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CLAUDE DUVAL NOVELS



Luke the Swell.

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LUKE, THE SWELL.

AN EXCITING STORY

OF

LIFE, LOVE AND INTRIGUE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“PAUL CLIFFORD,” “DUVAL AND THE GHOST,”
“CLAUDE’S STRATAGEM,” ETC., ETC.

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LUKE, THE SWELL.

CONTINUED FROM "CLAUDE'S STRATAGEM."

CHAPTER I.

UPON this, Luke lit a phosphorus match and speedily succeeded by its aid in igniting a wax taper which he had with him; and as it burnt slowly up into rather a sickly flame, for the air of the place was neither good for flame nor for animal life, they were able to see something of the gloomy region into which they had penetrated.

"Hold the light, Luke."

Luke did so, and then they had all a good view of the spot on which they were. They had all got to the foot of the stairs, which were somewhere about twenty in number, and they were standing upon a considerable thickness of sawdust, with which the ground was literally strewed. The space in which they were was about twelve feet square, and several passages branched off from it.

"This is a strange place," said Claude.

"It is so," replied Lucas, to whom the remark seemed to be more specially addressed. "I have heard that in Catholic times—for the church above and all these underground places belonged to the Catholics—there were strange doings in these vaults, and that in the dark days of persecution for religion's sake, they were often converted into dungeons."

"Not a doubt of it. Were you ever here yourself before, Lucas?"

"Only once, and that was upon the occasion of a law suit regarding an estate in the immediate neighborhood, when a search was made in these vaults to see if any coffin had a plate upon it bearing the name of one of the litigants. Then I and some others had a slight view of the place."

"Hush!"

A strange confused noise came from above, and it was quite evident that those who were in the church were persua-

ing the investigation they had resolved upon making with a vigor that was quite regardless of what noise or confusion it occasioned in the sacred edifice.

"They are looking for us," said Luke.

"But they will not find us, I think," said Claude, "for no one is likely to imagine but that we have found some mode of outlet from the church before now. This will not be a likely place to search."

"Far from it."

"Come on, then, as we are here, and let us see some of the wonders of these receptacles of the dead."

"You should say the terrors," remarked Annie Forsyth, with a shudder.

"Pardon me," added Claude. "I see that I was wrong now in asking you to advance beyond this spot. It is well to keep young minds free from the terrors that otherwise, in happier moments, might haunt them."

"Oh, listen!" said May, suddenly.

They were all as silent as the grave, and then they heard distinctly some blows given to the iron door at the top of the staircase.

"We are lost!" said Annie.

"Say, rather, found," said Lucas. "But yet there is a hope."

"Hush! hush!" said Claude. "They are coming now. Hush!"

With a wrench the covering of the staircase leading to the vaults was opened, and at the same moment Luke extinguished the light, so that, with the exception of a very faint gleam of light that came down the stairs from the candles above, all was darkness again. It was evident, now, that several of their enemies were collected around the opening leading to the vaults, and every word that was said came plainly upon the ears of the anxious fugitives below.

"Yes, gentlemen," said some one—it was the beadle who spoke—"yes, gentlemen, these are the vaults; but, I assure you all, as they hasn't been opened no how for I don't know when; so it don't seem likely that they should have found out such a place."

"Indeed, it does not," said another.

"Well, but," cried a man in a cracked disputive voice, "we are hired to search everywhere, and you know upon that principle we should look here as well. If it comes to giving up looking in one place, because it ain't probable they are there, we may as well give up the search altogether, for I contend that people always do get into improbable places."

"Well—well, you go down," said another.

"Nay, why should I go alone? They might pop a

bullet into me in a moment or two, and nice I should look then."

"Well—well, let's go down a little way at all events."

"Come on, then. Hold the light, one of you. Bring two lights. That will do. Now look to your pistols, and come down. We won't have any one say that we did not look everywhere."

Upon this, Harry Lucas laid hold of Claude by the arm and said in a whisper—

"Follow me, all of you. It is our only chance."

They none of them knew very well where Harry Lucas proposed to lead them, but they followed him, hearing him speak of the chance yet of escape. He took a passage to the left of where they had been standing, and which was covered likewise with sawdust laid on some four or five inches in thickness, so that the sound of their footsteps was completely lost in it.

The roof and walls of this passage reeked with an unwholesome moisture, and they could all feel how very bad the air was to breathe by a feeling of oppression at the lungs, such as it would scarcely have been possible to endure for any length of time.

"Oh, Claude," whispered May, "this is some dreadful home of the dead."

"Courage—courage," said Claude.

"Yes, but where are we going? A thousand unknown fears oppress me, and I feel ready to sink to the earth."

"Let me support you, May. You will not sink, I am sure, while my arm is around you!"

"No—no, I shall not."

"Come now; courage—courage. Where are we Mr. Lucas?"

"Stop," said Lucas. "Let us listen if our enemies are near at hand, or not. Do you hear anything?"

"Yes, the murmur of voices I hear," said Claude, "and that is all; but whether they come from the church above, or from persons in these vaults, I can't say."

"I will go on a little way towards the path we have trodden," said Luke, "and ascertain, if you like."

"Do so—do so. We will await your return, good Luke."

Before Luke had gone many paces, the sudden flash of a light came upon their eyes, and they could no longer doubt that the officers were determined upon making such an examination of the vaults as would thoroughly satisfy them.

Luke was back again in a moment.

"They come!"

"What are we to do, now?" said Claude, as he took his pistols from his pocket, and began to adjust them for use.

“Resistance will be madness,” said Luke. “If we cannot hide from them we are taken. Recollect, Duval, that if we fire upon them, they will return the shots, and that in that case May or Miss Forsyth might come to injury.”

“That is true,” said Duval, as he coolly replaced his pistols in his pockets. “Let them come now.”

“It is all over,” said May.

“No,” said Harry Lucas, suddenly. “I have got open the door of one of the vaults here. Come in, all of you. We may yet elude them. They are only walking through the passages, as we have done. Recollect, they have not yet opened any of the chambers of the dead.”

“True—true,” said Claude.

“A light for one moment,” whispered Harry Lucas. “One of the matches that you have got will do. Your enemies will not see it, having a light themselves; and I want to know where we are.”

Luke quickly enough produced a light, and before it expired they all saw the open door that Lucas had in his hand. It was of iron, and led to a vaulted room. Above the door was rudely sculptured the arms of the family to whom the vault had originally belonged. There was no choice now but to remain in the passage, and be seen and captured by the officers, or to go into this open vault. They embraced the latter alternative, and at once crossed its threshold. Harry Lucas closed the door on the inside, and all was still.

“It is very strange,” said Claude, in such a whisper that it was quite impossible it could get beyond the ears of his friends in the vault. “It is very strange that the air is purer shut up in this place than it is in the long passages on the outside.”

“It is much purer,” said May, “I can breathe here without difficulty.”

“And so can I,” said Annie.

“That is a circumstance I cannot account for,” said Lucas. “I should like to see the place, though. Will you light another match, Mr. Luke, and let us look about us for a few brief seconds?”

“Willingly.”

The match was lighted, and as Luke held it up, they saw around them, and a fearful sight it was.

Upon shelves all round the vault, with the exception of one part, which had very much the appearance of having been opened once and then built up again, were coffins; but the majority of them had rotted and broken, letting fall to the earth and sawdust below the skeleton remains of their occupants.

The side of one had fallen out, and the corpse, by some

means, hung half suspended between the shelf and the floor by some strong material that it had been wrapped up in, and which had resisted the decay of all else that was mortal about it. That was a strange and a hideous spectacle.

“Oh, this is dreadful,” said Annie.

Out went the match, and all was intensely dark again, and then, before they could say another word, they heard the voices of their pursuers just outside the door; but Lucas was doing something to the door which puzzled Claude Duval, and he whispered—

“What are you about, Lucas? Are you trying to fasten the door?”

“I am not only trying, but I am fully succeeding in doing so.”

“How do you mean? How is that possible?”

“Why, it seems odd to have fastenings on the inside of the door of a vault, but while the match was alight, I saw that there were a couple of good strong bolts to the door.”

“You did?”

“In good faith I did. One at the top and another at the bottom, and they are now in their sockets, so that I think our friends outside have no force sufficient to break in here.”

“This is most extraordinary,” added Claude. “What possible motive could there be for putting fastenings upon the inner side of the door of a vault?”

“It is inexplicable,” said Lucas.

“Not so,” whispered Luke, “I have an idea upon the subject which I will let you all know by and by; but at first let us consider that we have enough to do to listen to what our enemies are about.”

This was too self-evident a proposition to be denied, and they were all as silent as the mouldering remains of the dead inhabitants of that apartment. They could not detect any ray of light from the passage, which led them to think that the door fitted into its framework so well that they might if they chose have a light without incurring any danger. Still they abstained from such an indulgence, for it was better to err upon the safe side.

“There is no one here,” said a voice from the passage; “it is no use making ourselves sick with the pestiferous atmosphere of this place. There is no one in the passage.”

“But the vaults themselves, the actual vaults, you know, we have not been in any of them.”

“No, nor are we going,” said the first speaker. “Here is a door, now.”

