it's the same man. At any rate, I'm going to take a look around. You fix up the pole and the white flag outside here, and bring out the shovels. I'll be back again and help."

Lafe's eyes sparkled with a new excitement as he made his way across the pasture to the bank of the creek, noting as he strode along that all the lifeless forms on the grass wore the uniforms of privates.

He walked along the shelving edge of this bank from one end of the clearing to the other, to make sure that the winding bed of the stream below did not hold what he sought for. There was no sign, anywhere in the open, of an officer.

He remembered now that Red Pete had spoken of the other side of the creek, which lay so much lower than the bank

on which he stood that it could not have been raked by the fire from the breast-work. It was swampy ground, covered heavily with high, bushing willows and rank growths of tall marsh grass. No path leading into it was discernible, perhaps because the wind blew the reeds and flags so stiffly sidewise.

With a running jump Lafe cleared the bed of the stream, and pushed his way into the morass. It was not so wet underfoot as he had expected, but the tangle of vines and undergrowth made his progress slow and troublesome. It was easy enough to see that no portion of the brigade had passed this way; there were no indications that wild nature here had ever been disturbed. The boy pressed on until, finding the swamp-jungle getting worse with every yard, and the shadows deepening about him, it was clearly useless to go farther.

Turning, he fancied he knew from which direction he had advanced into this maze. There was no use in merely retracing his

steps. He settled his bearings as well as might be, and struck off to the left, to work his way diagonally out to the clearing.

When he had floundered on over what seemed twice the distance of his first direct line, and halted, hot, tired, and out of breath, he could detect no open space ahead. The wind was blowing hard from up above, and the noise of its impact upon the wilderness was in itself enough to confuse the senses. It was undoubtedly growing dark.

"Hello — Hornbeck!" Lafe shouted.

The wind seized the shrill cry and scattered it into fragmentary echoes. It was worse than useless to call out. He must push doggedly on. Lafe turned a little to the right, and crushed his way forward through the brush and bracken, with a step to which dawning fears of being lost lent added vigor.

He was traversing slightly higher ground now. The willows and marsh grass had given place to a more orderly second growth of firs, with dry moss underfoot,

and open spaces overhead. In one of these breathing-places of the thicket, he came suddenly upon the blue-clad figure of a man sitting propped up against a stump, his head hanging on his breast.

He was young and fair-haired, and Lafe's glance took in the glint of gilt straps on his shoulders as he hurried toward him. Almost in the same instant the boy, kneeling at his side, saw that this was the young Ohio officer he had spoken with at sunrise, and that he was alive.

As he sought to waken the wounded man, and make out how badly he had been hurt, it grew suddenly, strangely dark. Looking upward, Lafe saw above the tree-tops nearest him, piling skyward on the wind, a great writhing wall of black smoke.

It mounted in huge, waving coils as he looked, and came nearer, bending forward in a sinister arch across the heavens. His startled ears dimly heard a sullen, roaring sound, newly engrafted upon the whistling of the wind.

The woods were on fire!

CHAPTER V.

LAFE RESCUES AN OFFICER, AND FINDS HIS
COUSIN.

LAFE had seen forest fires near Juno Mills, and there was nothing in his recollection of them to suggest great danger in this one. He was more interested for the moment in the young Ohio officer propped against the stump. This lieutenant was barefooted. A thief had evidently taken also his sash, sword, and belt.

He was probably one of Red Pete's victims. The others could not be far away, among them Lafe's problematical kinsman with the presentation watch.

But finding a possible uncle was just now of less importance than finding a safe way out of the thicket. The smoke grew visibly thicker, and Lafe could detect, off

to the left, the distinct crackling noise of flames. He dropped on one knee again, and patted the officer's shoulder with decision.

The young man moved his head restlessly, then opened his eyes and stared dully at Lafe.

"Which way is the creek?" the drummer-boy shouted.

The lieutenant, as if dazed, looked half wonderingly into the boy's face. Then he blinked, shook himself, and made a move to sit upright. He sank back with his mouth drawn awry by the severity of his pain, and forced the semblance of a laugh upon these pale lips.

"I thought at first I was home, and you were my brother," he said.

"How bad are you hurt? Can you walk?" Lafe demanded. "We've got to get out of this. The woods are on fire, and the wind is blowing it dead this way. Where are you hit?"

"Minie ball here — between the shoul-

der and the lung, I hope," replied the other, indicating his left side. "It's stiffened and I can't lift myself. Help me on my feet, and I guess I can walk away."

Lafe put an arm under him and gave him his hand. The lieutenant, with a groan, set his teeth and scrambled up on his feet. He looked about him for an instant, and then hastily seated himself on the stump.

"I'm dizzy for the minute," he murmured. "I must have lost so much blood. It's afternoon, isn't it?"

"Past five. You'd better brace up now, and try to come on. Which way is it?"

The officer looked vaguely around. "I hardly know," he confessed. "I can just remember dragging myself off into the swamp. I thought I should find some water, and I guess my strength gave out about here. Somebody came along and pulled off my boots and stockings, and went through my pockets, but I was too

near dead to resist, and I kept my eyes shut."

"Well, you want to keep 'em open now. This must be the way out, according to the wind. That's it; get your arm over my shoulder, and we'll make a break."

They walked thus for a dozen steps or so, the officer leaning a little on Lafe's right shoulder. Then the wounded man stopped.

"I'd rather you went ahead," he called into the boy's ear. "The branches knock against my game side, this way. I'll keep behind you;" and so they went on again, Lafe pushing the saplings and boughs aside for the other.

The smoke had become almost blinding now, as it sifted through the motionless air of the thicket. The noises had risen now into a pandemonium of uproar — on the left the furious bellowing of the tempest and the flames, to the right a series of outbursts that shook the earth like mine explosions. It sometimes seemed to Lafe

as if he distinguished the cheers and vague cries of men, off on the other side — and then back would come the chaotic din.

Awed and deafened, the two pushed doggedly on, Lafe stealing glances over his shoulder, to see if the officer was following. He came, holding to the branches with his right hand for support, and striving to pick soft places for his bare feet among the stones and prickly ground vines.

It had suddenly grown very hot. The heat began to sting Lafe's forehead and eyes. They were advancing into the temperature of a veritable furnace. The crackling noises to the left had swollen all at once to an angry tumult close at hand.

Looking up with smarting eyes through the pungent smoke, the boy beheld scattered flashes of flame dotting the murky shadows of the forest beyond, and even as he looked these tongues of fire ran forward under the wind with darting swift-

ness. An imperative outcry behind Lafe called a halt. He turned as his companion reeled, clutched wildly at an ash sapling, and fell against it, his head hanging helplessly forward on his breast.

"It's no use," he gasped, as the boy strode back. "I'm choking, and I'm played out. I can't go another step."

He falteringly lifted one of his torn and bleeding feet, and put it down again. His arm slipped from around the sapling, and he would have fallen if Lafe had not caught him.

"Why don't you be a man!" the boy screamed shrilly through the tumult.

A sort of angry desperation seized upon Lafe. He would drag this Ohio tenderfoot out of the fire in spite of himself. With rough energy he fitted his shoulder under the officer's armpit, and drew his right arm forward in the determined clutch of both his hands.

"Come on now, the best way you can. Never mind your feet or your shoulder

either!" he yelled, and then, stiffening his back under the burden, he staggered forward.

He could never afterward recall anything definitely of how he did it, or how long it took. But through the shrivelling heat, through the murderous swoop of fire and smoke, somehow he came. All at once there was the play of cooler air upon his face. Instead of the choking smoke and darkness he was wrapped about by a clean wind. It had grown suddenly daylight again.

Bent almost double under his burden, he strove in vain to fill his lungs with this fresh air. It was dimly in his mind to straighten himself, and breathe in all he could hold. But the load on his back seemed to be pressing him further down, and whirling him round as well.

Then he was lying face downward, on dry, soft earth with the sharp edges of stiff marsh grass in his hair. Something heavy lay across him. He rolled himself

free from the encumbrance, and stretched himself out luxuriously on his back. The wind souged pleasantly through the reeds about his head.

He went to sleep, dreaming placidly as he dropped off that ordered swarms of men were passing through the tall grass close beside him, firing volleys and cheering as they fired.

Four red points of light, at regular distances apart, and shining faintly against a broad canopy of blackness, was what Lafe, still lying on his back, beheld when he woke. He looked at them lazily for what seemed a long time, and did not care in the least what they signified. Then, quite without any effort, he knew that they were lanterns hung on a rope.

There were sinuous lines of motion in the darkness above the lanterns, and these revealed themselves to him as the sides of canvas-strips stirring in the wind. This, too, did not seem important, and he indolently closed his eyes again.

A sharp cry, ringing abruptly out close at hand, awoke him more thoroughly. He even lifted his head a little, and saw many more lights — lanterns, kerosene lamps, and tallow-dips stuck in bottles. They stretched out irregularly in all directions, illumining little patches of space, which seemed all the smaller by comparison with the vast blocks of deep shadows surrounding them.

The radiance of many of these lights centred upon a broad table, about which several men were standing in their shirt-sleeves, and with aprons like butchers. There seemed to be another man lying on this table, and one of his legs was bared to the thigh. Some of these shadowy figures moved, and another cry arose. Lafe shut his eyes, and turned away from the spectacle.

There was now a rustle of straw under him, and he noted that his head was resting on a canvas pillow filled with straw. A strong smell, as of arnica, attracted his attention. Now he understood that he was in a hospital tent.

He wondered where he himself had been hurt. Except for a general, dull aching of the muscles, he was conscious of no special pain. He tried opening and closing his fingers, and moving his toes.

Each member seemed in working order. He passed his hands along his sides, and still found nothing amiss. But his head certainly did ache.

Vague recollection of the events of the day began to stir in his memory, but not at all in their right order. It seemed as if it was Foldeen Schell whom he had carried out of the burning woods, and nearer still in point of time seemed to be Red Pete's stifling grip upon his neck. Then, somehow, his thoughts drifted to the watch and its inscription.

He drowsily tried to think what this Lyman Hornbeck must be like—a gray-bearded old man and a church-member, and yet only a lieutenant. So his vagrant fancy drifted about on the border-land of sleep.

Suddenly there were voices close about him. Half opening his eyes, Lafe blinked at three or four torches which some soldiers were holding up at the foot of his bed. A half-dozen officers were there as well, and the foremost one was General Boyce.

The light hurt Lafe's eyes, and he closed them. The general's cheery voice remained in his ears, though, and conveyed so true a notion of the man that Lafe seemed to continue to behold him, the red torchlight heightening the glow of health on his round cheeks and shining in his brave, kindly eyes.

"Oh, you'll be up and about in a day or two," the general was saying, in a hearty, encouraging way. "Won't he, surgeon-major?"

"Well, inside a week," answered another voice. "The wound in itself wasn't much. It's the loss of blood that's worst."

"Lieutenant," the general went on, "if I don't call you captain when you get back

from your furlough, it won't be my fault. You've been mentioned in the despatches. Your company's tussle with the breastwork under the hill was as plucky a thing as has been done to-day. Well, good luck to you!"

There was a rattle of spurs and swords, as if the group were moving, and then Lafe was conscious that the young Ohio officer spoke, as if from the very next bed.

"O general," he called out, "I'll save my own thanks for some other time! But I want you to take notice of this boy here. *He's* one who ought to be mentioned in despatches. I'd have been roasted alive if it hadn't been for him. He came into the woods and found me, and routed me up, and made me walk, and when I gave out he actually carried me right through the blaze. Talk about charging the breastwork! What he did was worth fifty of it."

Lafe felt through his closed eyelids that the torches were being held so as to cover

him with their light. Oddly enough, he seemed without desire to look.

"I won't forget," said the general. "How badly off is he?"

"He was brought in with the lieutenant here," returned the surgeon-major. "I didn't see him myself. You were here, nurse?"

A woman's voice took up the thread: "Poor little fellow, he doesn't seem to have been shot, but his head was laid open to the bone somehow. Doctor Alvord thought it must have been a horse's hoof."

"We were both on the ground in the way when the big charge down the run was made," explained the lieutenant. "He must have got trampled on. I think he's a drummer in the brigade band. I noticed him when we went into line this morning."

"I wonder if it can be our Juno Mills boy," broke in the general. Lafe felt that the great man was bending over close to him. "Some Dutchman in the band was telling a tremendous yarn about a youngster who went down alone into the breast-

work after it was deserted, and had a fight, single-handed, with a baggage-thief, and played the deuce generally. Does anybody know whether he's the same one?"

Lafe could never understand afterward what ailed him to behave so, but at this he kept his breathing down to its gentlest possible form. The general and his attendants moved off down the aisles, halting with the torches at other bedsides to give cheer. Their going gave Lafe leisure for the thought which interested him most.

The news that his head had been laid open to the bone had fascinated him. He put up a hand now and felt of his skull. It was covered all over with interlaced strips of stiff plaster encased in a soft linen bandage drawn tight.

"Are you feeling all right?"

It was the voice of the lieutenant. Lafe, proud of his plasters, opened his eyes and made out the young officer, propped up with a couple of straw pillows on the bed next his.

“My head aches a little, that’s all,” said Lafe. “Say, we had a squeak for it, didn’t we?”

“I sha’n’t forget it — nor you,” responded the other.

“Cleveland’s in Ohio, ain’t it?” the boy asked, all at once pursuing a subject which had kept dodging in and out of his mind. “Perhaps you know an old man in one of the Ohio regiments — he must be getting along toward sixty — he’s a lieutenant, and his name’s Lyman Hornbeck. I was looking for him this afternoon when — when I lighted on you.”

The young officer, quite heedless of his bandages, sat bolt upright and stared at Lafe as if too much amazed for words.

“I don’t know what you’re driving at,” he said at last. “*My* name is Lyman Hornbeck, and I’m a Cleveland man and a lieutenant — but I’m a long way off from sixty. You can’t mean my father? He’s been dead two years. His name was Lyman. Why, hold on! General Boyce



"I'M STEVE HORNBECK'S SON!"

said something about Juno Mills—my father came from near there—you don't mean to say you're a Hornbeck?"

An irresistible impulse moved Lafe to crawl out of his bed and totter across to the other's pallet. He sat down on the edge of it, and leaned his head back on the officer's two pillows.

"Say, I'm Steve Hornbeck's son," he said, "and your father was my Uncle Lyme. Do you know, I kind of felt like takin' a shine to you when you spoke to me early this morning."

The officer had put his arm affectionately round the boy's neck. "Why, don't you remember," he cried, with pleased interest, "how I said I had a brother like you at home?"

And so the two lay close together in a delighted gossip until the surgeon came, and laughingly but peremptorily drove them apart. They told him something of the strange story, and an attendant went out and found Foldeen, and brought him

in, and he added many striking variations to the legend which now, by midnight, had become the talk of the brigade.

General Boyce came back to the hospital tent purposely to see the boy from his own Dearborn County whom men were talking about. He nodded his head approvingly as he stood by the bedside and listened to Foldeen's excited narrative of the lad's fight with Red Pete.

"I remember hearing of that fellow before," he said. "We'll hang him in the morning, if we have to go without breakfast to do it."

Foldeen shook his head. "He is no good for hanging, dot Red Pete," he explained. "When the fire is gone out by dot breastwork where he vas, maybe you find some chargoals from him—und maybe two, dree buttons—dot's all."

The beautiful city by the lake wore its most velvety, green robes of June when Lieutenant Hornbeck, who had been home invalided for some weeks, was able at last

to accept the reception which the good people of St. Mark's Church wished to hold in his honor.

It seemed as if all Cleveland sought for admission to this festival of welcome to the brave young officer. Yet when he came in, leaning on his wife's arm, and with the flush of honest pride mantling upon the pallor of his face, it turned out that the real hero of the evening was the wiry, brown-faced boy he brought with him.

Lafe's story had been told in many other places. They knew it by heart here in his new home, where henceforth he was to live with his cousin. He blushed many times that evening at the things admiring people said to his face about him, and he still says if folks *will* insist on discussing it, that the only interesting thing of the whole day was his taking a shine to his cousin before he knew who he was.

HOW DICKON CAME BY HIS
NAME.

HOW DICKON CAME BY HIS NAME.

A Tale of Christmas in the Olden Time.



CHAPTER I.

THE MAKING OF A SOLDIER.

THOUGH more crests are blazoned nowadays than there are minutes in which the heralds may count them, yet old families still live, with roots deep down in rural England's soil, and nourish in quiet legends which, when they come to notice, are the fairest flowers in the garden of English folk-lore.

Such a tale the Tambows of Shropshire can tell. Once, it is dimly understood, the narrative was written out, and even printed from types in Caxton's own press. If this be true, the book has long been lost. But the story is worth keeping.

Dickon looked at this time to be well on in his teens. He was so tall and stout a lad that grown men spoke to him, now and again, as to one of themselves. Just what his age might be, however, it lay beyond mortal power to discover. His mother was long since dead. His native hamlet had been wiped by fire and sword from the face of the earth.