“Yes, gentlemen,” said the beadle, “that there door leads to the family vault of the Fritles—a very great family in

Guilford many years a-gone by, I assure you; and them's their coat of arms over the door."

"And what's become of the family of the Fritles, now, Mr. Beadle?"

"Dead and defunct, sir."

"What, all of them?"

"Reether! They is, in a manner of speaking, now, nothing in this here vassal world but ashes and dust."

"Well, it can't offend them, then, if we take a look into their vault. Open the door, Mr. Beadle, What, is it fast?"

"So it seems, sir, for it won't move no how. Now, sir, they tells funny stories about these Fritles."

"When they were alive, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir. The funniness was all when they were dead, gentlemen. They do say that whenever a Fritle was buried, or rather put on the shelf in the family vault, and the door left just close, the dead Fritles got up and bolted it on the inside till another of the family went dead."

"The deuce they did."

"Yes, gentlemen; and, would you believe it, once the Fritles gave leave to a gentleman of the name of Podgers to put his wife in the vault, but when they came with the coffin to this door it wasn't open!"

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes I does. The dead Fritles in the inside wouldn't undo it to let in a Podgers."

"Oh, I say, it's no use staying here. Why, this vault of the Fritles is enough of itself to make one's hair stand on end. What, suppose all the dead Fritles were to take it amiss our coming here now, and suddenly to pounce out upon us? I wouldn't be here if such a thing was to happen for a thousand pounds."

"Nor I," said another.

"Nor me!" cried the beadle, "because, you see, gentlemen, me being the beadle of the church, they would be sure to be down upon me."

Every word of this legend concerning the Fritles and their family vault was heard distinctly by Claude Duval and his friends, and he thought it too good an opportunity of alarming his pursuers to let slip; so, watching his opportunity when there was a lull in the conversation, and when it might be supposed that they were all looking at each other with terrified aspects, Claude tapped with his knuckles on the inside of the door, and made a strange moaning noise at the same time.

For a moment or two the seven or eight persons in the passage immediately outside the door of the Fritles' last

home were too much petrified by fright to move or speak; but then, with one accord, they turned and fled.

It was truly ludicrous to hear their cries of alarm and shouts for succour as they ran along the passage towards the staircase that would lead them into the church. Some fell down and were run over by the others, and the beadle was the most afraid of the whole lot, and roared for mercy as if the Fritles, each with a good cudgel, were at his heels.

"I think that has settled them," said Claude.

"Yes, for the time," said Luke; "but it is doubtful if those who wait in the church the report of their exploring party will take the same superstitious view of the matter."

"Well, Luke, you were saying you had an idea connected with the bolts on the inner side of this door."

"I have, and that idea is, that the bolts would never have been there if there had not been some other mode of exit from the vault; and, what is more, the freshness of the air convinces me that such must be the case."

"A light, Luke," said Claude. "You are right."

Luke now lit one of his little bits of wax taper, and it soon gave sufficient light to enable them to take a thorough look all round the vault. It was then that, in the roof, at that part of the wall which seemed to have been built up, they found a narrow opening, about half the width of a brick, through which there came a current of cold air.

"We must pull down this bit of wall," said Luke, "and the sooner we set about it the better, for I am quite convinced that it will lead us to freedom by some route that will not be suspected. Come, Claude, you have a pistol with a spring bayonet to it, and that will work capitally. For myself I will be content with my knife."

CHAPTER II.

ANNIE FORSYTH GOES IN PEACE TO THE MOTHER OF HER MOTHER.

THIS was one of those ideas and suggestions that bring conviction with them in a moment, and Claude commenced at once to act upon it. Luke placed the light upon the corner of a coffin, where it gave a very tolerable reflection over

the whole vault, and then they both began to work upon the wall.

It did not take many moments to convince them that they would find no difficulty in getting a portion of it down. The bricks were but badly cemented together, or else the damp air of that region had had the effect of preventing the mortar from more thoroughly hardening.

Harry Lucas searched through the vault with the hope of finding something by the aid of which he could aid his friends, but he was disappointed, and Claude, who guessed his intention, said—

“Come, Master Lucas, you can do quite as much good, if not more, by moving with your hands the bricks as we loosen them, than you could do if you were working away at the wall yourself.”

“Can I, indeed?”

“To be sure, so set about it at once.”

Harry Lucas did set about it with a good will, so that the united exertions of the three very soon succeeded in moving a portion of the wall that was quite large enough for a moderate sized person to pass through.

While this was going on, May and Annie were conversing together, and vowing to each other an eternal friendship, and Annie was bitterly lamenting the course of life that Claude Duval pursued.

The reader is well aware that she could not possibly lament that course of life more than May herself did, and the tears coursed down the cheeks of the latter as Annie hinted at what might be the dreadful termination of such a career as Claude Duval's.

“I know it all,” she said. “I dream of it, and awaken to shudder at the awful visions of the night. Alas! alas! I am very wretched.”

“Ah, now,” said Annie, “I regret that I touched upon such a theme, since it is one upon which you feel so deeply.”

“Could I feel otherwise than deeply?”

“But there are those who would not so feel. Pardon me, though, for making such a subject one of discussion between us.”

“There needs no pardon. It is so natural a thought that those who feel kindly disposed towards me or him, cannot but speak of it.”

“Now we shall get out of the vault,” cried Lucas. “What is it that engages your joint attentions so deeply?”

“Nothing—nothing,” said Annie.

“Are you successful?” said May.

“Yes—behold. There is a passage beyond this vault.”

“And it leads to freedom,” said Duval, “for I can quite

plainly feel the fresh air coming upon my face, and in that case we shall soon be out of this gloomy region entirely. Come on."

Claude took charge of May, and Lucas of Annie, while Luke carried the light, and so they all got through the opening in the wall that led from the vault of the Friittles.

The passage into which they emerged from the vault was very narrow, and they had not proceeded half-a-dozen paces along it when a current of cold air blew out the light.

"Hilloa!" said Luke, "how is this? I can feel the open air raising the very hair upon my head. Where are we?"

"Behold!" said Claude. "There is the solution of the mystery. There is a grating over our heads."

When he pointed it out they all saw it, and by looking up they could see the night sky and that the stars were shining. There could be no longer now any doubt or perplexity about the mode in which the vault was constructed. The fact was that there existed an entrance to it from a corner of the church-yard, and by the grating beneath which the adventurers now were.

Thus, then, was it that fastenings had been put in so apparently inscrutable a manner upon the inner side, as it seemed, of the door of the vault; for, no doubt, at one time the wall which our friends got through had been the mode by which the departed families had visited their last resting-place on earth.

The grating was not above four feet above their heads, so that Claude Duval could very easily reach it, and by the aid of Luke he did so, and one vigorous push opened it; for although it had a lock, rust and the effects of time had so eaten into it that it could not withstand anything like violence.

"We are saved," said Claude. "I will get up and then help you all out. That will do. Thank you, Luke."

"By the aid of Luke, Claude drew himself through the opening, and in another moment stood in the old church-yard.

What a feeling of exquisite relief it was now to find that he was in the pure open air again. The wind was roaring monotonously amid the branches of the old yew-trees that were in the burial-ground, but the sky was clear, and millions of bright stars were peeping out from the blue vault of Heaven.

"This is truly beautiful," said Claude.

As he spoke, he heard a tramping sound outside the wall of the burial-ground. The wall was not above five feet high, so that there was no difficulty in his seeing over it. He shrunk down partially behind a gravestone, and then he saw

the whole troop of lancers ride past within six feet of him, and take the London road.

It was quite evident from that circumstance that the hunt for the fugitives was given up as unsuccessful, or the officers of police would never have been satisfied to let the soldiers go.

It took some three or four minutes for them to pass, and not one cast a look into the old church-yard. No doubt, both officers and men were glad to be released from a duty which never comes with a pleasant idea to the military.

"Gone," said Claude, as he made his way back to the grating; and then, stooping over it, he added, "Did you all think I had forgotten you?"

"No, Claude," said Luke. "We heard the sound of horses feet."

"Yes, it was that sound that detained me. The cavalry have all gone on, and we have nothing but the police to cope with, if, indeed, they now remain, which is doubtful."

"Then we are saved, indeed."

"I hope so. May, where are you?"

"Here, Claude, here."

May held up her arms to him, and Claude had no difficulty in drawing her up through the grating. He then did the same to Annie; and when they were both safe and seated upon an old tomb, he assisted Lucas and Luke to emerge from the regions of the vaults, and then closed the grating, saying as he did so —

"Rest in peace, mouldering remains of the Frittles. It has not been with any wish to disturb you that we have this night trespassed upon your last resting-place; and can only hope never to have the necessity of cultivating your acquaintance again."

A feeling of joy came over them all, now that they stood in the open air. There is something so delightful in the consciousness that there is nothing above us but the blue vault of Heaven, after going through some dreary and cavernous recess, that of itself becomes luxurious; and although in reality no great change had taken place in his, Claude's, position or prospects, he felt as though such had been the case, so light of heart was he.

May clung to him, and as well as the darkness would permit, looked tenderly up into his face; and Annie, as she was clasped to the heart of her lover, seemed to feel that all her trials were over, and that there was nothing now to come but a long sunny period of pure happiness.

"Well," said Luke, "I am glad to see you all so comfortable."

“My dear Luke,” said Claude, with a smile, “you must fall in love and marry.”

“Not I, Duval. I don’t mean my words as any reproach to you, because if such another loving heart as you can call your own were to be offered to me, I should be only too happy to accept of it; but I don’t think our life is exactly the sort of one to bring a young and tender girl to share.”

Claude made no reply to this. Perhaps, notwithstanding the highly complimentary kind of accompaniment that Luke had given to the remark, it touched him a little too narrowly.

Harry Lucas advanced to Claude.

“What shall I say in the way of fervent thanks to you all,” he said, and his voice shook as he spoke. “How is it possible that I shall ever be able to assure you of the deep sense of gratitude that prevades my heart?”

“And mine likewise?” said Annie.

“By your silence,” said Claude. “Believe me, it is so sincere a pleasure to me that I am at times able to do such little kindnesses as I have done to you, that the joy it brings me amply repays me for all trouble, toil, or danger in the process; and, besides, I fancy such actions to be some sort of a set-off against the rather questionable mode of my life. But now let us quit such a subject, and let me advise you, Lucas, to proceed to your mother’s house as quickly as possible.”

“I will, I will. There you will remain, my Annie, in safety and in honor beneath her roof.”

“I know I shall, Harry.”

“And it is better, too,” added Claude, “that we should part as soon as possible, for your further association with us can do you no good. We will but see you a little on your way, and then you can forget that you ever encountered Claude Duval, upon whose head a price is set.”

“Forget you?” said Annie. “Oh, never.”

“Can you think so meanly of us?” said Harry Lucas.

“Enough! enough!” said Claude, with emotion. “Let us get on now. Oh, my friends, you do not know what sensations of bitterness and regret you awaken in my heart when I see that you are happy and virtuous, and at peace with that society which must ever regard me as an enemy.”

May was sobbing while this little dialogue was proceeding, for it deeply affected her, inasmuch as it bore so directly upon that subject which was ever dear and present to her heart, namely, the possibility of Duval leaving his pursuits and taking up some honest calling.

Fain would she have now put in a word or two to strengthen the feeling that she knew was at his heart, but she feared to procrastinate the time at such a moment; and besides, she

could tell by the tone of his voice that he felt quite keenly what had been said already, and she hardly knew how far he might be inclined to listen to more upon the subject.

"Come," said Claude, suddenly. "This is the way."

With these words, he walked so rapidly towards the gate of the little church-yard that further conversation with him was then out of the question, unless it had been forced upon him in a voice that would not have been just or fair to him, seeing that he wished to avoid it.

The little party followed him in silence, but the thoughts of all were engaged on the possible means of rescuing Duval from the consequences of a course of life which sooner or later was sure to be fatal to him.

CHAPTER III.

CLAUDE IS DEAF TO REMONSTRANCES, AND TAKES TO THE ROAD AGAIN.

THE route which Harry Lucas wished to take with Annie led past the house of old Hunkers, and they naturally enough rather hesitated about going that way.

"Never fear," said Claude. "I'll warrant he is still in the chimney."

"The chimney!" repeated Annie, with surprise.

"Yes, my dear," said Lucas. "We thought that such would be the most appropriate place for old Hunkers to pass his wedding night in." Harry then gave her a brief history of all that had taken place at old Hunkers' house, at which she could not help laughing, although she thought, she said, that they had been a little too severe upon the old man.

"Are you not going to let him down from his uncomfortable place of punishment?" she said.

"Not I."

"Nor I," said Claude; "if he should remain there till doomsday it will not matter to me. A more thoroughly selfish old rascal I think I never came across. But I wonder where our friends, the officers, are?"

"Don't speak of them," said May. "They may make an appearance when we least want them. Let us get out of the

town as quickly as we can. I shall have a lively recollection of Guilford as long as I live."

"I shall always love the old town for Annie's sake," said Lucas. "It will, in my mind, ever be associated with her, and, therefore, it will have a claim upon me which otherwise it would want, no doubt."

"You are right," said May, "and I give you great credit for speaking so freely the true sentiments of your heart. You will be very happy, Annie Forsyth, as you deserve to be."

"I thank you," said Annie; "but——"

"Stop, all of you," said Claude. "Step into this gateway, and stoop low. There are some men coming. Do you not hear them?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then it will be just as well to escape a collision if they are foes, and the reverse observation if they are indifferent to us. They might recognize you, Annie."

"They might, indeed."

"And me, likewise," said Harry Lucas, "for I am pretty well known in Guilford; and now that I have not got any disguise upon me, there are few persons who would not be able to name me in the town."

"Capital reasons for caution," added Duval. "Let us keep out of the way."

The gateway which Duval had alluded to seemed to lead into a yard of a builder; but it afforded them a good shelter, and they waited till the danger was past, for it was a danger.

About six or eight men, in a disorderly kind of throng, came on, and as they neared the spot, it was quite easy to hear what they were saying. A few words of the conversation was sufficient to announce that it related to the fugitives, and before they had quite passed, Claude felt quite clear that they were the officers.

"I tell you," said one, "it's of no use now staying another moment in Guilford. He is off, and if once he has got fairly mounted and out of the town, he is out of our clutches by this time."

"Ah, and twenty miles off," said another, "though I don't know how the deuce we came to miss him. He was in the church."

"Oh, it's the unwillingness and carelessness of the soldiers. They pretended to have surrounded the church by sentinels, and we know that Duval was inside, and yet, lo and behold, off he goes! What are we to think of that, but just that the sentinels outside were too lazy to stop him, and that he and his friends with him got comfortably enough out at one

of the old windows, and walked off without any difficulty."

"That's about it—that's about it."

"And then, you know, there's another thing——"

Here the distance that the officers had got past the builder's yard, where our friends were concealed, smothered their voices, and what the other thing was that one of the police was going to call attention to was completely lost to them.

"A close touch that," said Luke.

"Very; but then, you know, Luke, a miss in these matters is as good as a mile; and as they have passed us, it is all the same to us as though they were at Jericho."

"So it is, Claude."

They thought it prudent, however, to wait a little time in the builder's yard, so that the officers should get some distance from the spot before they emerged on to the road again. At length Duval intimated that he thought they might venture with safety, and accordingly they sallied out.

Their route to where their horses had been left took them exactly past old Hunkers's house, and they were not a little curious to discover whether or no he had had the courage to release himself from his rather painful situation in the chimney. Claude Duval could hardly think it possible, upon calm and cool reflection, that old Hunkers would remain in such a situation; but Luke would have it that there he was still, and argued that he was quite incapable of a sufficient amount of calm and cool reflection to enable him to leave the place.

"Well, we shall soon see," said Lucas.

In the course of the next three minutes they were on the opposite side of the road, which was flanked by a thick-set hedge

A strange noise from the top of the house came upon their ears, and after looking up for a few moments, Claude said:

"Do you see anything particular about that stack of chimneys, Luke?"

"Yes, I do. I am tolerably long-sighted, and one of the particular things that I see is a dark object clinging to one of the chimney pots."

"Then that dark object must be our old and rather dark friend, Hunkers, I should say!"

"Not a doubt of it."

The odd lugubrious noise from the dark object on the house-top continued, and it was quite evident that old Hunkers was mingling his groans with the night wind, but had not the courage to call out loudly and energetically for help, lest the

threat that Claude had held out to him of some one being on the watch to shoot him should turn out to be true.

"Surely," said Annie, "he is sufficiently punished now?"

"Do you think so?" said Lucas. "The old rascal, I should never think he was sufficiently punished for the suffering he made you endure."

"But the result of all that is, that I am yours, and so, you see, Lucas, how out of evil springeth good."

"Yes, I see that; and if I thought that old Hunkers repented of his rascalities, which I am tolerably sure he does not, I, too, could pity him."

"Let him down, Claude," said May, "oh, do let him down."

"You forget," said Duval, "that I can have but very little control over a man who is on the top of a house."

"But you can call to him that his charge is past."

"Yes," said Luke, "and alarm the neighborhood."

"It must not be done," said Claude. "It does not now want but half an hour, if so much, to daylight, and when that comes, Hunkers will see that there is no one in his way, and that he can descend in safety. Come on!"

There was no resisting the reasoning of Claude in this affair, as it would have been quite absurd for them to endanger their own safety for the sake of sparing old Hunkers half an hour's uneasiness on the top of his house.

"Besides," Luke said, "it is a fine airy situation, and will do him good, no doubt; and if the wind should get up a little at sunrise, as it most possibly will, the soot will be blown off him, and he will come down quite cleansed from the impurities of the chimney."

They passed Hunkers's house and made the best of their way now to the little, quiet inn where they had left their horses. Everybody was in bed and asleep in that little hostel, but Claude Duval rang the ostler's bell several times loudly, and then a night-capped head popped out at one of the windows, and the voice belonging to the head called out—

"Hilloa! What's the matter? Is Guilford on fire?"

"No," said Claude. "I am sorry to disturb the house, but we want our horses that we left here early in the evening."

"Oh, it's all right—all right. Jem is getting up, I can hear him swearing, so he will soon attend to you."

"Thank you!"

"Good-night, or rather, good-morning, and a pleasant ride to you, gentlemen."