His father could remember nothing more of Dickon's birth than that it was either just before the Battle of Bloreheath in Stafford, or soon after the fierce fight at Mortimer's Cross in Hereford. The one would make him sixteen years old, the other scarcely more than fourteen. Whether it was sixteen or fourteen no living soul in England cared.

There was as yet no other name for him than Dickon—that is to say, any securely fastened name. He had been called Smithson, and even Smith, by word of mouth among strangers. But the rough men close at hand commonly hailed him

with oaths, which pointed to no surname whatever. Indeed, surnames were matters strictly for his betters—for gentlefolk, or at the least for thrifty yeomen with a dozen cows or fourscore sheep on a walk.

There could never have been a thought, therefore, in Dickon's head as to what name was likeliest to stick to him, since of all unlabelled hinds in Salop surely he was the lowliest.

Thought, in truth, is an over-fine word for aught that went forward in Dickon's brain. He knew only some few things more clearly than did the horses and dogs about him.

He did know, first of all, that his grim master, who lived up in the castle just above, was named Sir Watty Curdle, and that the castle itself was Egswith. That he was Sir Watty's man was by far the most important thing there was for him to know; and that it might be kept always fresh before his eyes and patent to all others, this lord's device of two running hares, back to back, one

turned upside down, was sewed upon the breast of Dickon's leather jerkin.

Dickon had more reasons for holding his master to be a foul ruffian and robber than the dumb brutes in stable and kennel could have possessed, though doubtless they, too, were of the same opinion. He knew, furthermore, that the king was a tall and fine young man, because he had seen him after Tewksbury. He knew that the Lady Curdle came from Cheshire, which was reputed to lie northward.

He knew that all men-at-arms who wore three stags' heads on their jackets were his natural enemies; and that it was thought better to be a soldier than the son of a smith. Sometimes he thought that it must be better to be dead than either.

Dickon's belongings were all on his back. He owned a thick shirt of rough woollen, which had been his share of the spoil of a Yorkist archer, slain the year before in a fray on Craven highroad. Formerly the lad had been harassed by dreams that the

dead man, all shivering and frosted over, had come back for his shirt, but these dreams were past long since, and he wore the shirt now like a second skin, so wholly did it seem a part of him.

Over this shirt was drawn his leather tunic, which was becoming too tight. Under this were fastened with cowhide thongs the points of his old leathern hose, also strained now almost to bursting. His shoes were rude and worn contrivances of leather, bound on over ankle and instep with cords. His neck and tangled shock of yellow hair were hidden under a caped hood of coarse brown cloth.

In these garments he toiled miserably by day; in them he slept in his cold corner of the smithy floor by night. By night and day the solitary aspiration of his mind was for the time when he might escape his father's curses and beatings, and bear a spear among the men-at-arms.

This chance came to him suddenly, on a December day, when the air over the

Marches was so thick and gray and cold that men desired to fight, if only to keep their blood from chilling within them. Out of this chance proceeded strange things, the legend of which has lived these hundreds of years in Salop.

Sir Watty Curdle did what he dared toward being a law to himself. In the fastness of the Welsh mountains, just back of his domain, there were always whisperings of new Lancastrian plots and bold adventures. These drifted to Egswith Castle, on its steep, ugly crag, and made an atmosphere of treason there which hung over the Marches like a fog.

That Sir Watty had a rushlight's choice between King Edward and Queen Margaret no one ever believed. If it had suited his ends he would as easily have been the king's man. But since the hated Stanleys were cheek by jowl with the king, there could be nothing for Sir Watty but the other side.

Besides, he had grievances. That is to

say, other gentlemen in the countryside had houses and fair daughters and plate and fat cattle. These things rankled in Sir Watty's mind.

Sir Watty rose on this December morning with his head clear from a month's carouse, with his muscles itching for sharp work, and with the eager sniff of rapine in his nostrils.

Word that sport was afoot ran presently about through the galleries and yards and clustering outer hovels within the high-perched walls of Egswith. Rough, brawny men forthwith dragged out haubergeons and sallets, and leathern jackets stuffed with wool, and smiled grimly over them and put them on.

Two troopers in sleeveless coats of plate mail, and heavy greaves and boots, came clanking down the jagged hill-path. They routed with loud halloos the threescore people who dwelt in the foul and toppling huts huddled at the foot of the crag, under the shadow of gray Egswith.

“Ho! Ho-o!” they bawled. “Out with you — out! out! Your lord rides to-day!”

A bustling crowd arose on the instant. Strong men swarmed in the open. Some were sent into the fields with horns to summon yokels who were grubbing among the roots. Others haled forth armor and saddle-gear, and bows and spears, and shouted joyous quips from group to group.

Dull-browed women, with backs bent like beasts of burden, brought food and hoods and such tackle at command, in sulky silence. Half-clad children hung about the doorways, gazing wonderingly. From the castle gates some horses were being led out; and about the high walls rang the shrill blare of trumpet-calls.

The two troopers, after setting all in motion outside, clanked their way into the smithy, and the black one, Morgan, he with a brutish face, seamed and gashed with red scars, — where only one eye remained to glare in rude arrogance, — kicked the door open, and cried out as he did so:

“Are you dead here, then? What are your ears for, fools? And no fire!”

Dickon crossed the floor of the smithy, and stood before the intruders.

“The old man will light fires no more,” he said, with dogged indifference, pointing a sidelong thumb to the bundle of straw at the tail of the forge, beneath the bellows.

There, flat on his back, lay the smith, with wide-open, staring eyes, and a face of greenish-brazen hue; his huge grizzled beard spread stiffly outward like the bristling collar of some unclean giant vulture.

“He was ever a surly swine,” Morgan growled. “Even as we need him most, he fails us thus!”

Dickon offered no opinion upon this. “It fell on him in the night,” he said.

Morgan leant over as far as his iron casings permitted, to note what share of breath remained in the smith’s body. Then he rose, and looked the lad from top to toe with his sullen single eye.

“Get you into his foot-gear, then, and follow on,” he snarled curtly.

Then for the first time the other man-at-arms spoke. He was a huge, reddish warrior, with the shoulders of an ox, and a face which flamed forth from out the casings of his head-piece like a setting winter sun.

“Were it not better to leave him?” this Rawly asked. “If he chance to get his head broken, how will Sir Watty make shift for a smith?”

Morgan sneered this down. “The lout hath not the wit for the tenth part of a smith,” he said. “Between this and Bromfield there are a dozen of the craft to be had at the bare mention of a halter.”

Thus it was that a soldier’s life opened before Dickon.

He made haste to don his father’s sleeveless chain coat and sallet. Then, choosing a crossbow and sheaf of quarrels for himself, he gathered such other weapons as the smithy held, and carried them out into



"SIR WATTY CAME STALKING DOWN."

the open. Now the troop was forming, and the start close at hand.

The lad had seen many of these rallies for a raid; but this one, wherein he was to have part, had a new glory in his eyes. He rubbed shoulders with the men who were making ready against the ride. With the boldness of an equal he bore a hand to help them fit the armor to their backs. There was none to make him afraid. When a knavish hobler offered to force his cross-bow from him in exchange for a rusty pole-axe, Dickon smote him on the head with a full man's might and heart, and kept his weapon.

At last Sir Watty came stalking down the broken, winding path, with his chestnut stallion led prancing from rock to rock at his heels. Behind him came a score of men-at-arms, and then still other horses at halter.

The knight stopped on the boulder at the foot of the hill, that two men might lift him to the saddle. As he moved for-

ward there arose a great, joyful shout and clanking bustle of men mounting to follow. Dickon was of the sorrier sort who must run on their own legs; but no man on armored steed was prouder than he.

Sir Watty sat with alert, poised lightness in his stirrups, as if the brigandines which cased him from nape to ankle had been of linen instead of close-set, burnished metal plates overlapping one the other like a fish's scales and planned with cunning joints. Gilt nails studded the angles of this glittering suit, and the body of it was covered with green velvet, with the two hares of Curdle wrought in gold upon the breast.

Unlike the lesser riders, he wore bascinet and gorget on head and neck, with light pauldrons, velvet-clad and shaped like eagles' talons, running out to his shoulders over the scaled mail.

There were unnumbered tales as to how Sir Watty had come by this princely harness, all of a likeness in that they imputed

its possession to plunder. One might well credit this on looking at the man's face as he rode with lifted visor—the curved, bony, beak-like nose, the stone-gray eyes, the thin, brief line of lips twisted tight together—all as relentless and shrewd and cruel as something born of snake or hawk.

Clustering at his back rode thirty men-at-arms, no other knight among them. There were unfrocked monks, loose, wandering troopers, murderers, revolted townsmen and mere generic ruffians from anywhere on the face of the earth, all gathered to Egswith by the magnet of its lawless fame, and all risking life and facing punishment here and hereafter with Sir Watty because they knew him for a master knave and robber.

These wore ill-assorted armor, the random product of years of raiding—some nearly covered with iron, others with no more than a rusted haubergeon and battered sallet. Of weapons, too, there was as mongrel a show. Some bore hagbuts,

or hand-guns, to be fired with powder, and had leather bags full of stone bullets hanging at their saddles. Among the others were crossbows with wyndacs and without, lances, bills, long and short pole-axes, and even spiked clubs of iron.

Dickon joined the score of footmen who turned into the road as the cavalcade filed by.

For a little these all trudged behind the horses, bearing their lighter cuirasses and caps and their long or cross-bows with easy spirits. It was a morning made for walking, with black frost holding the ground so stiff that it rang like stone under the clattering hoofs ahead. A sharp air tweaked nostrils and ears, and made the blood glow even in churlish veins.

It was to the footmen nothing short of delight to stride onward thus, with a captain in front who feared naught, and on one's shoulder a weapon of death.

Later in the day, when their course lay over a rough moorland stretch where bleak

winds whistled, and hunger began to gnaw upon fatigue, the adventure became less joyful. Still Dickon pressed forward upon the freshest hoof-marks, gay of heart. Others, who carried more years and a staler fancy, began to lag. Then an interesting thing happened.

At a word from Morgan, huge Rawly and a dozen others wheeled out from the troop and, halting at the side of the highway in waiting till the footmen had passed, drew close in behind them.

To make the meaning of this more clear, some of these horsemen pleasantly pricked their spear-points into the weariest of those walking before them. Thereafter the whole body moved on more swiftly.

None of the peasants knew whither the expedition was proceeding. For the first few leagues, journeying down the valley of the little stream which rose back of Egswith, they had seen at a distance more than one frowning castle. But they had come near to no human habitation. Then had ensued

the arduous march across the moor, with no sign of castle or roof-tree.

But now, some hours after high noon, they were advancing upon a better-ordered country, with smooth roads and farm-lands. The mountains on the right were farther away now, and hung pale blue upon the confines of the gray sky. There were farm-houses in view, and these were of a larger and more prosperous aspect than Dickon had seen before. The husbandmen seemed to have small appetite for fighting, too, for they could be discerned presently fleeing with their women, children, and cattle across their fields to woodland shelter.

The spectacle of people making their escape before his approach was new to Dickon. He swelled out his chest to a greater girth because of it, and forgot the heated aching of his feet.

Sir Watty permitted the men to enter and ransack one of these farm-places. No living soul was to be discovered, but of food there was plenty. Some of the older

and wiser troopers knew where to look for gear of less transient moment. But the spoil was not of importance.

Soon they were all pressing on again, along the highroad traversing this peaceful and fertile plain. By and by an old archer who trudged by Dickon's side halted in surprise, and as he stepped forward again growled out in perplexed disquiet:—

“Nay—aught but that, Sir Waddy, aught but that!”

Dickon, looking ahead, noted that his lord, after a moment's parley, had turned his course to the left, and was leading the party into a narrow lane.

Some of the hoblers, mounted on their light nags, were sent flying off across fields still more to the left, and Morgan came galloping back to the rear of the column. When he had muttered some charge to Rawly and then set back again to join his chief, it became known that Rawly with his handful of horse and all the footmen were to continue on the highroad.

The lad would never have thought out what this division of forces signified, but the old archer, little by little, and more to hear his own voice than from kindness to the boy, informed his mind. The company had been split in twain because the quarry was near at hand, and must needs be surrounded.

This was good soldiery, but in the present case it would be useless. Sir Watty and every mother's son with him would be slain—the footmen as well as the rest. Of this there could be no tittle of doubt, the archer cheeringly insisted. He was a native of these parts, and knew the evil repute of the stronghold they were about to attack. Not a man-jack of them would ever find himself back upon this blessed highroad again! Of that he made certain.

Dickon listened to these astounding tidings without any very near sense of fear. To look Death in the eye seemed not an unnatural thing, now that he was a soldier and wore an iron jacket. But

his blood chilled within him when he heard the answer to his idle query.

“Is it bigger then than Egswith?” he had asked.

The gray old archer, stealing an apprehensive glance about him, and whispering sidelong, replied:—

“There are no walls—that eye can see. But inside is a sorcerer who fights with magic fires, and can on the instant raise up battlements of poisoned adders and scorpions, and blow upon us with a wind so deadly that at its touch our flesh will melt from our bones. If yon men wist whither Sir Waddy led them, they would fall upon him first and tear him limb from limb.”

CHAPTER II.

A BURST FOR FREEDOM.

THE crossbow was audibly rattling on Dickon's shoulder and his knees smote together after hearing what the old archer had told him about the so-called sorcerer. He looked hurriedly behind, with perhaps some vague thoughts of flight, but the sight of the fierce horsemen at his heels scattered these.

The boy plodded miserably forward, catching only here and there a stray word of what the archer further said. This was to the effect that the place they were pushing toward—dread Camber Dane—had been the home of the mad baron, Lord Tasktorn, for many years. Now for other many years his equally mad younger son, Sir John Camber, had been in possession of the estate.

A gruesome and awful man, by all accounts, was this Sir John, who lived alone with uncanny, dwarfish servant-people. It was said that he conjured gold and jewels out of the unholy flames he kindled, and was accurst of God and the church.

Little enough of this did Dickon comprehend, for the idea of an alchemist was new to him; but the terrors which the archer painted were none the less real to the lad.

He fancied that the air in the tangled copse through which they were now pushing their upward path already bore the fatal taint of magic. He strove to breathe as little of it as he could, and thus to avoid its spell.

The horses had been left behind, and their riders were now on foot like the rest.

Dickon looked anxiously about for some offer of escape. Then affrighted visions of what death really was rose before his eyes — all with startling suddenness taking

on the likeness of his father, lying gasping on the straw of the squalid forge. It horrified his senses.

He stumbled blindly on. with the rest, not seeing where or with whom he was going, and ever and again receiving blows from the armed men behind him, which he scarce noted.

All at once they all stood forth on the edge of a promontory. Beneath them spread out a picture of almost enchanted loveliness, with park and lawn, with garden, orchard, and lake. In the centre of all was a peaceful mansion, turreted and gabled for beauty rather than defence. Engirdling all was a broad oaken zone of forest. Midwinter though it was, the sylvan prospect seemed to speak of spring, and grass and trees alike were green.

As he looked down upon this scene, Dickon felt the fog of fright lifting from his mind. Somehow the notion dawned upon him that if death by a sorcerer's wiles awaited him here in this vale, it

must be a gracious and almost pleasant death to fit the place.

His terrors left him,—as strangely swift as they had come,—and in their place there rose a curious sensation of regret that so sweet and goodly a home as this should be ravaged.

This was, however, too novel a thought to take easy root, and he forgot it again as they began creeping downward along the narrow, shelving path to the park. The marauding party were sheltered from view the whole length of this path by a hedge the height of a man's waist; and once the bottom was reached, their way led through a wood where bushes and saplings grew thickly in the shadow of giant oaks.

When at last the end of this had been won, they were close to the rear of a small stone building which they had not seen until now. An arrow's flight away was the great house, also in plain view—and there grave things were going forward.

As Dickon gazed out, a great cloud of black smoke burst forth from the upper window in one of the towers of this mansion, and through the smoke he saw a dark object hurled outward, and whirl swiftly to the ground.

As it fell and lay sprawled shapelessly there, the lad realized that it was a human being. Then, in a dazed way, he understood that he was witnessing the sacking of a manor-house.

Sir Watty and his troop were already inside, and from the narrow doors and windows faint noises proceeded—screams of terror, curses of rage, and the clashing of weapons. Through a little postern door two of the Egswith marauders were thus early dragging out spoil in hangings, armor, and russet and murray gowns.

At the back of the mansion, to judge by the sounds, there was fighting in the open air not less fierce than that within.

At sight of the booty issuing from the postern, Rawly uttered a roar of greedy

exultation, and Dickon, in the twinkling of an eye, found himself bereft of all his late companions, who followed Rawly in a headlong race for the scene of plunder.

The old archer did hold aloof for a brief space, calling out to Dickon that in a minute, or two at the utmost, all these would assuredly be stricken dead; but when no such thing happened, and more costly stuffs appeared to view in the hands of the ravishers, he threw off his fears of magic, and ran forward at the top of his speed to join in the work of plunder.