The landlord then popped in his head from the casement and closed it again, and in the course of a few minutes the ostler appeared, and let them into the stable-yard. He did

not seem very well pleased at being disturbed though, at such an hour.

“My friend,” said Claude, “when I give any one extra trouble I give them extra pay, so take that guinea, and get us out our cattle as quickly as you can.”

“Lor, sir! don't mention the trouble. I don't mind what I do for a real guinea—I mean a real gentleman, your honor. I'll get up any hour of the night to serve you, sir.”

The ostler, who had really seemed to be half asleep before, now became so wide awake and active that it was quite wonderful to see him, and in a considerable short space of time the horses were at the door of the inn.

“Good-morning,” said Claude, as they went off at a gentle trot, just to warm the blood of the animals before they resumed their pace.

“Now, Lucas,” said Claude, “which is your route?”

“Straight on for half a mile or so, and then down the road to the right, which will take us to my mother's farm.”

“Very well. Then we will bid you good-bye at the corner of the road you speak of, and till then we can easily accommodate the pace of our cattle to your own, unless you don't mind Annie riding behind me for a little way, while I give May into your charge.”

“If it will not be a trouble to you, I shall thank you.”

“All's right. It's no trouble.”

The arrangement did very well. Annie sat very comfortably behind Claude Duval, and held him firmly, while Lucas rode upon May's horse, and she sat behind him, and then they set off at a good canter, which was the easiest pace they could put the doubly-weighted horses to, although the addition of such light weights as Annie and May, to tell the truth, was not much.

The road which Harry Lucas was to take was soon gained, but Claude would not leave them there, but cantered down it until they came to a stile which would lead them across a couple of meadows to Mrs. Lucas's farm, and then he paused.

“Now, indeed, we part,” said Claude, “and all I have to do is to bid you good morning, and to wish you all manner of happiness.”

“That happiness,” said Harry Lucas, as he wrung the hand of Claude in both of his own, “is entirely of your own making, and your name will be always remembered by us both with affection.”

“It will, indeed,” said Annie, who could not control her tears.

“Enough,” said Claude. “Do not let us part with even the look of sorrow upon our faces. Farewell!”

May and Annie embraced each other tenderly, and then they parted. Claude put his horse to a gallop, and the others followed him, till turning round to Luke, he cried—

“Here we are on the road again. I will stop the first man I meet, for a highwayman I am and a highwayman I shall ever be.”

CHAPTER IV.

DUVAL DETERMINES TO PAY A SHORT VISIT TO PARIS.

THERE seemed to be a sort of desperation about the feelings and the manner of Claude Duval at this time which it would be difficult to account for. It is just possible that it was owing to the fact that he could not help observing the look of anguish that was upon the face of May at times.

Since she had commenced now saying much to him about the sort of life he led, she had evidently suffered much in silent reflection; and he felt that the constant dread of something fatal occurring to him was the bane of her young existence. This was a feeling that in its turn had a depressing effect upon him, Claude, and it was under the impulse of it that he had just spoken.

May made no reply to him, but Luke glanced at him, as he said—

“Would it not be well first to find a home for——”

The significant inclination of Luke's head to May filled up the sentence, and before Duval could reply, May spoke—

“No, Luke, oh, no! But when I say no, believe me that I appreciate your motives, and thank you for your good kindness to me. But it may not be; I have made up my mind now that where he goes there will I go. His dangers shall be my dangers.”

Luke merely slightly inclined his head, and then Duval, as he looked at May, said—

“And can you bring me into so much peril?”

“I bring you into peril?”

“Yes. Do you think that while you are with me I could attend to anything in all the world but to you? In seeing that you were not hurt, and in protecting you as far as possible

from the likelihood of injury, I should come to destruction myself. Who is there in the world that I have to love or to think of but you?"

"Claude," said May, and her voice shook as she spoke "your last words put me in mind of a question that I have often thought to ask you. Have you no relations in the world?"

"Yes, May, I have; but do you think they would be glad to claim any connection or companionship with such as I am? No; they forget me and I forget them. And yet, there is one whom I should like to see. My father had a sister who was kind to me in childhood: I know not where she is, but I should like to see her and shake her by the hand once again. That is a feeling I have often had."

"And where is she, Claude?"

"That I know not, or before this I should have made some attempt to see her. I don't mean to say, though, that I have been very active in trying to find her out, feeling that my acquaintance is not a good credit to any."

"Hush!" said Luke. "A horseman comes."

"Get aside, then," said Claude, "for he belongs to me."

"Oh, Claude—Claude, you will not——"

"Will not what?"

"Stop this traveler who is approaching?"

"It is my business so to do, May. Luke, I entrust her to your care; but I am Claude Duval the highwayman, and, therefore, I must perform my mission. You had better ride on, you two, and then it will not be supposed that you are in any way connected with me."

The manner of Claude Duval was quite sufficient to let May see that any remonstrance with him would be quite fruitless; and, indeed, if she had talked for a month, what could she say but that he was a highwayman, and that she wished he was something else? She and Luke then trotted on, and Claude, turning his horse's head in the direction from whence the traveller was coming, met him at a walk.

The person whose destiny it was to be stopped upon that eventful occasion, was a big, burly-looking man, on a powerful black horse, and, indeed, take him altogether, he was a sort of person to look at that few persons would have felt inclined to stop on the highway alone.

"Stand!" cried Claude; "your money and your valuables, sir—if you please."

The man pulled up and looked amazed for a moment or two, and then he said:

"Why, you impudent rascal, do you think I am going to let myself be robbed on the highway by one man?"

"Yes."

“ Well, then, you are mistaken. I am armed.”

“ So am I. What are your arms ?”

“ Fire-arms.”

“ Then, in the name of all that is abominable, why don't you produce them and have it out ? If you will have bloodshed over a few paltry guineas, begin it, and have it over as quickly as you can.”

With these words Claude produced a bright-barrelled pistol, that had rather a serious look about it of mischief, and held it to the head of the horseman, who now turned rather pale, and in a much lower tone, said :

“ Well, you are right ; I don't want to take the life of a fellow-creature for the sake of a little money. There is my purse.”

“ How much is there ?”

“ About ten pounds.”

“ Go on, then. I believe you have more about you, but I never do things in such a shabby way as to search a gentleman. Go on, and think yourself well off that you have listened to me in time. What good on earth would it have done you to have had your brains blown out, and then your money taken from your quivering corpse, eh ?”

“ Oh, none—none,” said the stranger, giving a shudder at the very idea. “ None at all. Have you any objection to tell me who you are ?”

Claude laughed. “ They call me the Ladies' Highwayman,” he said.

“ Then, by Jove, you are Claude Duval !”

“ The same, sir, quite at your service whenever you bring another purse on the road.”

The stranger did not wait to hear more, but galloped off as hard as he could. As he passed Luke and May, he called out to them—

“ I say, look after your pockets. Claude Duval, the highwayman, is on the road. You had better look sharp, or he will be down upon you before you know where you are.”

“ Thank you,” said Luke.

The man then rode on, and May, who was very pale, turned her horse's head in the direction where Duval was now, and was about to ride towards him, when they heard the sound of wheels, and a gig, in which were two gentlemen, drew up. This gig must have passed the flying horseman who had been robbed by Claude Duval, and that he had warned them. This was evident by one of its occupants saying—

“ Have you seen anything of a highwayman upon the road ?”

“ No,” said Luke.

“Well, there’s a man on horseback just passed us who called out to us to look out for Claude Duval.”

“It’s not likely,” said Luke; “but if you do meet him, the best way is to give in quiet, for he is a desperate fellow.”

“Catch us at it! We are going out shooting, and have plenty of arms with us. Are you riding our way?”

“No, gentlemen. I wish we were, because, of course, in union there is strength. We are going in this direction. Good-bye.”

“They will kill him,” said May, with a look of embarrassment at Luke.

“Not a bit of it. He will stop them both. They are as frightened as they can be. Did you not see that by their looks, and did you not notice it in their wish that we should be going their way? You may depend when two men wish for further aid against a single highwayman, that there will be no great danger to apprehend from them.”

“But this is terrible. If he goes on stopping every one on the road that he meets the result must be certain destruction at last.”

“Oh, no—no! Not at all. Pray be composed. We shall have him galloping after us all right in a little while.”

The two men in the gig now drove on very carefully, and with rather scared looks. They had a couple of guns slung in front of the vehicle, and in the lower part of it there was a kind of box for the reception of a pointer, who was snugly reposing upon some straw.

Duval saw them coming, and suddenly emerged from a lane that was by the side of the road, and which had rather hidden him.

“By Jove, there he is,” said one of the shooting gentlemen.

“Oh, no,” said the other, “that’s no highwayman.”

“Don’t you think so? Oh, Lord, it’s him. Get out the guns!”

“Yes, oh dear, yes. You shoot him.”

“Not for the world. I wouldn’t have his death at my door, poor devil. Let’s pity him, and give him a few pounds, and tell him to repent.”

“But he won’t, I’m afraid.”

“Won’t what?”

“Repent, or take the few pounds, either. Here’s the gun. You hold the barrel of it towards him, and pull the trigger—now for it. Here he comes. Oh, Lord, if it should miss him! Now, are you ready?”

“Yes.”

Bang!

“Where is he?”

“All right, gentlemen,” said Duval; “try the other barrel. It’s my turn, though, now.”

Slap went one of Duval’s pistols, but he purposely fired over their heads. Crack went another, a little nearer, and then the two sportsmen fell flat, one upon another, to the bottom of the gig, as though they had been both shot dead at once, and Claude rode up.

Now, May had heard the shots fired, and in spite of all that Luke could do to persuade her of the impolicy of the step, she rode back, calling out as she did so—

“Claude! Claude! Oh speak to me if you live! Claude—Claude!”

“All is right,” said Duval. “Away with you. There is no harm done, and the battle is fought and won. For Heaven’s sake away with you at once, for some one may come up.”

Luke quite understood that what Claude intended was, that whatever happened upon the road he and May should not in any way seem to be connected with it, so he took the bridle of May’s horse and turned it again, and went off in the direction from whence they had come.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Claude, “my time is valuable if yours is not; and you will be so good as to hand me your money as quickly as you can.”

“I’m a dead man,” said one.

“Heaven have mercy upon my sinful soul,” said the other.

“Get up, will you?” cried Duval, “or I shall be forced to make you.”

“We are no more among the living,” said the first one who had spoken. “We are now as those who have been.”

“Yes,” said the other; “but who are not any more.”

Duval saw that their fright was such that nothing but force would have any effect upon them; so he stooped from his horse and seizing one of them by the collar he made him sit up, and then holding a pistol just to the lid of his eye, he said—

“Your money!”

“Money! Cash do you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, Lord, here it is! Take it all. There it is. It’s all, but a few shillings, in that pocket-book, in notes.”

A glance at the pocket-book assured Claude that there were notes in it, and that satisfied him; so he put it into his pocket at once, and letting that one go, he dragged up the other, and went through the same process with him; but he was gone too far in fright to know what was wanted of him, yet he took his purse from his pocket, and deliberately handed it to Claude, saying as he did so:

"I beg to assure you, Mr. Highwayman, that he has no more money with him now; you have it all."

"Very well, I will take your word for that; and now drive on. I would advise you both to be very careful, though, how you proceed; and if you meet any one on the road who stops you, your answer will be 'Twenty-two.'"

"Twenty-two?"

"That is a watchword or signal, that will protect you; for I have quite taken possession of this road, and some of my men are in all sorts of disguises, so if you meet any of them, and fancying they are strangers to me, say nothing about being robbed; some hasty and heedless one may shoot you."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! And ain't we shot?"

"You ought to know that. I fired twice at you, and purposely missed you. If I had fired again, your brains would have been scattered over this road. Farewell!"

Claude turned from the gig, but he had scarcely done so when he heard quite a rush of wheels, and a cry of "Clear the way! Hoi!—hoi!" and he saw a post-chaise with four horses coming along at a dashing pace. He had just time to get to the side of the road as it whirled past, but one of the wheels caught the gig and upset it and its occupants into a ditch in a moment.

This occurrence caused a slight detention of the post-chaise, and a man looked out at the window next to Duval, with a pistol in his hand, and in a voice of passion, cried:

"What the devil is that?"

Claude laughed, to which the passionate man replied by at once discharging the pistol at his head, saying as he did so:

"Take that to stop your grinning. Drive on, postillion—drive on!"

The bullet passed so close to Claude's face, that for the moment he thought he was hit, and so staggered was he at this piece of brutal and reckless mischief that the post-chaise had got into motion before he could make up his mind what to do. He drew a pistol from his saddle, then, in a moment, and took aim, but a footman who was in the rumble behind, as he saw the movement, ducked his head, as he cried out—

"Oh, don't—don't fire. Mind the girl—you may hit the young girl."

These words caused Claude to pause, and he held the pistol in his hand while he advanced at a gallop after the coach, crying out as he did so—

"What girl? What girl do you mean? I'll fire if you don't tell me."

The affrighted footman looked around, and pointed to the interior of the carriage, to signify that there was a girl there,

and then out came the head of the furious and irascible man again, with a roar of rage, as he shouted at Duval—

“What, ain't you dead? I thought I had shot you—you vagabond.”

“Stop!” cried Claude. “Stop, I say.”

The face had popped in again, but it was only for a moment, and then out it popped again, accompanied by a hand and a pistol. Claude was waiting for this, and he fired at the head directly, which disappeared the moment the report of his, Claude's pistol, was heard; and the footman in the rumble was so alarmed that he scrambled up to the top of the coach, and from thence fell into the road.

Claude was going at speed, but the sudden appearance of the footman in the road bewildered and frightened the horse, which shied and stumbled so that Claude was nearly unmounted, and as it was, he thought that if he secured the footman it would be the best thing he could do, as it would assure him who the carriage belonged to, and who the bully that had fired at him was, as then he, Claude, could find him out.

May and Luke now came up, and Claude, while he soothed his horse, called out to Luke—

“Seize that man, Luke; don't let him go on any account. I shall have something to say to him.”

“All's right,” said Luke. “I have him.”

CHAPTER V.

CLAUDE'S ADVENTURES ARE TENDING TO THE CONTINENT.

DUVAL'S horse was so disturbed by the firing and by the unexpected appearance of the footman in the middle of the road, that it was with the greatest difficulty his rider could pacify him. He who is well acquainted with the habits of the horse knows well how difficult it is to restore the equanimity of that animal when once it has been disturbed. Still, if that was to be done at all, Claude Duval undoubtedly knew the way. By kindness he did more in three minutes than is attempted to be done frequently by some brutes in human shape by blows in an hour.

When the footman found himself in the custody of Luke,

he gave up his life for lost, and getting upon his knees, he howled in such an awful manner that Luke was compelled to threaten him dreadfully before he would be quiet and attend to what Duval wanted to say to him.

“Oh, yes,” he exclaimed at length. “Oh dear, yes, I will answer anything you like, indeed I will, if you will only spare my life. Oh dear, what good would it do you to kill a poor fellow like me? I assure you it would do you no good at all.”

“Silence!” said Claude; “you are going the very way to make us think of knocking you on the head for the purpose of stopping that abominable clattering of yours. Silence, until you hear what I have to ask of you and then make your replies short and distinct.”

“Oh dear, yes, I will. I am poor——”

Luke gave him an admonishing knock on the top of his head with the butt-end of a holster pistol, and while he was rubbing the lump that was produced, Claude spoke to him—

“Whose carriage was that?”

“Major Brown’s, gentlemen, and he——”

“Silence! What young lady was it you mentioned?”

“Why I’ll tell you all, upon my life. We have been looking after her for a long time; but at last the major has got her, you see. He had been on the watch: and having the carriage all ready, she was caught up and popped into it before she knew where she was, and there she is, with a silk pocket handkerchief over her mouth so that she could not speak. Oh, gentlemen, I did take part in the affair, but I am as sorry as possible; and when I saw her pretty face all tears, and with such a look of despair upon it that it seemed as if her heart was broken, I felt that I could have throttled the major, only I wasn’t strong enough.”

“Who is she?”

“Why her name is Thornton, sir.”

“Thornton?” said Claude. “Where does she live? Tell me that at once. Where did she come from?”

“Finchley, sir; but I don’t know the exact house. They say, that is, the major’s valet says—and he carried on all the affair—that she lived with her mother, a widow, and he says she is just sixteen years of age.”

“But—but——”

Claude paused. “What am I to think,” he then added, and for a moment or two he looked to the ground and seemed absorbed in reflection. Then looking up he added—

“Where is this Major Brown going with the girl?”

“To Dover, sir. I don’t mind telling all, for I shall not go back to his service again. Intrigues and vice among those who don’t mind it is one thing, but to lay hold of an innocent

young girl, almost a child, is what I don't like, so I won't have anything more to do with it, nohow."

"I thank you for your information," said Claude Duval. "If you have anything else to tell, tell it now."

"Nothing, sir. But here's the letter that made the young girl meet the major on the high road, you see. I picked it up as it fell from her bosom in the struggle to put her into the coach, and I made up my mind that I would find out the person whose name is to it, and ask him if he wrote it; and if he didn't, ask him if he had a human heart in his bosom, and was going to put up with it."

Claude took the letter.

"This may enlighten me," he said; and he opened it, and cast his eyes over it. As he did so, he turned very white with passion; but he folded up the letter again and put it carefully in his pocket, and handing the footman a few guineas, he said—

"My good fellow, I thank you. Take this as an earnest of my good feeling towards you. Farewell."

"You don't happen to want a fellow as footman?"

"No no, I can't take you. I am much beholden to you, my good man, and wish I could do you any service."

"Thank you, sir. I feel all the happier now that I have told some one of the wickedness of the major; but, oh, sir, don't let him injure her. If you had only seen that young creature's face as I saw it you would feel all the blood in your body boiling."

"Silence!" cried Claude, in a voice that made them all start again. "Silence, I say. My blood does boil, and by heaven I do feel it. Let him injure her? No, by all that is sacred I will not. Come on, Luke. May, come, follow me."

Claude Duval put his horse to speed, and set off at a pace that it was rather difficult to follow, so that May had to call to him, and then he drew up, and when she reached his side he said—

"Finchley—Finchley! The nearest way to Finchley is what I want. Do you know it, May, or you, Luke?"