Such combat as had been needed was now at an end. Sir Watty — unless, indeed, he had other visits on his mind — might have safely wrought all this mischief with the fifth part of his force. Dickon marvelled vaguely that so many men had been brought for such paltry fighting — in ignorance that his lord's true danger lay on the highroad, returning with his spoils.

Why the lad had not gone forward with his fellows he could not have told. There

was no reason why the thought of plunder should be repugnant to him.

His whole life had been spent among men who lived by plunder, and only in the dimmest fashion did he comprehend that there were people able to command horses and armor who lived by other means.

Yet he made no motion to join the others, and in the curious interest with which he stared upon the scene before him, had wholly forgotten the crossbow under his arm.

As he looked a swaying, shouting knot of men-at-arms appeared at the chief door of the mansion, dragging forward, with great buffetings and scuffling, a person whom Dickon saw to be, despite his struggles and disorder, one of dignity and presence.

As they haled him out upon the sward, and he stood erect among them, the lad noted that he was tall and past middle age, with the white face which goes with gentle pursuits, and that he wore a blue side-gown with fur upon it, and had a chain of gold about his neck.

His brow was bleeding from a blow with an iron gauntlet, but he held himself straight and proudly. Now that they had ceased to buffet him, he seemed to be putting questions to them which they answered by ribald shouts. Instinctively Dickon left the wood and began to cross the open space, that he might the better hear the gentle questions and the rude answers.

Sir Watty Curdle came suddenly out from the door, and made his way with swift, striding steps to the centre of this strange group. The shouts of the soldiers rose the higher for a moment, and then ceased altogether, to make silence for what their dumb show gave to be a talk between the robber-knight and the gentleman.

Dickon had not won near enough to catch even the sound of their voices, when the parley came to an abrupt ending.

Sir Watty all at once lifted his mailed hand, and with it struck the other man a violent blow in the face. As the gowned and unarmed man reeled, a soldier with his pole-

axe completed his master's work. The stricken gentleman fell heavily, sidelong, and two others on the instant pitched upon the body to tear off the chain and furred robe.

While he stood watching this, Dickon felt his heart leap upward, and then sink with a great sickening. He stood as if turned to stone for a moment; and when sense returned to him, he had unconsciously brought his crossbow forward and fitted a bolt in it, and begun to draw the string home. To do what? He never knew.

Some soldiers were running in his direction across the sward, sounding the halloo of the chase, and pointing their weapons toward him. His first thought—that their approach meant an attack upon him—bred promptly the resolve to die as hard as might be.

He set his heels firmly, and again began to draw his bow; but then it became apparent that these running men strove to call his attention to some other matter, for

they themselves were headed now obliquely away from him.

Turning, he saw that two persons, an old man and a boy, were fleeing for their lives toward the wood. They had come from the small house near by, and might have won safety by this time if his presence there had not forced them to bend in their course.

Without an instant's thought he began running after them at his utmost speed. It seemed to him that he had never moved with half the swiftness before which now lightened his heels.

At the very edge of the forest, the old man staggered and tripped upon his long gown, and fell face to earth, so that the foremost of his pursuers tumbled over him. Dickon had a momentary glimpse of a reverend white head and long, snowy beard kicked on the ground among iron boots, and of a half-dozen furious men fighting over what seemed already to be a lifeless body.

Then he heard a hoarse voice cry out, "The lad has the jewels! After him! After him!" and two of these robbers plunged on in headlong pursuit of the fugitive boy.

What Dickon had seen thus swiftly had served to slacken his pace for but a moment, and now that he gave chase again he was nearer to the child victim than were the others.

As he rushed through the thick tangle of woodland, he could see that the boy ahead bore under his arm a casket, the weight of which so wore upon his frail strength that his flight could last but a little longer. Then it came that Dickon was between the strange lad and his pursuers, being very close to both, and was turned in hot resolve to face these murderers, with his crossbow strung and levelled.

It seemed to cover only a blinded and whirling instant of time—this struggle which enveloped him. Dickon sent his square-headed bolt with a twang! straight

into the throat of him who, panting and red-eyed, led the chase. As this one threw up his knees and pitched forward, the young archer sprang fiercely over the body, and fell with the fury of despair upon the other.

There was a terrible brief wrestle upon the frosted leaves and moss. Then the second ruffian lay suddenly still.

Dickon stood in trembling amaze for a little, staring down upon these twain, whom he had in a frenzied second put beyond further combat. He shook like any winter leaf as he looked, and his legs bent beneath him — for this foremost dead man was Morgan, the very bone and sinew of Egswith's dread band.

To be burned alive were the lightest vengeance for such a trick as this.

Dickon now thought of flight. Turning in haste, he saw before him the boy with the casket, standing at the entrance to a rocky glade just beyond, and looking out upon him with a white face. He moved swiftly to him, and laid hold upon the box.

“Speed for your life!” he hissed; and then the pair, with no further word, set forth in a breathless stumbling race through the forest.

Before long the echoes of savage shouts at the rear rang over the thicket, but the hunted lads only shivered in silence and pressed on. Then the cries died away, and there was no sound in all the woodland save the rustle of their hurried footsteps.

At last, when they had crossed a second valley, and had arrived at a hill upon which tall fir trees grew sparsely, and the ground was spread with a dense carpet of dry spines, the strange boy threw himself to the earth.

“Further I may not stir,” he groaned, and put his head down upon the soft pine-needles in utter weakness.

Dickon lifted the lad in his arms, and bore him a little way to a nook where some stunted firs, bunched close in a ring around an ancestral stump, offered shelter. There, when he had disposed his companion in

comfort, and stripped off his own fretting haubergeon, Dickon had time to think and to look about him.

The lad whose life he had saved in so terrible a fashion was slender and small of stature, yet had a face which to Dickon seemed full of the wisdom of years. It was a pale and girlish face, with thin, fine lineaments and blue eyes from which shone knowledge and swift sense.

The brow was strangely high and white. Dickon had seen such once or twice among the younger of the preaching road-friars. The long hair which fell in two partings from it was of the color and softness of flax. His thin legs were cased in some light hose which Dickon held to be of silk — puny enough stuff for such a rude journey as they were making, and now much torn and stained.

His body was covered with a tight slashed tunic of a brown velvet. His cap — if he set out with one — had been lost in the flight.

The boy seemed to desire no talk, for he lay with his ear to the earth, breathing heavily, and so Dickon squatted himself on his haunches, and pried open the cover of the heavy casket he had borne so far.

Instead of jewels, as he had looked to find, there was naught but a block of leather, ornamented with raised strips of velvet and gilded lines, which wholly filled the box. When Dickon lifted it out from its encasing, this leather top turned as on a hinge; and fastened below it at the back were seen many folds of parchment, one upon the other, all covered with black markings strange to the eye.

Dickon gazed in wonder at the queer figures upon the parchment. Then his slow mind recalled the archer's talk of magic, and he let the thing drop, open and with crushed pages, flat to the ground.

The lad sprang up at this with a murmur of alarm, and lifted the fallen object, solicitously smoothing out the parchments and shutting the leather over them. Then

he reached for the casket, and put it inside again, eying his companion with vexed regard meanwhile.

“It is ill to mar what thou canst not mend,” he said sharply.

“There are more bolts to my bow, an you mean me harm,” Dickon answered, with a stout voice enough, but much uncertainty within. He took up his weapon to point the words.

The lad in velvet laughed. “What harm could be in me?” he said, and laughed again. “Bolts and bows, forsooth! Why, thou couldst spoil me with thy thumb.” And still he laughed on.

“Yon leathern gear—is it goodly?” Dickon pointed to the casket.

“What—my Troilus?” Looking into Dickon’s honest face, he understood his fears, and answered gently: “Nay, ease thy mind. It is a book—a book not written, but made with types. It tells to the skilled eye a brave story—but not braver, good fellow, than to-day’s tale of thee. Art a

stout carle, by the rood! Who is thy master?"

Dickon bent his chin upon his throat to overlook the device stitched upon his breast, but did not reply. A formless idea crossed his brain that perchance one might live in forests without a lord. It was worth thinking upon.

"And by what mercy camest thou at my heels?" the lad pursued.

Then, as these words brought up before him the awful scene at the woodland's edge, he fell to shuddering and choked with sobs.

"My good old master,—to die thus foully,—oh, woe! woe!" he moaned, and put down his head again.

Dickon pricked up his ears at the word. "Had you then a master, too?" he asked, and on the instant there sprouted in his heart a kindlier feeling for the lad. They were more of a common clay, it seemed, than he had thought.

"But you have no badge!" he commented.

“Badge? Badge?” the boy said hesitatingly, and Dickon noted now a strangeness of sound in his speech which, the while he had held him to be of rank, had passed unheard.

“What means it—badge?” asked the lad; and when Dickon pointed to the two hares on his own breast, the stranger burst again into laughter. A droll boy this, surely, who could be so merry and so tearful all in the same breath.

“Nay, I wear no man’s collar,” he said at last; and then, in pity for Dickon’s perplexity, explained. “The good old man, Geraldus Hansenius, was my master only in love and courtesy, and in that he taught me in all the deep mysteries of his craft.

“He brought me from my own land, and here, where Sir John gave us honor and fair lodgment, we printed the book. And now, lo! in this short hour Sir John and Geraldus are foully done to death, and Camber Dane is despoiled—and the Troilus and I are

hiding for our lives, like hares in a thicket. Ach Gott! Ach Gott!”

At this there were more moans.

“No hare am I,” said Dickon, stoutly, “but if they try me, more like a wolf. Pick me out these threads.”

He knelt beside the lad, who with a bodkin from his doublet ripped one by one the hated lines that had shown Dickon to be evil Sir Watty’s man.

Then Dickon stood upright, and filled himself with a great, deep breath. The new sense of liberty seemed to raise his stature and swell his girth. He took off his iron sallet, and shook his free head proudly, nearer to the sky than it had ever before been lifted.

“We will live in the greenwood,” he said in bold, boyish confidence.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE CHRISTMAS EVE.

WHEN two nights and two days had passed, Dickon and Andreas found themselves on the furthest edge of the forest. Here skirted the woodland a highroad which neither had seen before. Beyond this were a rolling moor country and distant mountains, the sight of which was strange to them; but house of any kind there was none.

When their eager gaze, sweeping all the prospect, had made certain that no habitation was to be seen, Dickon groaned deeply, and little Andreas wept outright.

As they stood thus, Andreas clenched his hands at his breast, lifting his white face upward toward the bare boughs. Then he closed his eyes, and staggering

a single step, fell forward to the ground, and lay there on his face like a log.

Dickon lifted his comrade in his arms, and bore him back into the thicket. Out in the open where the two youths had viewed the highroad the earth was frozen stiff, and snow lay thin-spread upon it; but behind them, on the path they had made, lay warmer nooks sheltered by tangled shrubs.

To the first of these Dickon pushed his way, and putting the lad softly down, began gathering dry, dead leaves by armfuls and piling them over the senseless body. On these he laid branches, and then again more leaves, until only the boyish, sleeping face met the air.

Now he made another journey to the outer place which they had won, and gleaning from the ground the three things he had left there, brought them back to where the lad lay under his leaves, and put them down beside him. These were the crossbow, the book in its casket, and

the mangled carcass of a boar which he had killed, but had eaten of more to his harm than good, since there was no fire with which to cook the meat.

Dickon looked down to his friend, and saw that the boy was awake, and sick unto death. Cold and hunger and the toil of wild wandering had dealt harshly with even Dickon's own tough English flesh and blood. They were killing the fragile lad from foreign parts.

"Do you get warmth?" he asked dolefully, as he had asked scores of other times.

For answer the lad closed his eyes and shook his head in weakness.

Then Dickon knelt down and did a thing strange to all his knowledge of customs. He kissed the pale forehead which lay half-hid among the leaves. Then, as if in shame, he sprang to his feet.

"Bide you here till I come," he said, and turning, strode off toward the open, with the crossbow under his arm.

For warmth's sake and the peril which brooded behind him, he swung himself forward at a swift pace down the high-road. The air and the movement kindled his blood a little.

A full league it seemed to him he must have tramped, over barren moorland and through winding defiles with steep, unfriendly sides of bare rock, before he came to anything that spoke of human habitation. Then, as the skies were darkening into twilight, he entered unawares into the deeper shadows of a great wall, gray and forbidding, rising above the highway like a part of the boulders themselves.

At the base of this, as if entering upon the heart of the earth, was a small, black door of wood, framed in frowning stone.

On this door of the monastery Dickon pounded with his fists, and with the handle of his weapon, and presently there came a sound as of bolts withdrawn. The door opened half-way, and a chalk-faced young friar in white gown and hood stood before him.

“Enter,” this spectral figure said, and trembled with the cold.

“Nay, fire is what I seek,” stammered Dickon, almost in fright at the ghost-like form before him, and at the strange sound of a tinkling bell echoing from the rocks overhead.

“Canst not wait till thou art dead for that?” the white-robed phantom said, in tones of earthly vexation. He would have shut the door at this, but that Dickon sprang forward, thrust his bow against the inner frame, and clutched the friar by the arm.

“Fire! fire!” he cried. “Give me that to kindle fire, or I kill you — like the others!”

The monk stood stock-still, and curled the thin corners of his lips in scorn at this rude boy, and held him with his bright, sneering gaze. Dickon looked into these sharp, cold eyes, and felt himself a noisy fool.

“Nay, father,” he stumbled on, pleadingly, “if I get not a fire, he dies!”

“Hast thy head full of dead men, seemingly,” the young Cistercian replied.

He cast his glance down over this rough visitor, and noting the blood-splashes upon his hose, lifted his brows in wrathful inquiry. Then he snatched up the crucifix from the end of the chain at his girdle, and thrust it swiftly into Dickon’s face.

“Who art thou, churl?” he demanded. “Whose blood is this?”

Dickon’s nerve sank into his shoes.

“A boar that I have slain, good father,” he answered in a mumbling whimper, “and lack fire wherewith to roast it; and the raw flesh is ill food, and he can eat naught of it, and gets no warmth, and must die if I win not a fire.”

At this the monk softened. He led Dickon into the outer porch, and gleaned the purport of his story. Only Dickon said nothing of the book or of the two men he had killed.

“Fire thou shalt have,” the young monk said, more kindly, when Dickon’s tale was



"WHOSE BLOOD IS THIS?"



finished. "But first go through the gates before thee to the hall, and take all thou wilt of meat and ale. None will deny thee. 'Tis the eve of holy Christmas, and though we fast, thou and thy kind may feed in welcome."

"It is only fire I seek," said Dickon, doggedly, though all his vitals clamored in revolt against the speech. "Food I will none till he hath supped."

"So be it," said the monk, and left Dickon alone under the groined archway in the growing darkness.

Presently he came again, and put flint and steel and tinder into the lad's hand. He gave him also a leathern bottle stopped with wax and a little cheese wrapped in fine straw.

"Bear these along," he said. "It is the Christmas eve. Peace be with you," and so motioned the boy away.

Dickon's tongue was not used to words of thanks, and he had turned in silence to go out when the monk called to him, and then came forward to the outer door.

“You were to kill me — like ‘the others,’” he said, with a grim smile curling his lips. “What others?”

“Two of Sir Watty’s men, whom I smote down as they would have fallen upon *him*,” said Dickon, pride struggling with apprehension.

The monk smiled at this outright, and departing again abruptly, returned with a pasty in a dish, enfolded in cloths.

“Now God be with you!” he said, heartily. “Hither bring your strange gossip on the morrow, if he find his legs.”

Once outside the rock-girt postern, Dickon set to running, his arms full with the burden of the friar’s gifts, and his heart all aglow with joy. It was a wearisome enough ascent, and the darkness of even was drawing ever closer over the earth, and the lad’s empty stomach cried aloud at every furlong for food; but still he pressed on.

When at last he had gained the point on the road whence his quest had begun,

the light had altogether failed. Then only he struck his flint, and set fire to some leaves. From these he kindled a knot of dry branches, and with this for a torch pushed his way into the woods.

"Andreas," he called out, when at last he stood above his friend, "here is fire and food!"

The white face among the leaves was the color of the snow he had left behind him. The eyes were half-open, but no answering light came into them. The boy lay as if dead.

With a startled cry Dickon let fall his spoils, and dropping to his knees, lifted the other's head up against his waist. It twisted inertly upon the thin neck and hung forward. Was life truly gone?

Like one in a daze, Dickon laid the boy down again among the leaves, and rose to his feet, still holding the burning sticks in his hand. The flames came painfully near to his flesh before he started into sense again.

Then he swiftly built a fire in a cleft among the rocks at the end of the little hollow, piling dry wood and leaves upon it till the blaze lighted up everything about. This done, he knocked off the waxen cover of his leather bottle, cut out the stopper, and kneeling once more, put its mouth to the dying lad's lips.

Strange tears came into his eyes as, after only a brief moment, those of his friend opened in truth, and gazed wonderingly upward at the luminous volume of ascending smoke. Then the slight frame shuddered piteously with a recurring chill, and the dread sleep fell upon it once more.

Dickon dragged him to the fire, piling leaves behind for support, and holding the lad's hands almost into the flames, so desperate did the strait seem to be. Then he stripped off his own leathern jacket, and wrapped it about Andreas.

He heaped fresh fuel on the fire, he rubbed the slender limbs for warmth with his rough hands, he forced more of the

wine-drink down the boy's throat—all at once, as it were, in a frenzy of resolve that death should at all hazards be fought off.

And so it came about, for presently Andreas was sitting propped up upon the mound of leaves, smiling faintly with pleasure at the new warmth in his veins, and sucking bare the last bird-bones from the pie.

Dickon gnawed ravenously upon the smoky and half-cooked piece of tough meat he had cut from the ham of the boar, and watched the sweet spectacle of his friend restored to life, in an abstraction of dumb joy.

Andreas lifted his hand in air, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“It is Christmas eve!” he said. “I had forgotten!”

“So said the friar,” Dickon mumbled between mouthfuls, tearing at the food meanwhile with his teeth. “He was in two minds about having me flogged, but for that. The monks have a fear of the

king, they say, and on the days he marks for them durst not break bread for themselves. Thus this friar must needs fast to-day—so he said. How could the king know, if he slipped in some food while-times? He hath not been in these parts this many years.”

“It is not the king, Dickon,” answered Andreas. “A greater than any king ordereth these matters.”

“Aye, the lord of Warwick,” said Dickon. “My father rode with him, in far countries, when he was lusty. But the king slew him years ago, in a battle by London town. Wist you not that?”

“Tut, tut,” the lad in ragged velvet made reply, smiling at first, and then more gravely. “Your Warwick is dust and bones, as every man shall be, the king not less than the meanest knave. But God does not die, and He ruleth all things.”

“Sir Watty swore ever by Him,” said Dickon. “But He hath not once set foot in Shropshire, in my time.”

Andreas lifted himself at this, with eyes marvelling at such ignorance.

“Oh, Dickon lad, thou hast the very mother’s milk of learning to find thy way to,” he cried, and crossed his knees by the ruddy blaze, tailor-fashion, to begin.

The story that he told to Dickon was such a one as never Christian child in these times needs to hear, but rather draws in from every source, unconsciously, like speech and the shapings of thought. But to Dickon it was brand new, since at Egs-with no godly man had ever shown his face. He listened to it all with open mouth and brain.

As for Andreas, he grew presently conscious of fatigue, and lay back upon his couch of leaves as his narrative unfolded. Then, the instant spur of food and warmth becoming spent, his voice grew fainter, and in the returning weakness his thoughts wandered from the thread of the sublime story to tender memories of how it had been illumined and decked out in his old German home.

“Ach, lieber Tannenbaum!” he murmured, with the firelight in his dreamy eyes. “It was a sight to live for, Dickon — the beautiful fir tree before you, with burning candles fastened in among the branches, and Christmas gifts hanging underneath, — every little minute something new you found, — and father, mother, brothers, sisters, all in the happy ring around the tree, with joyful songs and good wishes — woe! woe! I shall never see it again!”

“That thou shalt, and hundreds of them,” said Dickon, cheerily.

But Andreas shook his head in sadness, and gazed into the crackling blaze as though it were a tomb.

“Old Geraldus and I would have had a tree,” he sighed at last. “Each year since we came out from Augsburg we made us one, and sang the dear old German songs, and gave each other gifts. And this year we were both to give this goodly ‘Troilus’ to Sir John — and lo! they are both mur-

dered, dead, and I am following them, close at their heels—and 'Troilus' will come to naught. And never had more cunning and shapely work been done, not even in Augsburg!"

"Is it far—that 'Owg'—what name do you call it?" asked Dickon. "As far as London town?"

The lad smiled faintly from where he lay. "It is across the sea, and many days' journey still."

"And does the king come there oftener than into Shropshire?"

"Dull boy! There your king durst never come. It is not his country. There is an emperor, and then a Wittelsbach Duke, but even these may not come into Augsburg if the burghers say them nay. The tongue is different there from yours, and so, glory be to the saints, are the manners, too. There learning flourishes, and men are gentle, and books like poor Troilus yonder are monthly made by dozens."

"Wherefore came you hither, then?" queried Dickon, with rude islander logic.

"It was the madness in my master's head. He deemed that here he should be welcome, bringing a new craft to make knowledge common. But these be beasts here in Shropshire, not men. They desire not books, but only blood and battle and red meat."

"Men come by knowledge to their hurt," said Dickon. "There was a clerk turned thief in Egswith with Sir Watty, and he was skilled to fashion marks on paper so wise men might know their meaning—and him they hanged at Rednal for a rogue four winters syne."

"For that he was a robber, and no true clerk," retorted Andreas.

Dickon looked into the fire for answer, and then at the black, starless sky overhead. He rose, and busied himself for a time in gathering fresh fuel, and then in roughly wattling some side shelter at the back of the bed of leaves. Some vagrant

flakes of snow sifted through the branches above, and he reflected upon the chances of making a roof on the morrow. Or doubtless it would be better to go farther back, and build more securely there.

He put the question to Andreas by way of talk, restoring the fire meanwhile. The German boy smiled in wonder.

“Why, on the morrow, if strength comes back to me, hie we to the good white friars. They bade you come, and me, too!”

Dickon’s face clouded over.

“Nay, I’m for the greenwood,” he said stubbornly. “I will wear no man’s collar more, nor sleep under roof. To be free, here in the open, it maketh a new man of me. And so, an you leave me, here I abide alone, or in these parts.”

“How should I leave thee, Dickon?” said the other, softly. “That could not be. But freedom lies not alone out under the skies, in wind and cold. Was any other more free than I, with my old master? Come, thou shalt be ruled by me — and we

will make our way out from these ruffian parts together, and somewhere we shall light upon a gentle patron, and there I will carve new types and build a press, and thy stout arms shall turn the screw, and I will teach thee learning, and — ”

He broke off all at once, and gazed wistfully upward at the mounting volume of smoke and snapping sparks for a long time in silence. Dickon looked on him, speechless but with great things dawning confusedly in his head.

CHAPTER IV.

UP IN THE WORLD.

SAVE the crackling of flame, and the small sound of branches overhead that were swayed a little by the draught from the fire on the forest floor, Dickon heard nothing while he waited for Andreas to finish the matter of which he had been speaking.

For the rude smithy-bred boy there was little meaning in the other's promise to teach him learning. No more meaning was there for Dickon in the young scholar's craving for types and a press to begin printing anew.

But the promise that Andreas would not part from him lingered in Dickon's ears, and uplifted his heart as he waited reverentially to hear again the gentle, con-

vinced, and loving accents of the German youth.

At last Andreas spoke—as if he had not paused, and yet with a strange new wailing weakness in his voice:—

“And if the saints willed, thus might we win our way back to Augsburg. But that may never be, for I shall die here, here where I lie, and thou wilt turn to wild beast or robber when I am gone, and brave, goodly Augsburg will press on, leading all men, with never a thought of poor little me, dead here in the forest.”

Dickon would have spoken in homely protest, but the change on his friend's face scared him to dumbness. Not even the flame-light could make it ruddy now. In the eyes there was a dimmed, far-away look which chilled Dickon's blood.

“Aye, when I lie forgotten here,”—the thin, saddened voice went on in increasing slowness,—“there the old gray walls and tiled gables will be, with the storks making their nests in the spring, and the convent

boys singing at daybreak in the streets, and the good housewives stopping in the market-place on their way home from mass, and the smell of new grass and blossoms in the air . . . and when Christmas comes I shall not know it . . . these eyes shall not look again on the Tannenbaum. Woe! woe!"

"Is that the tree?" asked Dickon, some impulse to words and action stirring vaguely in his frightened heart.

"Aye," groaned Andreas, "the beautiful tree with candles blazing on its branches and shining gifts." He followed on in a weak murmuring of foreign words, seemingly without meaning.

Dickon bent one intent, long glance upon this childish, waxen face before him. Then he plucked a burning bough from the fire, and without a word pushed the bushes aside and plunged into the outer darkness of the forest.

After some time he returned, bearing an armful of rushes. He warmed himself for a moment, and then, seated so that

Andreas might not observe his work, began with his knife to cut these down into lengths of a span, and to strip off all but a winding rim of their outer cover.

Then he hacked with his knife into the frozen boar's carcass. Cutting out portions of white, hard fat, he melted these a little at the fire, and then rolled them thinly between his palms about the trimmed rushes. This done, he flayed off a part of the boar's skin, scorched off the bristles, rubbed it all with ashes, and spreading it over his sallet, sliced it into a rude semblance of fine thongs.

Then, still uttering no word, he was gone again, once more bearing with him a lighted torch.

In front of Andreas, but to one side, as he lay in half trance and utter faintness watching the smoke, there rose at two rods' distance the dark outline of a fir tree, the lower parts of which were hidden by shrubs.

Suddenly the sick boy's gaze was diverted

to the dim black cone of this tree, where a reddish radiance seemed spreading upward from the tangle underneath. Then a sparkling spot of white light made itself visible high up among the dusky branches — then another — and another. At last nearly a dozen there were, all brightly glowing like stars brought near.

Andreas gazed in languid marvelling at the development of this strange thing — as one quietly contemplates miracles in sleep. It seemed but a natural part of his dying vision of Augsburg — the Tannenbaum making itself weirdly real before his fading sight.

The rosy smoke parted to shape a frame for this mystic picture in its centre, and Andreas saw it all — the twinkling lights, the deep-shadowed lines of boughs, the engirdling wreaths of fiery vapor — as a part of the dreamland whose threshold he stood upon. And his heart sang softly within him at the sight.

Then all at once he awoke from the

dream; for Dickon was standing over him, flushed with a rude satisfaction in his work, and saying:—

“Gifts had I none to hang, Andreas, save it were the bottle and what is left of the cheese. Look your fill at it, for boar’s fat never yet was tallow, and the rushes are short-lived.”

The dream mists cleared from the German boy’s brain.

“Oh, it is thine!” he faintly murmured, in reviving comprehension. “Thou hast made it—for me!”

Dickon glanced out to where, in his eyes, some sorry dips guttered for a brief space on a tree-top. More than one of the lights was already flickering to collapse in the breeze.

“You said you never would see one again,” he urged triumphantly. “Belike your speech about dying was no whit truer.”

Andreas had no further words, but lifted his hand weakly upward, and Dickon knelt down and took it in his own hard palms.

Thus the two boys kept silence for a period—silence which spoke many things to both—and looked at the little rush-dips fluttering on the boughs against the curtain of black night.

Of a sudden, the stillness which had tenderly enwrapped them was roughly broken. If there had been warning sounds, the lads had missed them—for their hearts almost stopped beating with the shock that now befell.

A violent crushing of the bushes, a chance clank of metal—and two fierce-faced bowmen in half-armor stood in the firelight before their frightened gaze.

“Stir not—on your lives!” cried one of these strange intruders, with the cold menace of a pole-axe in his mailed hand. “What mummery is this?”

Somehow it dawned upon Dickon’s consciousness that these warlike men, for all their terrifying mien, were as much frightened in their way as he was. This perception came doubtless from the lessons

of a life spent with bold soldiers who yet trembled at sight of a will o' the wisp. He kept his jaw from knocking together with an effort, and asked as if at his ease:

“What mean you, good sir? No mummery is here.”

“There! there!” shouted the other man-at-arms, pointing with his spear to where the rush-lights—or what remained of them—twinkled fitfully in the tree.

“Oh, that,” said Dickon, with nonchalance. “It is a trick of foreign parts, made by me to gladden the heart of this poor lad, my master, who lies here sore stricken with sickness. Wist you not it is Christmas? This is our Tonnybow, meet for such a time.”

The two men looked sharply at the boys, and then, after a murmured consultation, one turned on his heel and disappeared. The other, espying the leathern bottle, grew friendlier, and lifted it to his lips by an undivided motion from the ground. Then he said, drawing nearer to

the blaze and heaving a long, comforted breath:—

“Whose man art thou?”

“This is my master,” replied Dickon, with his thumb toward Andreas, “who was most foully beset by robbers, and is like now to die if he win not help and shelter.”

“That shall be as my lord duke willeth,” said the soldier.

As he spoke, the sound of more clanking armor fell upon the air. In a moment a half-dozen mailed men stood at the entrance to the copse, gazing in with curious glances.

Behind them were men with flaring torches, and in their front was the stately figure of a young knight, tall and proudly poised. A red cloak and fur tippet were cast over his shining corselet.

This young man had a broad brow under his hanging hair, and grave, piercing eyes, which passed over Dickon as mere clay, and fastened a shrewd gaze on the lad in velvet.

“It is the German gift-tree,” he said to those behind him, whom Dickon saw now to

be gentles and no common soldiers. "I have heard oft of this, but looked not to see it first in Shropshire. What do you here?" he asked at Dickon, rather than of him, and with such a flash of sharp, commanding eyes that the lad's tongue thickened, and he could make no answer.

Andreas it was who spoke, when words failed Dickon, in a voice firmer than before, and lifting himself on his elbow.

"He saved my life, my lord," he said. "And I am dying, I think, and this tree the good fellow tricked out to please my sick fancy. And I pray you, for a dead lad's sake, have a care for him when I am gone."

The knight, with the promise of a smile on his straight lips, looked from eager, fragile Andreas to burly, hang-dog Dickon, and back again.

"Art from the German countries?" he asked. "And how here, of all spots under the sky?"

"I am Andreas Mayer, from Augsburg," said the lad, "driven hence by robbers from

the house of Sir John Camber, who was slain along with my good master, Geraldus Hansenius."

The young knight took a hasty step forward, and peered down upon the lad.

"Geraldus of the types and press — the printer?" he asked hurriedly. "And thou art skilled in his craft?"

"This is even more my handiwork than his," replied Andreas, with a boy's pride, reaching out for the casket containing his beloved "Troilus."

Dickon undid the cover, and handed out the volume to the young noble, who took it with a swift gesture, and turned over here and there a page, bending the book to the firelight and uttering exclamations of delight. Suddenly he closed the book, and gave it back to Dickon to replace in the casket.

"I thank thee, Sir Francis," he said to one of those behind him. "But for thy wonder at the lights in yon tree, we had passed this treasure by. Ho there, Poynter!

Fashion me a litter on the moment, and we will bear this lad onward to the abbey as we go. Let some one ride on to say I am belated; hasten the others."

Then he took the precious volume from its casket once more, and mused upon its pages again, and spoke of them to the gentlemen closest behind him. Again and again he put pointed questions to young Andreas upon the method of their making.

"Thou hast heard of Master Caxton?" he asked the German boy.

"Aye, he of Bruges, and I have seen his work. Geraldus did as fair."

"Thou shalt help Caxton, then, to do fairer still. He is of Bruges no longer, saints be praised, but practises his good craft in his own native England now this two months syne at my own house in Westminster; and he will fall upon thy neck in joy when I do bring thee to him."

The boy's eyes sparkled with elation. Forgetting his weakness, he sat upright.

"I would not be over-bold," he said, "but

with these mine hands have I held proofs for the Emperor to read from, and there is none of higher state in this thy island of a surety. Art thou the duke of these parts?"

"Rather a duke who fain would be of all parts," the young knight answered, and then smiled to note that the quip was lost upon the foreign lad. He made a little movement of his hand to signify that he would be no longer unknown, and one of the others informed the questioner.

"It is his Grace of Gloster—our good King's brother—who honors you with his princely favor."

Some archers bore in a bed of boughs at this, over which the Prince, still smiling, spread his own red cloak, jewelled collar and all. To another he gave the casket with the book.

"I keep my Christmas at the house of holy St. Bernard, down the valley," he said, as the men lifted Andreas gently into the litter, and folded the royal robe about his slender form. "Sobeit thou gainest strength

there, in warm bed and cheerful care, shalt ride to London with me."

So, as he turned upon his heel, the torch-bearers spread themselves forth to light his way; and after him, with much rattling of iron, arms and armor, the knights and the men with the litter pushed their way.

Dickon stood by the declining fire, awed and struck dumb with what had come to pass. The brother of the King! They were bearing Andreas away, and he was left under the black winter sky with his cross-bow and frozen boar and empty bottle, desolate and alone.

He stared stupidly at the dancing torch-lights on the armor of the passing group, with a dull ache in his breast.

Then suddenly he heard the shrill voice of Andreas crying, "Dickon! My Dickon!"

Dickon ran headlong forward, and stood boldly beside the litter, which for the moment was halted in its progress. When the Prince turned to look back, the smith's son faced even this mighty glance upright, and

with his chin in the air. If the wrath of kings' brothers killed, then he would at least die beside Andreas.