"I do," said Luke, "and can show you."

"That is well; let us ride hard."

"Oh, Claude! Claude!" cried May, laying her hand upon his arm, "what is the true meaning of all this? You terrify me. There is more in the affair than meets the eye, I feel assured. Oh, tell me what it is and what it all means before you go further. You know well that I am with you, heart and soul, and that I will aid you in every possible way in what is right. All I ask of you is, that you should trust me."

“I will—I will. Luke, don't go away; I want you to know what I am about to explain.”

Luke would have left May and Claude Duval to themselves, but now he rode up to them, and listened with interest to what Claude was going to say

“Listen to me both of you,” he cried. “I feel that there are such things as foretokens in this world. You both heard me, and recollect, I dare say, that, not an hour ago I was talking of my aunt?”

“Yes,” said May.

“Well, her name is Thornton.”

“Ah, now I see.”

“You see some of it, but not all. I have reason to believe that this young girl who is in the coach is Lucy Thornton, my cousin, the youngest and the fairest of my aunt's family. I say I believe that she is that person; and with that conviction, I will not rest till I have rescued her from the villain who has taken her from her home. My design is to go to Finchley first, and see my aunt, and then start to Dover. What say you May? Will you go with me?”

“With all my heart.”

“And you, Luke?”

“To the end of the world, if you like.”

“Be it so then. This young creature must and shall be rescued.”

“But, Claude,” said May, “are you quite sure that a similarity of names merely does not lead you to this belief? Only think if that should not be your cousin Lucy—if the tale you have heard from the footman should not be true. I do not say it is false; but you know, Claude, that there is room for doubt.”

“No, there is none.”

Claude Duval, as he said this, took from his breast-pocket the letter that the footman had given him as that which had been the inducement to the young girl to come alone and unprotected to the place where she was kidnapped.

“Read that,” he said, “and read it aloud, so that Luke may hear it at the same time, and when you have done so I think you will see that there is no room to doubt the fact of the young girl being my cousin, nor to doubt for one moment of the good faith and truthfulness of him who gave me the letter, and who sympathized with her.”

May took the letter, and read from it as follows:

“MY COUSIN LUCY—You are but a young girl, but Heaven has by a strange chance given to you the power to serve me. It is true that since we were children you and I have never met; but yet you may remember your young playmate, who,

by being some seven years or so older than yourself, was the partaker of your sports.

“Dear cousin Lucy, you know the life that I have led; report has come to your ears full of my deeds; but now I yearn towards a better life, and I will, if you will see me, explain to you how it is that you can aid me. If you will be at the place mentioned in the enclosed slip of paper, which you should take with you as your guide, as a rough place is close upon it, at the time there mentioned, I will meet you; but if you tell anyone of this all is lost.

“Oh, Lucy, will you come and save me from death and despair?”

“This is from your old playmate and loving cousin,

“CLAUDE DUVAL.”

“Claude Duval?” cried May.

“Claude Duval?” cried Luke.

“Yes, you see that this letter purports to come from me. By some means or another those who would betray the girl found out her relationship to me, and have practiced upon her gentle, loving nature in my name to deceive her; but, oh, they shall rue the day they thought of such a plan.”

“Alas!” said May, “I do now, indeed, see it all, and I admit that there is no room for doubt.”

“It is most villainous,” said Luke.

“And it shall be avenged,” said Claude. “No doubt this letter had all its effects upon her, and in her goodness she thought that she might have some power to do me good, and so she fell into the snare that was laid for her own destruction. Poor—poor Lucy! I remember you well, a little smiling, blue-eyed child. But this will drive me mad! I must be doing something. Let us be off now at once. Oh, what fiend in human shape could have written that letter?”

“It is a woman’s hand,” said May.

“Is it so?”

“Yes, and thus it is always that woman is the enemy and the arch-foe of woman. I do believe that never yet was there a deep plotting scheme contrived against a girl, but a woman was at the bottom of it. Be patient and considerate, Claude; Luke and I will be with you heart and soul in the affair, and all may yet be well.”

“You have ample means, I hope?” said Luke.

“Ah, I will see to that. What is in this pocket-book, Luke? Examine it for me.”

Luke did so, and then said—

“Six hundred pounds in notes, Claude. The Jews will give three hundred pounds for them upon the chance that

the numbers may not all be known to the police within the next day or two."

"That will do. I have gold beside. Now I tell you what my idea is; this Major Brown will take the girl to the continent. It looks like it by his posting to Dover in such haste. Have you any objection to following him abroad?"

"None in the least," said both May and Luke—indeed tears of gratification rushed to the eyes of May at the idea, that by going out of England Claude would at all events be safe, and that it was possible she might prevail upon him to remain in some other country and live a different life from any that he had yet done in England. It appeared to her as if out of the incidents of that day there might arise abundance of good.

"Well, then," added Claude, "I feel that now I have got something to do. The first thing is to go to my aunt and satisfy her that not only I have no hand in this villainous affair, but that I will put it right if it be in the power of mortal man to do so, and then we will ride at speed to Dover. If we find that such a person as Major Brown has been there and has crossed the channel, we will cross it after him, and woe be to him when we meet! I have a little private account of my own, too, to settle with him, for he fired at me."

"Yes, and I think you wounded him," said Luke.

"Think you so?"

"I do. There was blood upon the road, and he popped his head in at the carriage window with marvelous quickness."

"I hope I did touch him. If I have, it may save Lucy for a time. There may be something providential even in that."

They now let Luke go first, as he knew the shortest route to Finchley Common, where it appeared, by the footman's statement, that Mrs. Thornton resided, and at the speed they went they soon left a tract of country behind them, and finally emerged from a by-road on to the common.

The day was now near to its close, and they all three drew up at a little ale-house and inn, called the "Heifer," that was on the road side. May looked very much fatigued, and as Duval lifted her from her horse, he said:

"You and Luke will stay here, dear May, while I go and look for my aunt. I will not be long."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WIDOW'S HOUSE ON FINCHLEY COMMON.

May would fain have persuaded Claude to take some refreshment before he left the little inn, but one glass of wine and a crust of bread was all he would eat or drink.

There was every accommodation at the little road-side inn, and May was fain to wait until the return of Claude. There was one thing, however, that enabled her to wait with some degree of patience, and that was, that she knew he was not going on any enterprise of danger, but one of mercy.

For a variety of reasons, May was well pleased at the idea of leaving England. She hoped that Claude Duval would never return to it, but that he might be persuaded upon the continent to turn his abilities, for he unquestionably had abilities, to some better account than robbing on the highway.

The ideas of Claude himself flowed in a very different direction. He had but one thought now, and that was the rescue of his pretty little cousin, Lucy Thornton, from the hands of a villain. He considered that he was bound by every tie to so rescue her, and, moreover, it appeared to him as if by such an act he would seem to be making up to her family in some manner for the disgrace he brought upon them in the proceedings on the road, and which he felt conscious must produce considerable uneasiness among them."

The old common at Finchley, which is now scarcely to be called a common at all, was at the period of the existence of Claude Duval but thinly inhabited. A cottage here and there only appeared peeping up from the thick foliage of its little orchard and garden, while a large estate or two occupied the greater portion of the landscape.

It was with strange sensations that Claude Duval, on foot, for he had left his horse at the inn, approached his aunt's cottage. He had never expected to look any one, bound to him by the tie of relationship, in the face again, except by accident, and now it seemed to him as if the last few years of his life had been completely obliterated, and that he had only passed through some troubled dream.

"What will be the end of this career that I have shaped out for myself?" said Claude, as he came in sight of the cot-

age belonging to his aunt. "I have shaped it all but the catastrophe; and that is hidden. Well, it has been half my choice, and half necessity, so I must pursue my destiny."

Before the cottage there were a couple of handsome lime trees, that made a pleasant rumbling in the soft air of the evening, and some hundreds of birds were going to rest in them and the neighboring trees, and keeping up the chatter incidental to them at such a period. The last rays of the setting sun fell aslant the ruined wall of the old garden, and the place altogether had about it a pretty and gentle air of repose and beauty.

There was a small gate, and beyond it a little gravelled path, and then an inner gate, at which hung a servant's bell, and through the latticed upper-half of that inner gate Claude Duval could see the well kept little patch of garden ground, and a little fountain, and a summer-house at the farther end of it.

He rang the bell.

For about five minutes, then, he waited, but no one came to the gate, and Duval began to feel rather anxious about his aunt, and he rang again. Then a woman came and looked at him through the lattice-work of the door.

"What do you want?"

Before Claude answered this woman he took a good look at her, and certainly a more unprepossessing-looking personage it would have been impossible to conceive. She was above the ordinary height of women, and of a sharp, dark, frowning aspect. Her dress was what might be called serene, for it was composed of those fabrics which have a reputation for lasting, and the tone of her voice was anything but pleasant.

"Is this Mrs. Thornton's cottage?" said Claude.

"Well, what if it is?" said the woman.

"I asked you a plain question," said Duval, "and I want a plain answer. Who are you that you thus domineer at the gate of a lady's house?"

"Hoity-toity!" cried the tall female, giving her head a toss that one might consider was about enough to jerk it off, "and who are you, I wonder, that comes here with your impudence?"