"What to-do is this?" Richard of Gloster asked, with a bending of his brows upon the peasant lad.

The Prince had stopped, and with him all his cortège. Above him flickered in its final stage the last of the rush-lights on the tree. Now that he stood cloakless, one of his shoulders was revealed higher than the other.

"He saved my poor life, your Highness," spoke Andreas swiftly from his couch. "He came to Camber Dane along with the robber band, but in the pillage he bore no part, and with his own hands slew he two villains who would have run me down, and bore me through the forest here, and got food and drink and fire for me, and guarded my 'Troilus' there from loss and —"

"Whose man art thou, boy?" the Prince broke in.

"I was Sir Watty Curdle's man," Dickon

made answer, with a stumbling tongue, but bold enough mien. "But that I will be no more, but rather die here first."

"Why, Sir Watty hath outstripped thee in *that* race. I set his head up on a pole in Craven market-place this morning, and Eggs-with hath the King's men in it to keep for once an honest Christmas," said the Prince, smiling grimly. "What name hast thou?"

"No other name save Dickon."

"Why, then, for all this doughty strife and brave work shalt have another atop of it," the Prince said, his shrewd, shapely young face melting into a kindly softness. "Art a good lad to be thus sued for."

He cast his swift glance about in instant search for some fit surname, and his eye caught the struggling taper-light upon the bough above him.

"Thou shalt be Dickon of the Tannenbaum," he called out, so that each might hear, "and wear my boar's head in exchange for that other thou didst slay, and hold thyself my man."

Then the torches moved on again, and behind them, in their dancing shadows through the wintry wood, the Prince and knights and litter passed; and Dickon followed to the highroad, where horses and five-score men-at-arms were waiting, and so to the abbey before ever midnight struck.

Seven years afterward, on bloody Bosworth field, when King Richard hewed his despairing way through the ring of steel which engirdled the pretender Richmond, and fell there dead, another Richard rode hotly at his heels, and like him was stricken to the earth.

But life was left in this second, and for the madness of his bravery it was spared. After he had lain a time in Leicester Abbey, to be cured of his wounds, he went to London, where Henry now was king instead. It was our Dickon.

The aged Master Caxton and Andreas Mayer, his right hand now, stood Dickon's friends at court, and it came in time to

pass that he died Sir Richard Tannibow, for so the English tongue framed the strange foreign word Tannenbaum. Of the properties he left behind the chief was the domain of Egswith, where once he had been the lowliest of hinds.

In after ages the name of the family still further changed to Tambow; but it is not likely to undergo any further shortening. Though they do not hold Egswith now, and wear no title in these later times, the Tambows still bear upon their shield the fir tree and the candles, and rightfully hold their heads as high as any in all Shropshire.

WHERE AVON INTO SEVERN
FLOWS.

WHERE AVON INTO SEVERN FLOWS.



CHAPTER I.

HUGH THE WRITER.

A BOY of fifteen, clad in doublet and hose of plain cloth dyed a sober brown, sat alone at one end of a broad, vaulted room, before a writing table. The strong, clear light which covered him and his work fell through an open window, arched at the top and piercing a stone wall of almost a yard's thickness. Similar openings to the right and left of him marked with bars of light a dozen other places along the extended, shelf-like table, where writers had now finished their day's labor, and, departing, had left covered horns of ink and cleansed utensils behind

them. But the boy's task lagged behind fulfilment, and mocked him.

Strive as he might, Hugh could not compel the tails of the longer letters to curl freely and with decent grace, or even to run in the same direction, one with the other. Though he pressed his elbow to the board, and scowled intently at the vellum before him, and even thrust out his tongue a little in earnest endeavor, still the marks went wrong. At last there came at the end of a word an "f," which needs must flow into shapely curves at top and bottom, if all fair writing were not to be shamed—and, lo! it did neither, but sloped off shakily into a rude angle above; a clumsy duck's egg below. Then he laid down his reed pen, and groaned aloud.

This Hugh Overtown, having later come to man's estate and then comfortably ripened into old age, has been dust and ashes now close upon four hundred years. For every minute in that huge stretch of time, some other boy since then has put aside his pen

and groaned, because the stubborn letters would not come right. But not many of these have had such sound cause for vexation.

First of all, Hugh was a trained writer, who might look a little later to be actually paid for his toil, if so be he did not take the black habit and become a monk himself. All of their gentle craft that the master limners and letterers in this great scriptorium of Tewkesbury Abbey could teach him, he had learned. In all the ten major abbeys and priories of Gloucestershire, perhaps no other lad of his years was so skilled to use both brush and pen. His term of tutelage being passed, he wrought now, in repayment for his teaching, upon the choicest of the volumes written here for great nobles and patrons of art and letters. And if ever sureness of glance and touch was called for, it was at this present time, since the work must be meet for royal eyes. The volume—when all its soft, creamy leaves should have been covered with arabesques and

high painted crests and shields and deftly regular text of writing, and been sewed together inside their embossed covers— was to be given, they said now, to the brother of the King. Prouder ambition than this a craftsman could hardly dream of—yet now, all at once, Hugh despaired to find himself making foolish mis-marks on the precious page, and not able to contrive their betterment.

The boy stared in gloom upon the parchment, wondering if, in truth, it were wholly spoilt; then his eyes wandered off through the open window to the blue May sky, and drifting after their gaze went his thoughts, in wistful reverie upon that gilded dream-land of princes and earls, whither this book, in good time, was to wend its way. New promptings stirred in his blood.

He had been a monk's boy in all these later years of peace, since his father, the poor saddler, fell in his Nevill livery on Hedgely Moor, away in the farthest-north. The great kindly Abbey had been much

more his home than the dark, squalid little house in the village below, where his widowed mother lived: here he had learned to write so that even the Abbot, John Strensham, lofty magnate and companion of princes though he was, had nodded smilingly over his work; here he had helped to serve the Mass in the grand Abbey church, with censer and bell, and felt his young mind enriched and uplifted by pious longings; here, too, he had dreamed into the likeness of veritable and detailed history his vision of the time when he should compose some wonderful chronicle, and win thanks from the great ones of the earth, and be known to all men as Hugh of Tewkesbury, whose book was to be prized above every other.

But now, after seven years wherein peaceful desires possessed plain men — lo! here was fighting in the land. And now of a sudden it seemed to Hugh that the writing of books, the quiet cloistral life, even the favor of the Abbot himself, were paltry

things. An unaccustomed heat tingled in his veins at thought of what existence outside these thick walls might now once more signify. Who would be a stoop-shouldered scribe, a monk, or even a mass-priest when there were war harnesses to wear, horses to mount, yew bows to bend till the shaft trembled in the strain?

Hugh could almost believe that he heard the tramp and distant confused murmuring of an armed host, as his musing dream took form. The very pages lying before him spoke of this new outburst of war, and linked him to it. The book was one of heraldry, and it had been begun for the great Earl of Warwick. Both the fame and the person of this mighty captain were well-known to the lad, for the King-maker was lord of Tewkesbury, and the overshadowing patron of village and abbey alike. But when scarcely the first sheets had been written this puissant lord had fled the kingdom, and the cautious monks had laid the work aside. Later came strange

rumors and tales: how Warwick had returned and driven the King away, and put up his whilom Red-rose foes to rule in London — and then pens and brushes were set busily at the book once more. But now the King had in turn come back and seized his own again, and slain Warwick on bloody Barnet field — and the frightened monks had bethought them to finish the book, with sundry emblazonings of the royal arms now ingeniously married to those of the Nevills, and make it a peace offering to Duke George of Clarence, who had wedded Warwick's daughter, and would be lord of Tewkesbury in his shoes.

The half-written page of vellum on the table seemed to Hugh a living part of all this stirring new romance of blood and spark-striking steel. Almost it made a soldier out of him to touch it. The characters engrossed thereon by his own hand danced before his eyes — waved in his day-dream like the motto on some proud knight's banner being borne forward to battle.

Suddenly the boy sat upright. Beyond question there *was* an unwonted noise, as of tumult, coming through the casement from the village without. He could distinguish the clanking of iron harness and weapons, the trampling of hoofs; and now—once! twice! a trumpet blast, rising on the air above the dull, vague rumble which bespeaks the assembling of a throng. He sprang to his feet, with the thought to climb the embrasure and look forth—and then as swiftly sat down again and bent over his work; the Chief Scrivener of the Abbey had entered the chamber.

Brother Thomas came slowly to the table—a good, easy man, whose fat white fingers knew knife and spoon now in these latter days much oftener than brush or pen—and glanced idly over Hugh's shoulder at the pages. Then he lifted the unfinished one, held it in the light to peer more closely, and sniffed aloud. Next he put his hand under Hugh's chin, and raised the boy's blushing face up till their glances met.

“What palsied spiders’-tracks are these?” he asked, holding out the vellum. “Art ill, boy?”

The gentle irony in his master’s tone touched Hugh’s conscience. He shook his head, and hung it, and kept a sheepish silence.

Thomas tossed the sheet upon the table, and spoke with something more of sharpness. “It is the mummers that have led thy wits off morris-dancing,” he said. “These May-day fooleries stretch themselves out now, each year more, until no time at all is left for honest work. This it is I noted in thee yesterday, and marvelled at—when thou hadst ruled the lines bordering the painted initial letter with effect to cut off holy St. Adhelm’s ear. Thy head is filled with idle sports and frolics outside. Happen his Lordship shall put them down now, once for all!”

Hugh’s red face turned redder still, and when he would have spoken, his tongue was tied in confusion. Brother Thomas

had unwittingly drawn very near to the truth of an awkward thing, the burden of which lay heavily on the boy's mind. In the next room, hidden but indifferently, were the fanciful garments which he himself had painted for the village morris-dancers a month before. They had been returned in privacy to him, and he had weakly pledged himself to trick them out anew against their coming use at Whitsuntide. This guilty secret it was that had preyed upon his peace, and robbed his hand of its cunning, ever since the masking dresses had been brought to him on yester-morning.

In any other year, he might have spoken freely to his master of this matter. But as evil chance would have it, on this very May festival, now two days gone — when in their pleasant wont the youths and maidens of Tewkesbury rose before cock-crow, and hied them to the greenwood with music and the blowing of horns, to gather haythorn branches and dell-flowers, to bathe

their faces in the May-dew for beauty's sake, to shoot at target with Robin Hood, and dance their fill about Maid Marian—who but Brother Thomas should pass on his return from matins at Deerhurst cell, nodding drowsily with each movement of his patient mule? Hugh recalled with a shudder how some wanton ne'er-do-well had from the bushes hurled a huge, soft swollen toadstool, which broke upon the good monk's astonished countenance, and scattered miserably inside his hood. It was small wonder that from this Brother Thomas conceived sour opinions of May-day sports, and now hinted darkly that the Abbot should make an end to them. But as it stood thus, Hugh dared not speak concerning the morris-dresses, and so had hidden them, and now was sorely troubled about it all.

It may be that here, upon the moment, he would have broken silence with his secret, well knowing how truly gentle a heart had Thomas. But at this the door was flung

open, and there entered Brother Peter, his gaunt gray poll shaking with excitement, his claw-like hands held up as one amazed, his eyes aflame with eagerness.

“Know ye what is come upon us?” he called out breathlessly. “The foreign woman — save her Grace, she that was — or is — Queen Margaret, I mean — is at our gates, and with her the Lord Duke Somerset, and her son the Prince Edward, and the great Earl’s daughter, our Lady Anne, and with them a mort of lords, and knights, and men-at-arms — running now over every highway and lane inside Tewkesbury and out, taking to themselves roughly whatever eye likes or belly craves — swearing by the Rood they will have the Abbey down about our ears if we deny them or food or drink!”

While Peter’s vehement tongue hurled forth these tidings, the man Thomas went pale with sudden concern for the great treasures and peace of the house; the boy Hugh rose to his feet, all the miseries of May-day

and morris-garments clean forgotten, and only the inspiriting ring of steel on steel in his ears.

“Oh! may I run and behold the brave sight?” he prayed aloud, but Thomas held forth a restraining hand for the moment, and Hugh, much chafing, heard what further Peter had to tell.

The Abbot, and with him the heads of the Chapter, had gone to the gates, and by parley had warded off incursion. The Abbey servants, threescore in number, were bearing forth meat and bread and ale to spread on the ham by the mill for the famished Lancastrians, who had in these thirty hours marched from Bristol by Gloucester, through forest and foul by-ways, with scarcely bite or sup, and now ravened like winter wolves. There were stories that King Edward, in pursuit, had covered ground even more swiftly, and now was this side of Cheltenham, in hot chase. With this dread foe at their tail, the Lancastrian lords dared not attempt to ford the Severn, and

so Queen, Prince, Duke, and all were halted up above the village on the high Gaston fields, and there would on the morrow give battle to King Edward.

“Oh! woe the day!” groaned Thomas, whose heart was in peaceful things. “How shall we escape sack and pillage — our painted missals and fair written tomes, our jewelled images, our plate of parcel-gilt, and silver-gilt and white, the beryl candlesticks, the mitres, monstrances, rings, gloves — wist ye not how after Wakefield’s victory the Queen’s men broke open churches, and defiled altars, from York along to London town?”

“Hast but a poor stomach for war times, good Thomas!” said the lean and eager old Brother Sacristan, in a tone spiced with sneering. “Who talketh of Wakefield? Who hath promised victory to these ribald Devon louts? On the morrow, we shall see them cast off their coats to run the better. Our stout King Edward hath never lost fight or turned tail yet. Shall he begin now?”

The old monk had not forgotten the deep Yorkist devotion in which his hotter secular youth had been trained, and his eyes sparkled now at thought of how true a fighter King Edward really was. No such fire of remembrance burned within Thomas, who none the less accepted the proffered consolation.

“Of a certainty,” he admitted, “the King hath won all his battles heretofore. Doubtless he hath the close favor of the saints. I mind me now of his piety — how that he would not be crowned on the day appointed, for that it was Childermas, and the Holy Innocents might not be thus affronted. Thus do wise and pious kings and men” — Thomas lifted his voice here, and glanced meaningly at Hugh — “win Heaven’s smiles, and honor fitly the anniversaries of the year — not by dancing and mumming in the greenwood.”

“I ween that in this game now forward, hard knocks will serve King Edward more than all his holiness, good Thomas,” said

Peter, who, coming to the Abbey late in life, brought some carnal wisdom along in his skull. "And this more — mark thou my words — when all is still again the Abbey will be the richer, not the poorer, for it all."

"How wilt thou make that good?" asked Thomas. "At best, this beef and ale must be at our cost — and the worst may more easily come to pass."

"Hast forgotten the funerals?" said Peter, dryly, with a significant nod towards the door beyond. Then, noting no gleam of comprehension on the faces of the others, he strode to this door, and threw it open. Within, in the half light, they could see through the narrow archway the dim outlines of rich banners standing piled against the walls, and candles heaped on chests of vestments, and velvet palls.

"How make it good?" cried the worldly Peter. "Where we have put pence into that room we shall draw forth rose-nobles. Know you not the King's charge to his fighting men, 'Kill the lords, but spare the

commons!’ By sundown of the morrow one may walk among dead knights round about like sheeps’ carcasses on a murrain’d moor. The Gastons, if there the Queen holdeth her place till she be met, will turn to marshes with gentle blood. And where shall they be buried, but here, within the holy Abbey’s walls? Then see what comes: item, for tolling the death-bells; item, for streaking-board and face-cloth; item, for so many sin-eaters, to be of our own servitors; item, for so much waste of funeral torches; item, for funeral sermons; item, for the hiring of palls; item, for hiring of garlands of wax and gum to hang over the graves; item, for masses and candles before the rood at month’s mind; item —”

“Peace, greedy Peter!” broke in the artist Thomas; “wert thou bred for a gravedigger? His Lordship mislikes this funeral zeal of thine. When thy grumbling for that the great Earl came not here from Barnet for his burial reached the Abbot’s ears, he spoke wrothfully concerning it.”

“So would he not, when I had shown him the charges in my book for that same,” retorted Peter. “For how lives an Abbey save by the death of generous and holy men and women? And was it not a foul thing that the great Earl—lord of this manor, patron of this Abbey—should not have profitably laid his bones here, where now for four hundred years lie all the lords of Tewkesbury, Fitz-Hamons, Clares, De Spensers, Beauchamps—but should be filched away to Berkshire to enrich those Austin friars instead? Thus is religion scandalized, Sir Scrivener!”

Thomas turned away at this, mistrusting his temper in further argument; and Hugh would gladly have followed him out of the room, but that Peter bent his steps toward the storage chamber beyond, where lay hidden those wretched morris trappings. Prudence counselled the lad to depart, and let discovery take care of itself; but anxiety held him back, and he went in at the heels of the Sacristan.

Old Peter sent a speculative eye shrewdly over the contents of the room, making a rough enumeration as he progressed, and offering comments aloud from time to time half to himself.

“Full seven dozen small candles,” he muttered, “but scarce a score of torches. How should we be shamed if they brought us a great lord like Somerset! The moulds shall be filled overnight.” Then he turned up the corner of a purple velvet pall, noting its frayed edge and tarnished gilt braid. “Time was,” he grumbled, “when for this eight crowns was gladly paid in hire; alack, but two months since Dame Willowby cried out against me when I asked a paltry five, and buried her good man under that fustian with the linen edge instead. Ah, the impious times we are fallen upon! Yet, if so be the press to get buried is great enough, and they carry the lights well up in air, a lord might be content with it at ten crowns.” Again he mused over the waxen wreaths heaped on the floor.

“There are half as many more on the rood screen that may come down, if it be deftly done, and go into hire again for better men. The townspeople will be too stirred with battle talk to miss them.”

Suddenly he turned to Hugh, and raised his voice. “The Sub-Prior will not hearken to me. What we are richest in is banners—here, against the wall, are a dozen of the bravest in all Gloucester. Yet in what do they serve!—naught save those trivial processions of Rogation Week, where all is outlay and nothing income. If he did but drop the hint, the fashion would rise to hire them for funerals; yet when I urged this upon him he laughed me to scorn! I tell thee, boy, there is no true piety left in mankind!”

Hugh had listened with but dull ears, his mind wavering between thoughts of what was going forward outside, and fears lest Peter should push his inquiries within the chamber too far. Here he said:—

“Good brother, if I do help thee to-

night with the moulds — and later with what else is needful — wilt thou go with me now forth to the street and view these strange new things? I have never yet seen an army, harnessed for fighting, close at hand. And if thou art with me, Thomas will not be vexed.”

So the twain — the old monk full as eager as the lad to rub shoulders with men-at-arms — made their way through the corridors and cloister walks to the great western gate of the Abbey. They met no one either within the buildings or in these cool, open-air paths: the monks were at their prayers in the church, perhaps, or in the garden burying the Abbey’s treasures.

But when the gate was reached — “Angels save us!” gasped good Peter; “if our walls win soundly through this next forty hours, commoners shall be buried with candles till Ascension Day for three-pence. I vow it to Our Lady!”

Well might such as loved the Abbey feel their hearts sink at the sight! Upon

the green before the gate, which sloped smoothly for an arrow's flight down to the mill pit on the Avon, swaggered or lounged at leisure full five hundred base-born archers and billmen, mired to the knees, unwashed and foul of aspect, with rusty chain coats or torn and blackened leathern jackets. Some wore upon their heads battered iron sallets; others had only hoods pulled forward to their brows, or even lying back upon their shoulders, but over each face hung tangled masses of thick hair, and on the cleanest chin sprouted a fortnight's beard.

These unkempt ruffians were for the most part swart of visage, as Devon and Cornishmen should be. They waited now idly upon the return of their lords from the great church in front. While their betters within prayed to the saints in heaven against the morrow's carnage, these fellows sauntered in groups on the green sward, or played at dice upon a cloak spread flat on earth, or wrestled in rough

jest to further amaze the gaping natives. Many were already in their cups, yet still the servants of the Abbey were to be seen, in the waning sunlight, on the ham beyond, broaching new casks of ale. Ribald quips and drunken laughter filled the air. In the distance, close upon the entrance to the church itself, two soldiers had thrown a farmer to the ground, and one was stripping off his doublet while the other kicked him as he lay. From the direction of the mill there rose the scream of a woman — and no one heeded it.

The Sacristan and the boy cowered for a time in the shadow of the gateway, looking out with fearful eyes upon this unwonted scene. From their cover, they watched until the great ones began coming out from their prayers, and the idling men-at-arms were hurriedly gathered, each after his livery, to attend them. These billmen bore upon their breasts the cognizances of their masters, but so worn and defaced were

many of these that all Hugh's heraldic lore could not cope with them. Thus they could but guess who this or that proud knight might be, as he passed with gilded armor rattling in every joint, and the squalid knot of soldiers tramping at his heels.

"But this — this is surely the three *torteaux* of the Courtenays," he whispered, nudging Peter. "And he who carries his casquetel in hand, with fair curls and head bent in thought — that would be John, the new Earl of Devon."

The two looked upon this fine, strong, goodly young nobleman, and read in the three crimson circles wrought upon the jerkins of his retainers a tale of stately long descent, of cousinship with kings, of crusades, tournaments, and centuries of gallant warfare — familiar and stirring then to every schooled mind in England.

"Ay — I mind him now," said Peter, peering eagerly forth. "I saw his brother, the Earl Thomas, led to the block at York, after Towton field — 'tis nine years sine.

There was a witch who then foretold that those three ripe-red roundels of the Courtenays were blood spots from three brothers' hearts, and all should die under the axe."

A stranger's voice, close behind them, took up their talk.

"My father saw the second brother, Earl Henry, beheaded at Salisbury four years later—and men called then to mind this same bloody prophecy—to the end that the Lord John fled the realm. Look where he walks, with bowed head and face o'er-cast—a fateful man! Belike the axe's edge is whetted for him, even now."

He who spoke thus, with a shivering sigh to close his speech, was young and of slight form—clad from sole to crown in plain and dulled plate-harness. His uplifted visor framed a face of small features and soft lines, with saddened eyes. He had stepped aside into the gateway un-noted by the two, and stood now at the Sacristan's elbow, gazing forth as gloomily as ever affrighted monk might do.

Peter glanced him briefly over, and sniffed disdain.

“I know you not, young sir,” he said, with curtness, “and offer no offence. But I have seen stout fighting in my time—and were you kin of mine, into to-morrow’s battle you should not stir, with witches’ babble sickening your thoughts, and dead men’s bones in your eyes. Hearten yourself, I conjure you!”

That monk should bear himself thus masterfully toward warrior startled Hugh for the moment, until he recalled that old Peter had on occasion browbeaten even the Sub-Prior himself, and reflected that this Knight seemed very young.

The stranger made no reply, but kept his anxious gaze fastened upon the scene without. Then, with a sudden little shudder which rattled swiftly like an echo through his armor, he lifted his head upright, and tossed the end of his cloak across his shoulder.

“The streets are strange to me,” he said

proudly. "If you are so minded, walk with me upon them. No harm shall befall you!"

His beckoning hand summoned from the outer shadows two tall old men-at-arms, in bull's-hide jackets and bearing pikes.

"Fare ye close upon our heels, Wilkin and Ashman," the Knight commanded. The monk and scrivener-lad took instant counsel of glances, and without a word walked beside their new companion—forth from the calm haven of Mother Church into the rude turbulence of murderous civil war.

Pressing tight together, the five made their way across the green and into Church Street. To their left, above the black roofs of the Abbey mills, the sunset sky was glowing with laced bars of blood and sulphur, overhung by a pall of lead. Before them, the narrow street lay dark beneath the shadows of projecting roofs and swollen galleries.

Here, as in the other streets which they traversed, the houses were for the most

part. closed and lightless. Even in the market-place, where the Tolzey cross glimmered faintly in the waning daylight like an altar in some deserted unroofed church, the citizens gave no sign of life in their homes; movement enough was on foot all about them, but it was that of strangers. Knots of soldiers, some already with flaming torches, strode aimlessly up and down before the taverns and in the alleys, roaring forth camp songs, kicking at suspected doors, or brawling with such trembling inhabitants as they had unearthed. Amidst it all the Knight passed unquestioned, with head haughtily erect.

If the Knight had led the walk townwards with set purpose, it did not appear; for presently he turned, and the five pushed back again through the jostling, clamorous crowd to the open Abbey green. At the great gate he paused, and motioned the two retainers to stand aside. Still he hesitated, tapping the sward impatiently with his mailed foot, his gaze astray

among the clouds. At last he spoke, turning abruptly to the boy:—

“Canst write me a letter, to-night?”

“How wist ye he is a penman?” asked Peter, in amazed suspicion.

“What other wears ink upon his fingers? Nay—not you, good monk!—I asked the lad.”

“The scriptorium is long since shut,” Hugh began; “and—”

“Mayhap this golden key will fit the lock,” the Knight interposed, drawing a coin from the purse at his side. “The letter is a thing of life or death.”

“It may be contrived,” broke in good Peter, taking the money without ceremony. “When a life hangs on a few paltry scratches of the pen, should we be Christians to withhold them?”

The Sacristan led the way now by a postern door into a basement room, and lighted two candles by the embers on the hearth.

“Run you,” he said to Hugh, “and bring hither what is needful.”

When the boy returned, and placed paper, inkhorn, and wax upon the table, and, pen in teeth, looked inquiry upward, the Knight's wits seemed wandering once again. He paced to and fro about the chamber, halting a dozen times to utter words which would not come, and then, with a head-shake, taking up his march upon the stones. Finally, thus he ordered the letter written, though not without many pauses, and erasures in plenty:—

From a true friend: Much there is to tell you; how that the Lady Katherine's father is dead, and herself for some time sore beset and menaced by the enemy you wot of, but now in safety. Worse betides you if this evil man works his will. This se'nnight four villeins took horse from Okehampton with intent to slay you and win reward from him; so that he gains your lands and hers, and gets her to wife to boot. These foul knaves wear the Courtenay livery, and, arrived to-day in your camp, mix with the Lord John's train; though of this he is innocent. So watch and ware, as herself and I will pray.

“There needs no signature,” the Knight replied, when at the finish Hugh looked

up. "Seal it with this ring," and took from his baslard-hilt a little jewelled hoop, with the signet of three fishes, upright. Then, when the wax securely held the silk, he bade him superscribe the name "Sir Hereward Thayer, Knt."

The Knight took the packet—saying, briefly: "I am in much beholden to you both, and to all black monks through you, and shall forget nor one nor other," and went his way through the postern into the darkness, leaving the ring behind.

CHAPTER II.

SIR HEREWARD'S RING.

FROM the spire of the Abbey church, throughout the night, the monks could see on the high lands close by, to the south, long lines of red camp-fires, and dancing torches here and there, as captains made their watchful rounds. The cries of the sentries came to their ears through the stilled air, as from the near side of Swilgate Brook itself, which washed the Abbey's walls. Little of sleep did the cells or dormitories know that frightened night, for servants were busy till the first cock-crow burying jewels and plate in the Abbot's garden, and half the brothers kept vigil in prayer before the High Altar, or in the chapels of St. Eustacius and St. James, while others slumbered fitfully on their

pallets, or climbed the tower to watch the Lancastrians' lights.

Thus, at last, anxious morning broke, and the cawing of the rooks in the branches close to Hugh's window roused the boy from his sleep. At a bound he was on his feet, forgetting even to rub his eyes, and glad that, having slept in his clothes, he might fare forth without loss of time. His dreams had been all of archery — how that the best bows were of Spanish yew, and he had tried to cut down the English yews in the churchyard to make new weapons, and had been haled before the King's justices because of the law to preserve the yews for the King's armies — and the thread of this dream ran through his mind even as he knelt and muttered his prayer.

It was full daylight when Hugh found himself outside the Abbey walls and on the footpath leading over the brook up to the Vineyards. Behind him the matin chimes were sounding from the belfry. Before him rose the dismantled walls of Holme

Castle, once the abiding place of the great Earls of Gloster, but now long since grown over with ivy, and a harbor for owls and bats. When he had come to the top of the knoll, at the front of these ruins, the sight spread out before his eyes was one to well quicken breath and set veins tingling.

A vast host of armed men seemed to cover the earth as far as he could see. The boy had not known before that the whole world contained so many soldiers. One company was in the rough meadow close at hand. In the bright light he could discern them clearly—strong men of war, with battered steel breastplates, half blue, half red with rust, and iron caps upon their heads. Some of these were leading a score of horses back and down to the brook whence he had come. Others toiled at levelling some half-dozen camp-tents of white cloth, with crimson stripes, while still others crowded about the place where sparks crackled and black smoke curled

about huge caldrons wherein food was cooking. At the peak of the largest tent, high upon the staff, floated gently in the early breeze an emblazoned standard, bearing the blood-red three roundels of the Courtenays.

For a moment Hugh's thoughts stopped at the memory of the strange Knight and his letter; somewhere among this band of brawny fighting men would be the four caitiffs who were here to slay that unknown Devon gentleman, Sir Hereward. He glanced at his little finger, whereon the signet ring of the three fishes glittered unwontedly, — and marvelled to find his base-born skin touched by such a trinket, for he had resisted Peter's desire to take it over to the Abbey treasury, — and then the glance lifted itself to still more marvellous things.

Away in the distance, on the topmost point to the left hand of the highroad, Hugh had already noted a brave pavilion, guarded by banks of earth raised since last he saw that familiar horizon, and overhung

by what he saw now to be the royal standard of England's Kings. A blare of trumpets, rolling in sharp echoes from mound to mound across the field, proceeded now from this point, and as he looked Hugh saw upon the highway, setting forth in his direction, a little cavalcade of knights and ladies whose dress and trappings sparkled in the morning sun, even thus afar, like the lights on the High Altar beneath the painted windows.

Onward this group of riders came — and the boy, creeping under the cover of the hedge, stole forward with no other thought than to see them close at hand. And so it was that he crouched in listening silence, not more than twenty paces removed, when this thing happened.

The tall, grave-faced, golden-haired noble whom Hugh knew to be John, Earl of Devon, clad all in burnished steel, and bearing a great lion-crested tilting helmet upon his arm, strode forth from the company near the ruins to the highway, and

stood thus, with bare head erect in the sunlight, until the riders, cantering lightly over the dew-laid road, drew rein before him. Then he advanced, and bending with one knee to earth, kissed the hand of a lady who, with a single knight, rode at the head of the little train.

This lady, then,—she with the bold, beautiful face, pale now as an ivory missal-cover, and drawn with stern lines, she with the burning brown-black eyes, and proudly upright carriage,—was the Frenchwoman, the Queen, the great Margaret of Anjou!

Hugh held his breath and stared out of fixed eyes at this terrible foreign woman, whose hates had fastened war upon his country, had killed even his own father, had drenched the land with blood—and listened with all his ears.

“We have given you, out of our grace, the lands and titles which your recreant brother Henry forfeited, and lost along with his head, when he played fast and loose with the usurper,” this Queen said,

in loud, cold tones, when the Courtenay stood upright again. "This day will test our wisdom in the thing."

"Madame," the Earl made answer, holding her eye with his, "our house has given three lives for you. If mine goes to-day I shall die sorrowing chiefly for this—that there are no more of us to die for our King."

The knight who rode beside the Queen—Hugh through the bushes saw only that he was tall and lean, with a delicately handsome young face and reddish-brown hair under his beaver, and wore a silver swan on his breast—spoke now:—

"My Lord of Devon, my mother rides now with the Lady Anne and her tiring women to a place of safety on t'other side of Avon, there to wait upon the good tidings we shall presently bring her. The place is at Bushley, the Lady Anne being acquainted with it from childhood. From this, I return to lead our centre, with the Prior and the Lord Wenlock. My Lord



“HE ADVANCED AND KISSED THE LADY’S HAND.”



Duke holds the front, beyond where our standard hangs. To you, my lord, the rear is given, to swing across this field, with your back against the ridge. The men from Somerset march to join you, even now. God stead you, honest Courtenay, and bring us victory!"

The Prince at this threw himself off his horse and into his mother's arms, his face buried upon her knees, his hands holding hers. The Queen, with marble face, swept her agonized glance high into the morning sky, and wept not, neither spoke, but bit her lips, and with her eyes invoked the saints.

Then, like some dissolving mist before Hugh's gaze, everything was altered. The Queen with her escort was ambling one way, toward the gray Abbey walls and the passage at the mill; her gallant young son was galloping with his group of knights back whence he came; the Courtenay company, close at hand, was gathering itself into ranks, with knights clambering

heavily into saddles, and men-at-arms striking their pikes together. The whole broad field was, as by some magic hand, set in motion; everywhere troops were marching, standards fluttering forward, trumpets calling shrill-voiced to one another.

The boy, lifting his head now above the hedge, looked upon this vast shifting picture with but a dazed comprehension. The beauty of it all was so great that its grim meaning missed his mind. As far as eye could reach, armed bodies of men, with banners and harness glittering in the sunlight, met the vision. And now, of a sudden, all movement ceased. The birds in the ivy on the ruin behind him sang into the morning air, and no trumpet answered them. The landscape stood still.

Suddenly the boy clapped hands to ears, and stared affrightedly about him. A demon-like roaring sound had burst, as out of the very earth, which rocked and quivered under the shock. A thou-

sand thunder-claps in one, out from the clear sky! Quailing with fright, as lesser belching noises succeeded, shaking the ground and confounding all senses and wits, Hugh backed out of the ditch, and felt, rather than made, his way rearward to the shadow of the ruins. Creeping up upon a ragged heap of tumbled stones, he ventured to look forth again.