Claude controlled his rising anger, and said:

"I want to see Mrs. Thornton."

"Then you can't."

"And why not, madam?"

"Because she is indisposed, and can only see her most intimate friends, so you had better go away at once."

Before Claude could reply to this insolent speech, a man's

voice, to his surprise, called to the woman from the garden—

“Flora, my love, who is that?”

“Oh, I don’t know, but he shan’t come in · it’s some man wanting Mrs. Thornton.”

“Oh, well, of course he can’t come in. Mrs. Thornton is very unwell, and we are at her urgent request taking care of her, that’s all.”

The man advanced now, and presented a portly, bloated appearance, and such a villainous expression upon his face that Claude at once took up a very bad opinion of him. His attire, like his lady’s, was serene, and there was a dash of the evangelical in the fold of his cravat and in the cut of his clothing.

“So,” he added in a pompous way, “any business that you may have with Mrs. Thornton you will be so good as to communicate to me at once, and I will answer it. It is the will of the Lord that I and my wife should take care of her.”

“The what?” said Claude.

“The will of the Lord, sir, I am a religious man, and I do the will of the Lord.”

“Certainly,” said the wife, “and we take care of the afflicted sinners.”

“Very good,” said Claude, “you forget that all this while you are keeping me outside the gate.”

“No,” said the woman, “we don’t forget at all, and we beg to state that we mean to keep you there.”

“Certainly,” added the religious man, “as sure as my name is Jilky.”

“Oh, that’s your name, is it? Well, I have particular business with Mrs. Thornton, and I request you to allow me to speak to her. Go and tell her that a gentleman is here who has particular business with her.”

“We decline,” said Mr. Jilky, giving his head a slight shake, and looking contemptuously. “We decline, my good sir.”

“Go away,” said Mrs. Jilky; “it is easy to see that you are one of the ungodly. Go away, sir.”

“Oh, very well,” said Claude Duval, and then retreating a pace or two he lifted his foot, and made such a dash at the garden gate that the lock of it flew off and hit Mr. Jilky such a rap on the side of the head, that he tottered and fell into a gooseberry bush, and the door flinging wide open, Claude walked deliberately into the garden.

Mrs. Jilky uttered a scream, but Duval merely said—

“Oh, scream away, ma’am, it don’t make the least difference to me, I assure you. You can scream as much as you like.”

“My dear,” cried Mr. Jilky. “Oh, murder! I cannot get out of the bush. Yes, I have. Oh, dear—oh, dear! My

love, don't scream, it's of no use. The neighbors do not like us, and they will not come. It is our painful lot, through our highly religious feelings, to be doubted and persecuted all over the neighborhood."

"Hold your tongue! You are a fool, Mr. Jilky. I tell you, you are a fool to go on in that way. Now, sir, who are you?"

"I decline telling you," said Claude.

"Then out you go, sir. I am a weak woman, but I won't have you here. Out you go, s'r, at once."

With this the weak woman flew at Claude like a tiger, but he saw her coming, and stooped so as to make a back for her, and over she went with such a certainty that if they had planned it it could not have been done better.

"Now, madam," said Claude, "try it again."

Mrs. Jilky, however, had had enough of it, and she sat in one of the beds of the garden, looking the picture of discomfited rage. As for Mr. Jilky, he only rubbed his hands together, and said—

"Oh dear!—Oh, dear!"

"Now I don't know what right either of you have here," said Claude Duval. "If Mrs. Thornton, however, chooses to have you, that is her business and not mine; but you have surely exceeded your position by denying her to any one who may call at the cottage. I told you I had business of importance with her."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear," said Mr. Jilky, again. "What shall we do?"

"Kill him, if you be a man," said Mrs. Jilky.

"Very religious that, madam," said Claude, "but it don't matter a bit. I am quite qualified to take care of myself I assure you."

With this, Duval, paying no more attention to the highly religious couple than if they had been plants in the garden, walked towards the cottage, and as he got to the door of it, he saw a young girl of about fourteen or fifteen years of age, sitting on the step crying.

"Who are you, pray," said Claude.

"Oh, sir, I'm Mrs. Thornton's servant, sir, if you please."

"Well, what's the matter with you? You needn't shrink and tremble in such a way as that. What ails you?"

"Nothing ails me, sir; but— but——"

"But what?"

"They have been ill-using me, sir. Mrs. Jilky beats me so that I shall die if I stay here, and I don't like to leave Mrs. Thornton, for she is very good to me, but she is ill now. Oh, sir, what shall I do? Mr. Jilky, too, beats me, and they want to kill me between them, I do think."

Claude felt the flush of anger rising to his cheek, and then he said in a low tone, for he had a difficulty in controlling himself—

“Tell me, girl, who are these people, Jilky? What right have they here?”

“That I don't know, sir. They live in the neighborhood, and as soon as they heard that Mrs. Thornton was ill, and laid up, they came and took possession of the house.”

“But what excuse did they make for doing so?”

“They said it was in the name of the Lord, sir.”

“Indeed! Now, of all the unparalleled pieces of insolence that ever I heard of this beats them. Does Mrs. Thornton like their company?”

“Oh, dear no, sir, she never could bear them. She never did like them at all, and nobody else in the neighborhood does, sir; and if Mrs. Thornton had been well they would never have got into the place, sir.”

“Upon my word,” said Claude, “this is about the coolest thing I ever heard of for a long time. And where is Mrs. Thornton?”

“Up stairs in her own room, sir. It's the loss of Miss Lucy, if you please, sir, that has all but killed her.”

“Oh, no doubt—no doubt. I will go to her at once.”

Claude entered the cottage, and ascended the little staircase that led to the rooms above. He opened the door of one chamber, but no one was there, and then he heard from the adjoining room a faint voice say—

“Oh, who is there?—who is there? Because I am helpless, am I to be the prey of any one who chooses to come into the house? Speak, who are you?”

Claude opened the door and walked into the room. His aunt, looking much older than he thought to have found her, was partially dressed, and sitting in an easy-chair close by her bed-side. Her eyes were red and swollen with weeping, and she looked at Claude with alarm, for she did not know him, and he for a few moments was too affected to speak.

“Aunt,” he said at length, “I have come to see you.”

The old lady uttered a cry of joy, and was nearly fainting; but Claude ran forward, and supported her in his arms, saying:

“Come, now, don't be cast down; I have come to help you to recover Lucy, and with Heaven's aid I will do so.”

“Oh, Claude—Claude—Claude!” was all she could say for some few minutes, and then she burst into tears, and wept bitterly. Duval did not make any attempt to stop those tears. He was confident that they would do her a world of good; and so they did, for the old lady was much more composed

after they were over, and she was able to speak with greater ease. "And so you are really my nephew, Claude?"

"I am, indeed, aunt. Don't you feel sure that I am?"

"Let me look better at you. Draw up the blind, Claude, and let me look well at your face and eyes."

Duval did so, and then, with a deep sigh, she said—

"Ah, yes, I do know you now, and I should know you among a thousand, Claude, you are so like your poor dear mother."

"Am I so?"

Claude felt a choking sensation as he said this.

"Yes, you are; and she was so good, and so beautiful, and so true. But, oh, Claude, can it be really true that—that—"

"Go on, aunt."

"That you are the noted highwayman who they say terrifies everybody, and who will come to a bad end? Can this be possible, Claude?"

"Aunt, you need not listen to one-half of what you hear in this world," said Claude, "and, I think, if you go that far, it is very liberal, indeed. I don't believe half so much as that; so we will not talk just now of what I am; but I will tell you that anon. Chance has brought me acquainted with the fact of the abduction of my cousin Lucy, and I have set for myself the task of saving her; so you may be certain that she is not entirely left to her fate. I want you to tell me all you know of the affair."

At these words Mrs. Thornton's tears flowed afresh, and for some time she was unable to speak to Claude; but again she recovered, and then she told him all she knew of the affair, which was, that a man, having the appearance of a gentleman, had haunted the place for some days, and finally called, and asked if a couple of rooms in the cottage would be let at any price, and upon being answered in the negative, he had politely gone away, and that on the next day she had observed that Lucy was frequently in tears, and that upon her disappearance, she, Mrs. Thornton, had been so much affected, that she had had to take to her bed, and was then very ill.

It was evident that Mrs. Thornton had no idea of who the villain was who had thus invaded her peaceful home, and Claude did not think fit just then to give her the name, lest she might mention it imprudently, and it should have the effect of paralyzing his exertions to recover Lucy to her arms.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAUDE MAKES A LITTLE REVOLUTION IN HIS AUNT'S COTTAGE.

AT this juncture in his conversation with his aunt, Claude rose and went to the landing place at the head of the stairs, so as to be quite sure that no one was listening, and being satisfied of that fact he came back again, and he said to her in a serious tone :

“ Aunt, let me be your nephew Robert, if you please. It will not do to call me Claude Duval.”

“ Oh, dear, no. Oh, my poor boy, why don't you turn a hatter, like your grandfather was many years ago in the Strand ?”

Claude laughed.

“ I don't understand the business, aunt,” he said ; “ but mind, now, I am your nephew Robert, and not Claude.”

“ Oh, yes, I will recollect.”

“ If you don't, the little affair is very likely to end by my being transferred to the Old Bailey, and all hopes then of the rescue of Lucy will be forever at an end.”