A broadened veil of smoke—curious, thin, bluish smoke—all unlike that from burning thatches or stubble refuse—hung now upon the horizon where the royal standard had been. Was it still there? Hugh could not tell. Flashes of fire leaped swiftly for an instant here and there from this veil of smoky haze, and after each dart of flame there burst this deafening, thunderous roar which had so appalled him. Then it broke upon his brain that these were cannon, of which all men had long since heard, but few had ever seen on English soil. More than this it was not easy to grasp of what was

going forward. Along the line of smoke, where sky ought to meet earth, could be seen confused masses of horse and footmen struggling together, but whither moving or how faring in their conflict could not be told. The men under Courtenay's banner had marched westward toward the windmill, and were not in sight.

All at once Hugh's gaze was diverted from this distant prospect to a strange apparition nearer at hand—a brownish-gray sort of globe, like a full moon, which, low to earth, stood between him and the smoke, and seemed to wax in bigness visibly as he looked. There was not time for thought before this ball, singing to itself as it came, swelled to giant size in the lad's vision—then smashed into the vine-clad wall beside him with a huge scattering of stones and mortar. The wall quivered for a moment, then fell outward, prone to the sward.

Without hesitation, Hugh slid down from

his perch, and half-choked with dust and lime ran toward Swilgate Brook as fast as ever his legs would carry him. He made no pause, nor cast any glance backward, until he stumbled, panting and aflame with fright, into the cool shadow of the Abbey's big west gate. Not till its ponderous doors had clanged shut behind him, did he venture to draw breath.

Only the slowest and stoutest of the lay servitors in the kitchen lingered yet over their morning meal when the boy, his hunger led forward by keenest smelling sense, found his way thither. Within this low-vaulted chamber it was as if the confusion of tongues had fallen again. There were some hardier spirits who had, from sundry distant points of vantage, seen a tithe of what Hugh had witnessed. These told their tales to gaping, awe-stricken groups with much bold embroidery and emblazoning of fancy, peopling the field with mailed giants, and imputing to magic the mystery of the cannons, whose dire bellowings gave even these stony kitchen

walls a throbbing pulse. Worse still was what the village vagabonds — permitted for the once to enter freely and mix with their betters before the fires — related with rolling eyes and quaking voices, to wile further victuals from the frightened cooks.

Into such riot ran this babel of loose tongues that not even the Precentor's entrance stilled it. This gentle, soft-eyed old monk had, indeed, no thought to govern aught or any, and gazed about over the motley throng as one abashed, until his glance fell upon Hugh. To him he beckoned, and, when the two were without upon the stairs, made hurried explanation:—

“His Lordship will himself sing the early Mass, with pontifical procession, and full chapter ceremonial. Get thee with all speed into thy surplice, comb out thy locks — shalt bear the cross!”

A brief while later, paced slowly from the cloisters the long devotional line, Hugh, all aglow with pride in his new office, advancing at its head, with the jewelled cross upheld

aloft. After him were singing boys in surplices and singing men with added copes; then two score monks in ebon black with lighted tapers, the secular canons, the priests of the Abbey, the priors, the deacons attired for the altar, and last the venerable Abbot, John Strensham, bent with age and infirmities, and wearing over his vestments an almuce with hood of ermine, because his blood was cold. Into the choir the procession filed with measured step and solemn chant — and then, as by some sudden stroke of universal palsy, foot halted and song died on lips.

Such a scene as never monk or abbot had dreamt of in Tewkesbury lay before them.

The doors of the rood screen hung wide, so that vision swept from the choir down through the nave and its outer parts, where the simple and base-born heard the Mass, straight to the great north porch. Here, too, the doors were open, for daylight streamed therefrom transversely across the nave. And in this light the amazed

monks saw a mired, blood-stained, bedraggled swarm of armed men struggling fiercely for entrance before their fellows, and among these some who smote and felled the others with their swords or battle-axes — amid clamor of shrieks and violent curses, rising above the ground-note of a deep wild shouting as from a multitude without, and the furious clash of steel on steel. The wrath of hell raged here and tore itself before them on the consecrated floor of heaven.

While yet this spell of bewilderment lay upon the astounded spectators in the choir, Hugh felt himself clutched by the shoulder and pushed forward down the steps and into the aisle by a strong though trembling hand. It was the old Abbot, who in the moment of horror at this sacrilege forgot his years. Raising himself to his full height, and snatching the great beryl monstrance from the altar, he hurried now down the nave at such a pace that the cross-bearer, whom he dragged at his side, and the wondering monks and choristers who followed, were

fain almost to run if they would not let him reach the porch alone.

The western end of the nave held now a closely-packed mass of fugitives, with scarce a weapon among them — gilded and blazoned knight huddled against unkempt billman, lord and varlet jammed together — all crowding backward in despair from the open porch where, bestriding corpses on the blood-wet flags, a dozen mailed ruffians with naked swords and axes bent ferocious, hungry scowls upon them.

Helpless and dazed, as in an evil dream, the boy felt himself thrust forward into the very front of these war-wolves; and as he stood there, holding the cross as steadily as might be, within a cloth-yard shaft's length of their ravening jaws and flame-lit eyes, his foolish knees knocked together, and he had liked to swoon.

But then — lo! these fierce men put down their blades, and, bowing first, with ill-will slunk backwards to the sides of the porch; and the foremost, still doggedly, even

fell upon their knees. Then, the way being clear, Hugh saw that where the churchyard graves had been was now, underfoot, a slaughter pen, and above a wilderness of wild faces and dripping pike-heads. And in the forefront of this awful array, with one mailed foot on the threshold of the porch itself, stood the noblest figure of a man the boy's eyes had ever compassed — a youngish man of uncommon stature and great girth of shoulders, girt with polished steel armor picked in gold, and having on its breast a silver sun with flaring jewelled rays. He too grasped a huge naked sword, and sank its point before the cross Hugh held — the while two esquires made loose the rivets of his towering helmet and lifted it from him. Then he, not too humbly, bowed his head — a shapely head, with reddish-golden curls — and lifting it, looked into the church with the flushed face and glance of a very god of war.

The Abbot, tottering as he came, pushed Hugh aside and reared himself proudly in

the porch, holding the monstrance with shaken hand above his head, and crying out:—

“Where thou standest, my liege, thou art not King, but only Edward Plantagenet, a sinner even as the meanest of us, and with the blood of God’s children on thy hands. Therefore abase thyself. It is the Host!”

The King dropped to his knees for the counting of ten, then rose and made a step within the porch, still searching sharply with restless eyes into the shadows of the nave.

“My Lord Abbot,” he said, in a soft, full voice of stately measure which belied his glance, “I and my brothers and our trusty friends have desire to forthwith enter this holy edifice, and with thee offer reverent thanks for this our resplendent victory.” As the Abbot held his silence, the King added, “I had not looked to find a Strensham lifting himself between the saints and my piety.”

The Abbot found his voice: “I am

stricken in years, my liege. My life has been thine as long as has thy crown; take it now if needs be. But while it lasts me, into this consecrated house thou may'st not enter to ravish or mete punishment. Pledge me thy royal faith that no man within these walls shall feel thy wrath—that all shall be suffered to go forth in peace!”

“Since what time, my Lord Abbot,” asked the King, dryly, “hath the privilege of sanctuary descended upon the black monks of Tewkesbury?”

“Where God's flesh and blood are, there is sanctuary!” shrilled the Abbot. “By the pains of Calvary, thou shalt not enter unpledged—save over my old bones!”

While the King's answer hung yet in doubt, an old monk slipped past the Abbot, and, thrusting his shaven gray poll in obeisance close before Edward, mumbled a request which none behind him might hear. It was Peter, the Brother Sacristan—and the King, so far from buffeting the audacious shaveling with his gauntlet,

thought for a moment, then smiled, and waved Peter aside.

“On my kingly honor, I promise,” he said firmly, with a glance ranging from Peter to the Abbot, and the half-smile playing on his handsome, ruddy face. “Before God, I promise! And for this sacrilegious bloodshed here, will I do penance!”

The Abbot's withered old lips formed a mute thanksgiving. “My liege,” he faltered, “some forewarning of your triumph of a surety brought me from my bed to the altar this day. Praise God thy enemies are put under thy feet! Pray God for humility and a gentle spirit, these to stay thee from trampling them! Wilt follow, and hear the Mass?”

Thus strangely, the broken procession was reformed, and Hugh, aweary now under the weight of the cross, sick with the smell of blood and the sight of hewn corpses at his feet, stumbled back again up the aisle, past the rood screen, into the choir, the singers chanting the solemn *Te Deum Lau-*

damus behind him, and King, princes, nobles and knights and monks and soldiers following the Abbot to the High Altar. Here, out of pity at his white face, another took his office on him, and Hugh, escaping from the incense-laden air of the choir, staggered into the ambulatory, faint and distressed. He had too little wit left to note that the side aisles and transepts held scores of skulking fugitive soldiers, and that others of a like kidney were hiding in the shrine chapels about him.

Not even when one of these came forth from the enclosure dedicated to St. Edmund the Martyr, and laid hand upon his shoulder, was he startled, but only looked up with wan indifference on his chalk-like face.

“Where had ye that ring?” a deep voice asked, with tightened grip upon his shoulder to point the query.

Hugh saw now that it was a stalwart young man who questioned him—and one of quality, despite the miry disorder of his

dress and armor, and his dust-stained face. What could be discerned of this face was pleasing enough, too — but the lad's head was whirling and his tongue numbed at its roots. For his life he could not speak.

“That ring!” the stranger went on excitedly. “I saw it on your hand whilst you held the cross — the which, now I think on't, saved our lives. Fear nothing, lad! Tell me, how came you by it? Perchance I am beholden to you for the letter last night — if so — will ye not speak, I say!”

Hugh, with a despairing effort, gathered his wits, and asked faintly: “Are you the Sir Hereward, then, to whom 'twas writ?”

“Aye, none other — what there is left of me. And writ ye the letter? And at whose behest?”

The boy opened his mouth to answer, looked blankly up into his questioner's face — then, as the swelling chant ceased suddenly in the choir beyond, rolled supinely on the stones at Sir Hereward's feet, in a deadly swoon.

Through what remained of this awful Saturday, and through the startled hush of the Sunday following it, the boy kept his bed in a faint, drowsing languor, broken by fits of shuddering under the terror of evil dreams. Oft and again, the writing monks came in compassion to his bedside, but his shaken wits made of these visitors, only black figures in the background of an endless scared vision of stark corpses, bearing blood-stained heraldic shields along the pages of his book.

The second night came, and, lagging desperately through the long watches, stole off by a trick at last while the lad slept—so that he woke crowned as he lay with sunlight. The neglected book was in his thoughts first of all—and then came consciousness that he was better—and then, as he opened his eyes and blinked against the full light, he saw that Peter was in the room, bearing a steaming dish of broth.

“Art fit for great news?” the Sacristan asked, roughly enough, but looking down

upon the boy with a kindly light shining from under his gray, shaggy brows. "The Prince Richard — my Lord Duke of Gloster — hath sent hither for our best scrivener to attend him at the Tolzey, and Brother Thomas, conferring with the Abbot, hath nominated thee. Not that thou art our best, nor near it, but thy masters are in cowls and gowns, and since Saturday's sacrilege no monk may stir forth to serve the Princes or the King. Art fit for it?"

Hugh sat up in bed, and put hand to brow, and smiled wistfully. "Aye, save for a foolish little wandering here," he made answer, "naught ails me now!" And for proof he seized the dish and buried his jowl in it.

Peter strode up and down before the narrow casement, grumbling as his gown flapped about his heels.

"Sacrilege! Sacrilege!" he sneered. "Well may the King laugh us to scorn as witless loons! For what is 'sacrilege' but a weapon forged by Holy Church to

use against the laity, to our great profit and their uplifting? Yet here are we, turning its point upon our own throats! Because a little paltry blood was spattered in the porch—lo! for a full month now the Church must lie in penitential darkness, no matins, no masses, no vespers—until it be purified and newly consecrated. Was ever such madness? Here with mine own eyes have I seen the son of a king, he that was born Prince of Wales, shovelled into a grave in the choir without so much as a rush-light. The flags are all up for burials—the Earl of Devon, the Lord Wenlock, the Lord John Beaufort, and scores of knights and brave gentlemen brought to us by God's own hand—and yet we may not harvest so much as a penny for it all! Oh! senseless chapter, to decree such folly!”

Hugh had in swift silence dressed himself the while the old monk babbled, and stood now in all readiness. “I will to the scriptorium, good Peter,” he said eagerly,

“to bring ink and pens and paper, and then take orders from Brother Thomas for my going.”

“Thomas thou may'st not see, nor any other,” said the Sacristan; “each is in his cell, upon his knees, because of this same sacrilege, and there must stick for days!”

“But thou art here!”

“Oh, aye!” the old monk growled. “Be-like I took the habit overlate in life to learn the trick of good, thick, solid praying. They set me now and again at small, light supplications, but when great things are besought, my help seems never needful. Moreover, I have the burials to order. A sweet task, truly! To be laying the bones of princes and lords in consecrated ground as thick together as rogues in the stocks at fair-time, and not the purchase of so much as a gum-wreath to show for it!”

The two walked through the long deserted corridor overhanging the cloisters, and entered the tenantless writing room. Naught had been touched since that fate-

ful Friday night, when Hugh had written the letter for the strange knight. He recalled this now, as he took his inkhorn from the dusty table.

“Oh — tell me, Peter,” he said, “saw you aught of the Devon gentleman — him to whom that letter was writ — he was in the Abbey when —”

“Aye, more than once. He was holding you in his arms when Thomas and I found you. A goodly youngster — a thought too hasty, it may be, but sound at heart. He hath promised a year’s masses for the dead Earl of Devon, when things come right again. They were in some sort kinsmen. And I have sown in his mind pious thoughts of, moreover, rearing an altar-tomb in the Lady Chapel, with effigy and sculptured sides. Oh, aye — he had food from me yestere’en here in this very room, and so hotly pressed payment on me that —”

Even as the Sacristan spoke the veil of silence hanging like a pall over the Abbey was rent by a shrill, piercing shriek from

the cloister-green below! Clambering to the table, and peering forth, Hugh saw the figures of men running along the vaulted walks, and of others, mailed, and with weapons, chasing them. From the church beyond proceeded a great tumult, with angry shouts, and the clashing of steel.

The King's word was broken. The fugitives were being dragged from sanctuary!

Above the noises of search and despairing flight which now filled the air, there rose suddenly the sound of heavy footsteps near at hand. Then the further door was flung open, and Sir Hereward Thayer, breathless, bareheaded, and without his corselet, made hasty entrance. His eyes brightened as they fell upon Peter.

"The wolves are on us," he said, "and we have not so much as a stick to fend them off. It is no shame to hide. Where shall I find security, good brother?"

"Alack! there will be none here!" cried Peter. "If they are in the church itself, think you they will spare mere cells and offices?"

“Whither leads this room?” asked Sir Hereward, opening the middle door, and looking in upon Peter’s array of candles, banners, wreaths, and palls. “Here, under these, I can make myself secret till the search be done!”

Without further words, he lifted from the darkest corner a pile of disordered linen stuffs, loose shrouds, and grave-cloths, and coverings for coffins. The Sacristan, as he looked from the doorway, noted with shrewd swiftness the gay colors of the morris-dresses underneath, and, stepping forward, laid his hand upon them. Then Hugh, hurriedly, and with faltering lips, told Peter what they were, and the story of their guilty presence — and lo! the old monk laughed aloud.

Then suddenly — as the clamor of the chase deepened outside — Peter hissed commands into Sir Hereward’s ear.

“Get you into this motley in all haste! Lose no moment! Thus only can you win outside and pass the gates, and go unquestioned through the town!”

CHAPTER III.

HOW HUGH MET THE PRINCE.

ONLY a brief space later, Hugh and this new companion in painted fool's clothes and with raddled cheeks made their way forth from the great west gate to the green. No formless loitering of idle men-at-arms now met their gaze. Straight lines of pikemen had been posted before each entrance to church or monastery, and in the open space beyond stood long regular ranks of other soldiers, with fluttering standards and a forest of tall weapons—all newly burnished—ashine in the morning sun.

The twain, with as bold a front as might be, walked down this passage of pikes until the captain of the watch, a burly, bearded man in Flemish armor,

stopped them with uplifted hand; and two dozen pike-heads clashed down as by a single touch, to bar alike progress and retreat.

“I am the scrivener of the Abbey,” Hugh called out from within this steel girdle, “and go forth to the Tolzey at behest of your master and mine—the Lord Duke of Gloster.”

“And this merry fellow; hath the Duke need for him likewise?” the captain asked, with sharp glances. “I’m sworn his Grace looks more for headsmen than for morris-dancers, as to-day’s wind blows.”

“Put thy queries to the Duke himself,” said Hugh; “and hold us no longer waiting here, as he waits at the Tolzey.”

Grumbling in his beard, the captain dropped his hand, and the pikes flashed upward. Hugh and the mock fool passed forth, and turned their feet townwards across the trampled sward. At the church gate to their right hand, a greater body of armed men stood, and beyond these, within the

churchyard, high plumes on knightly helmets nodded in the morning breeze. Of what was going forward there the two saw nothing, but hurried on, glad to pass unquestioned.

They came thus to the market-place, held clear by solid walls of troopers, mailed, and armed to the teeth, behind whom the townsfolk, now heartily of but one opinion, strove to win friends and peep between steel shoulders into the open space. Still unmolested, the boy, bearing his inkhorn and scroll well before him as a badge of craft, passed with his companion to the side of the cross—where workmen toiled with axe and mallet to rear a platform of newly hewn beams and boards—and held his course straight to the Tolzey.

“Saw you what they build, there by the cross?” whispered Sir Hereward. “It is a scaffold, where presently axes shall hew flesh and blood, not logs.” And then he added, “Whither go we; into the very tusks of the boar?”

“Nay, but to get behind him,” returned Hugh, in the same sidelong whisper. “Halt you at the Tolzey door; mix there with the throng which idly gapes upon the soldiery, until chance offers to steal through some alley to the open fields.”

“And you leave me there?”

“How shall it be otherwise? And—I say it now—farewell; the saints protect thee!”

“A word,” the masker whispered. “Art sure it was a knight who ordered the letter to be writ?”

“None other. A knight in full battle harness. And—*Oh!* God save us! *It is he!*”

Before the low-browed Tolzey, or Toll-booth, a house of bricks on timber, with projecting gallery reared over open pillars, an urgent throng of citizens swarmed behind two rows of soldiers, to note the uttermost of what was passing. This Tolzey—at once exchange and town hall, court-house and jail—had in its long life seen



“TWO DOZEN PIKE-HEADS CLASHED DOWN AS BY A SINGLE TOUCH.”



strange things, but nothing like unto to-day, when the King's brother, Richard of Gloster, and John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, held bloody assize upon the enemies of the King. Above the gable floated, side by side, two standards of deep red stuff, on which were wrought, one the silver boar of Gloster, Lord Constable of England, one the silver lion rampant of Norfolk, Earl Marshal.

And at the porch, pushing their way through the press of onlookers under the arches between the pillars, a knot of men-at-arms dragged forward that same strange knight at whose bidding Hugh had written the letter!

"Look! It is he!" the boy repeated breathlessly, quickening his pace for the instant, then shrinking back dismayed.

Sir Hereward laid a firm hand on his arm. "I quit ye not here!" he swore, between clenched teeth. "Hasten we forward, and into the presence of the court."

"But—it means death to thee—" the boy began, as the other hurried him on.

“Better a thousand deaths — by fire and molten lead — than that *this* should happen,” the other gasped. “Up with thy chin! They *must* not say us nay!”

What answers they gave, in what manner their arguments satisfied, the twain barely knew. The chief matter was that they won their way into the Tolzey, were borne up the foul, narrow staircase by the throng close at the heels of the soldiers and their captive, and suddenly found themselves stumbling over the threshold into a large room, whereof one part was densely crowded, and one empty as a grave fresh dug. A triple line of steel corselets, sallets, and bills, drawn from side to side, split these parts asunder, and behind this line those in authority at the door roughly made to drive the new-comers.

When Hugh had shown his writing tools and told his errand, they smoothed their tone and bade him stand aside, in the cleared space. The others — strange knight, his rude captors, the mummer-gentleman —

all were swallowed up behind the barrier into the throng which snarled, and surged, and gnashed its teeth, in weltering heat and evil smells, under the spell of the scent of blood.

After a little while there rose an echoing blast of trumpets from the market-place without, riding as it were on the crest of a great wave of cheering. Then hurriedly the officers brought forth from an outer room two high chairs of state, gilded, and bearing the town's arms, and set them upon the floor-cloth under a canopy, and put behind these, on either side of the dais, other chairs and stools — and then bowed low as the doors in the centre were flung open with loud knocks, and two heralds, in blazoned tabards, entered. Behind these, with stately step, by twos came a score of great warriors and lords, mailed to the throat, and with pages bearing their cumbersome head-gear; then others of distinction, for the most part advanced in years, who wore rich gowns and chains, and held velvet

caps in their hands; and lastly, two young men in gowns who wore their caps on their heads. And one of these, of a square, thick-featured aspect, with broad breast, and reddish hair, was Earl Marshal of England, yet had scarce a look from any one, so bent were all thoughts upon the other.

This other — clad in sober colors, with a broad chain upon his breast and a black close-curling plume in his cap — came sedately forward and sat in the large chair a hand's breadth in front of his companion's. He let his glance rest easily upon the crowded half of the room, as if noting things in idleness the while his mind was elsewhere.

The heralds called out each his master's exalted office, and what matters they had come now to rightly judge upon; and Hugh, having been seated at a desk by the window, hung with all his eyes to the face of the youth in the foremost chair.

It was a thin, thoughtful face, dark of skin and with a saddened air. The

bended nose was long, the point well out in air to bespeak an inborn swiftness of scent. And above, wide apart, there burned a steady flame of great-hearted wisdom in two deep iron-gray eyes which embraced all things, searched calmly and comprehended all things. This Prince, though first subject and foremost soldier under the King, his brother, was even now but nineteen years of age; and Hugh, gazing in rapt timidity upon him, flushed with shame at thought of his own years, close treading upon those of this Prince, and of his own weak unworthiness.

The boy wrote down what the old men in gowns bade him say concerning the dreadful things that now were toward, and, writing, contrived also to look and listen with an awed, ashen face and bewildered mind.

Other soldiers had entered the room, and, making a weapon-lined lane between the door and the throng, brought forward now, one after another, the captive lords

and knights taken red-handed from the Abbey or found in hiding in the town. Each in his turn, with elbows thong-bound at his back, with torn raiment and dishevelled if not bandaged head, was haled before the dais, and looked into these deep-glancing eyes of his boy judge.

Richard held them in his calm, engirdling gaze with never sign of heat or pity, and to each spoke in tones high and sharp-cut enough for all to hear, but of a level in cold dignity. When they in turn replied, he listened gravely, with lip uplifted so that his teeth were seen. Ever and again his fingers toyed with the hilt of the baslard at his girdle the while he listened; and these to whom he hearkened thus trembled rightly at the omen. When all needful words were spent, the Prince leaned for a moment to his right and whispered apart with Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk; but this for very form's sake, and not to seek counsel. Then, still in the same chilled, equable voice, he would

mete out the judgment, suiting to each with apposite words his deliverance, whether they should lose their heads for their treason on the morrow, or depart under the King's mercy as free men, paying fines in gold or land, or suffering no penalty whatsoever. Well nigh two score and ten passed thus before the Prince, and of this number two-and-twenty were sent to the block. Of these, the greatest in estate was Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, blood-cousin to his judge, and to whom gray hairs had brought neither wisdom nor control. With him Prince Richard parleyed at length, pointing out how the Beaufort line of John of Gaunt, beginning in dishonor with Katherine Swynford, and filtering through envious trickery and disloyalty, would on the morrow run itself miserably out in muddy lees upon the scaffold. And then they led the childless Duke away amid the angered hootings of the crowd.

None but this Somerset, and Sir John

Longstrother, who was called the Prior of St. John's, had courage wherewith to accuse the King of broken faith, in that he had sworn to give mercy to all who sought refuge in the Abbey. To this young Gloster, still deadly calm, made answer that the King had given no such pledge, but only granted some old monk's prayer that all of gentle blood who met their death, either in battle or on the scaffold, might be buried in the Abbey without dismemberment; this, and nothing more.

Of a sudden, Hugh, grown at home among these horrors, saw advancing under guard between the glittering lines of bills, the mailed figure he knew so well. The boy held his breath as the strange Knight stood before the dais, helmeted and erect — and as he noted that the morris-dancer, fiercely pushing his way, had followed close behind.

“What now!” — it was Mowbray who spoke — “Who comes thus covered? Loose us his helm!”.

“I pray ye both,” spoke the Knight, “suffer me to thus remain! It is as easy to lose one’s head in this fashion as another. I crave no other mercy.”

A pale, flitting smile played over the Prince’s lips. “After such stress of sober state affairs, cousin of Norfolk,” he said, more gently, “the jest is grateful. Hast brought thy morris-dancer with thee, too, I note, good sir!”

The Knight swung round to follow Gloucester’s glance; then, after a moment’s earnest gaze upon the disguised man close at hand, turned with closed eyes and hand on heart.

The Prince rubbed his hands softly together, and smiled again.

“Aye! lift us the basnet,” he said to the soldiers standing guard. “The jest will trip the better for more air and light”—and in a twinkling the men had unfastened and raised the heavy helmet; and the Knight stood, flushed and confused, no knight at all! but a young and fair-faced

woman, with loose golden hair tumbled sweetly upon her neck.

Richard's lips curled again, and his teeth gleamed under them, while his eyes shone with a merry light.

"Most excellent!" he chuckled, looking to Mowbray's dull, puzzled face in mock search for sympathy. "Now scrub us the paint off yon mummer's cheeks, and let his head be bared. The jest goes bravely."

Before the astonished onlookers, this too was done, and Sir Hereward, still arrayed to the throat in motley, with eyes sheepishly downcast, stood revealed.

The young Prince covered the two, as they stood, with his mirthful regard, and rubbed his palms together in silent enjoyment.

"Read me the riddle, Lady Kate," he said at last. "I guess thy errand to these parts, and his is clear enough — perchance too clear! — but why, if thou must trick him out in morris-dress, why bring him here? Nay!" — as the lady would have

spoken — “fear nothing; I like the jest thus far, but comprehend it only in part.”

“My Lord Duke,” the lady said, throwing back her hair with a proud gesture, “we were children together,—you and I,—you will credit my word. I knew not till this moment that he was here, but deemed him—left—behind on the field. And I came hither, not in your despite, or your dread brother’s, but to warn my friend here, Sir Hereward, of treason menacing him in his own camp; and to that end, on Friday night, sent I a letter to him where he lay, by my own servant’s hand.”

“This is the letter,” said Sir Hereward simply, drawing from his breast the folded paper with its broken seal.

The Prince bent forward, took the missive, spread it out upon his knee, and read carefully through from first to last. “I grieve to learn of your good sire’s death,” he said once, lifting his eyes, and then read on, musingly. At last he smiled, and shook his head.

“I have full knowledge — none better, Lady Kate,” he said, “of thy high spirits and brave temper. Thou wert of the mettle of knights-errant even in short clothes. But what I looked not for was this clerkly hand, this deft scrolling of lines and letters.” Still with dancing eyes he held the paper up before the Earl Marshal. “Why, look you, cousin of Norfolk! ’Tis as fair as any guild work from Bruges. And from a woman’s hand, mark ye!”

The lady hung her head and blushed, then, lifting it, smiled. “Your Grace ever loved his jest,” she said. “Alas, I am no clerk, nor would be with a thousand years of teaching. I could more easily ride, by night and day, across from Devon to save my — my friend, than mark a straight line on paper.”

“And who writ ye this?” pursued Richard, eying the scroll afresh.

“A youth in the Abbey,” said the lady, and Sir Hereward pointed him out where he sat.

Then suddenly Hugh, staring vaguely at all this, heard some one say in his ear that his Grace had called for him, and felt another push him to his feet—and then saw, as through a golden fog, that the Prince held up a jewelled finger, beckoning to him. The boy's heart thumped to his throat with every step as he moved to the dais.

“It is thy hand, eh?” Duke Richard asked, with kindly voice, and the lad could only bow and blush. One of the old men at the table had brought forward as well the scrolls on which Hugh had written the day's grim record, and the Prince glanced over these with a student's lingering eye. Then, with a quaint smile and sigh, he said:—

“Behold how fair and goodly a thing is learning! Of ye three, this stripling boy comes first in the race. Thou mightst have had thy ride for naught, my Lady Kate, but for his craft. And thou, sirrah, mightst have been murdered in thy camp, but for

this same letter. And wert thou set upon by these knaves?"

"Aye, your Grace," Sir Hereward replied, "and slew two, with some small hurt to myself, and their fellows fled — to be butchered elsewhere — down by the mill pit."

The Prince nodded his head in satisfaction, then more slowly spoke again.

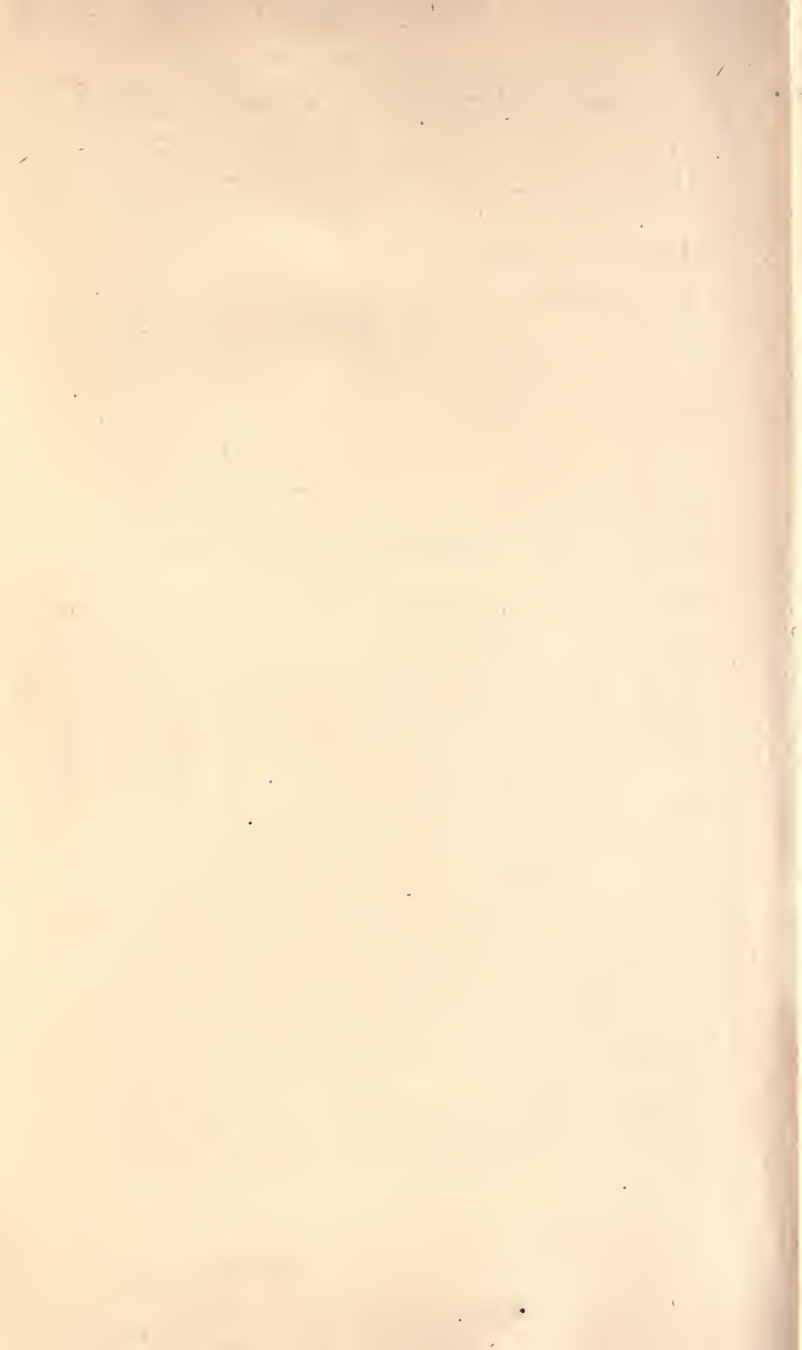
"Sir Hereward, were thy head a match for thy heart or thy vast sinews, belike thou hadst not saved it to-day. 'Tis dull of wit, but belongs to a simple valiant gentleman, and I will not lop it from his shoulders. Get thee to Devon, and keep within the King's grace — and if the taste for mumming rise in thee again, and will not down, go morris-dancing on thine own estates — or hers. And thou — saucy Kate — go take thy man, and make thy wit the complement of his slow honesty. But no tricks! Why, silly pretty maid, didst think England was ruled by blind men! Thou hadst not killed thy first horse, in Somerset, ere we knew of thee and thy quest. And as for thy knight

in motley, loud rumor preceded him down the street to-day as if he had been the borough bellman."

Sir Hereward, holding the lady's hand, would at this have made some speech of thanks, but that the Prince held up his finger to stop him.

"Nay — another day," he said, "perchance when we do send for thee to come up to London town. Thy affairs have eaten up too much time, as it stands. The saints speed thee, Lady Kate, and teach thee to write. In this rude, topsy-turvy world, naught is secure but learning. Observe what joy I have in this clerkly boy whose skilled hand mocks Master Caxton's types in the Low Countries — but of that thou knowest nothing. I am beholden to thee for the boy. This night I'll beg him of the Abbot, and he shall be of my household at Baynard's. Go now. I am weary of good unlettered folk."

And as the twain, bowing, left the room, the Prince turned again to the scrivener lad.



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