“ Oh, you terrify me, Claude.”

“ Robert, if you please.”

“ Yes, Robert I mean. You terrify me, Cla—I mean, Robert.”

“ Oh, aunt—aunt, if, in the presence of others, you make so little account of uttering my name as you do to me, you will be my destruction, and Lucy's, likewise, poor girl ; for who is there but myself in all the world who can and who will save her ?”

“ Oh, no one—no one. I will be careful, Robert. There, now, you see I am all right.”

“ Very well. Now tell me who are these people down stairs—Jilky they call themselves ; but what do they do here, aunt ? and why are they come ?”

“ They have forced themselves here. I cannot bear the sight of them ; but as soon as they saw that I was ill, and unable to help myself, in they both came, and one stood on one side of my bed, and the other on the other, and they said that they thought it to be their duty as Christians to come and take possession of the house, and attend to me, and they

meant to do it. Of course they know I have some money, and they have made repeated efforts to get me to say where it is."

"But how have you money, aunt? You are poor, rather."

"Oh, my brother left me one hundred pounds a year."

"I am glad to hear it. I thought, and, indeed, I may say I knew, that you had enough to live upon, or I should have taken care that you should soon be provided with means; and having that sufficiency, aunt, I never offered you any of my ill-gotten gains."

"Ah, Claude—I mean Robert—I am glad to hear you call them ill-gotten, for that gives me a hope that you will reform some of these days."

"Well, aunt, perhaps I may; but, to tell the honest truth, I find so many people so much worse than I am myself that I don't know what to reform to. But you tell me, then, that these people, Jilky, have no right whatever to be here, and that their presence is an impertinent intrusion?"

"Just so. They thought I was dying, I do think."

"Ah! and if that had occurred, they would have taken possession of the place, and claimed everything as their own."

"No doubt, my dear, they would; and what could I have done in such a case? Just nothing, and that's the way, I suppose, that villainies take place in the world that nobody hears anything about. They never knew of any relations coming to see me; for excepting you and poor Lucy, you know, they are all dead now; but they little expected that you would turn up at such a juncture. Oh, my dear, restore that girl to me if you can, and I am sure then that Heaven will pardon you all that you have done."

Claude was very much affected at the simple earnestness of his aunt, and he made up his mind, although he did not say so much, to save his cousin Lucy, or to perish in the attempt.

"Now, aunt, I must leave you, for every hour is of importance. I will not leave you in the care of these people below. Is there any neighbor in whom you can depend?"

"Well, I don't know. There is Mr. Clarke, the lawyer. They say that he is a clever lawyer, and a very good man; but he has only come to live about here lately, and I don't know him a bit."

"Never mind; he will do. What is the name of your little servant girl whom I saw below?"

"Emily."

"Very well, I will call her."

Claude went to the top of the stairs and called to the girl; but the only answer he got was a cry for help; and then he heard a scuffle below, which at once convinced him something

was going on in which he would like to have a hand. It did not take Claude half a minute to get to the hall, and then he saw Mr. Jilky holding the girl by the arms, while Mrs. Jilky applied a stick across her back with a vigor that was enough to kill the young creature.

Now Claude was rather hasty in his temper, and he caught the stick from Mrs. Jilky, and placing his foot against the hind part of that lady's anatomy, he sent her through the open door into the garden with such awful velocity, that she went right into the middle of the duck-pond in a moment. As for Mr. Jilky, Claude just laid the stick over him with a speed and effect that was quite marvelous, and from the rapidity of the blows one would think that they were the produce of some ingenious machine made for the purpose of inflicting the greatest possible number in the least possible space of time upon the back of Mr. Jilky. He roared and stammered, roared again, and fell down, and got up, and sat down, and still the stick descended; and, finally, he rolled out of the hall into the garden in such a condition that it was quite impossible he could take any active part in anybody's affairs for some time to come.

"Now, Emily," said Claude, looking as if nothing had happened. "you will put on your bonnet and go to Mr. Clark the lawyer, for me. I am Robert, the nephew of your mistress."

"Oh, sir, then you will save her from these people?"

"Yes, and you too. Why did you not go at once, before I came here, and bring in all the neighbors to turn them out?"

"I didn't know, sir, what to do. They said they had a right to be here in the name of the Lord, and I didn't seem to like it; they beat me, as you happened to see them."

"Well, that's all over—they shan't beat you any more, Emily; so go off at once to the lawyer, if you please, and give Mrs. Thornton's compliments to him, and ask him to come here at once if he can."

"Yes, sir—oh, yes, sir, I will go at once. Anything to get rid of these dreadful people."

The little maid was so elated at the idea of getting rid of Mr. and Mrs. Jilky, that she ran off with great speed for the lawyer, and neither of the two highly religious people could stop her, for Mrs. Jilky was crawling out of the duck-pond rather slowly, and Mr. Jilky was lying upon his back among the cabbages.

Claude walked to and fro in the garden until the little servant came back to say that Mr. Clarke would be there in a few minutes, and then Mrs. Jilky called out in a garrulous tone—

“Mr. Jilky—Mr. Jilky, will you swear your life against this man?”

“Yes, oh, dear, yes, anything you please,” groaned Mr. Jilky.

“You can swear what you like,” said Claude, “both of you:” and then he walked into the house, where he met the little servant, who said—

“Oh, sir, if you please, I may as well tell you, but this morning I heard Mrs. Jilky say to Mr. Jilky that she supposed the major was far enough off by this time; and then they both laughed. I don’t know what they meant, sir, but it’s been on my mind all day that it might be something to do with poor Miss Lucy.”

“You are quite right, Emily, in your supposition; it does concern Lucy, and you are a good girl for telling me of it, since it at once opens my eyes to the fact that these very people have been concerned in the taking away of your young mistress, Lucy. I shall now know what to do.”

“Oh, thank you, sir; and if you can but bring her back it will be such a good thing, for she was good to me, that she was, sir.”

“No doubt of it; I have hopes of bringing her back, at all events, Emily; and, in the meantime, you must stay and comfort your mistress as well as you can.”

“I will, sir; and there’s Mr. Clarke at the gate.”

The attorney found no sort of difficulty in entering the garden, since Claude Duval had demolished the gate in the manner that he had, and Claude met him close to the doorstep, and explained to him briefly how the Jilkys had taken possession of his aunt and her house in so strange a manner.

“Well,” said Mr. Clarke “it is about as impudent an action as ever I heard of in all my life. What do they want.

“Heaven only knows, sir; but as my whole time and exertion will be rendered to discover my cousin Lucy, I hope you will in a faithful way take care of my aunt in my absence, so far as to protect her from a return of these people.”

“Oh, certainly; the police will end that sort of thing. She must give them into custody if they come here again. I suppose they are gone now?”

“Not so, sir. There they are.”

“Dear me, to be sure; yes,”

It was truly ludicrous to see Mr. Jilky sitting up and looking about him in rather a wild way among the cabbages, and Mrs. Jilky sitting with her back against a tree trying to wring the wet out of her clothes, and looking as woeful as possible.

“If you will step up stairs for a moment Mr. Clarke,”

added Claude, "my aunt will confirm all I have said and give you her personal authority to act for her in my absence."

"Very good, sir. I will follow you."

"Well, aunt, here I am, your nephew Robert," said Claude as he entered the room, for fear she should call him Claude from forgetfulness, and "here is Mr. Clarke. All he wants is your authority."

"Oh, dear, yes," said Mrs. Thornton. "My dear Robert is quite right in all he says, Mr. Clarke; and he acts under my authority."

"Very good, madam. That is sufficient. Now, Mr. Rob—Rob——"

"Robert Thornton," said Claude.

"I beg your pardon. I had not the pleasure of knowing your name. Mr. Robert Thornton, you are justified in turning the people out of the premises, and in using sufficient force to make them go."

"I will."

"But mind me, in law you must not use more force than is necessary; although I admit that when one kicks out an intruder from one's house, it is very difficult to give him only the requisite kick; and as in this case you will have no witnesses to the transaction, I think you need not be particular, for I shall be looking at some of the plants in the garden, while you perform the operation."

There was a twinkle in the lawyer's eye, and a slight smile at the corners of his mouth, which showed how very much he should enjoy the kicking out of the Jilkys, so Claude marched down to the garden at once, and making a dart among the cabbages, he caught the pious Mr. Jilky by the collar, and led him towards the gate, bestowing upon him as he went such a succession of hearty kicks, that he roared and bellowed again for mercy; and when he got to the gate, and Claude let him go, he ran off as if he had not got a moment to lose.

"A very nice little garden, indeed," said Mr. Clarke. "A capital little garden, and beautiful flowers."

"Now, madam," said Claude to Mrs. Jilky.

"You beast!" cried the lady, and if you dare to lay hands upon me, I'll be the death of you! I'll have you all taken up, and hanged, and transported!"

"Now madam."

Mrs. Jilky moved towards the gate; but she was afraid to turn her back upon Claude, for she thought it just possible he might accelerate her progress by a kick or two, and so she went backwards all the way down the garden path, threatening vengeance as she went; and she would have got clear off in that way but for a pig.

Yes, but for a pig, Mrs. Jilky would have escaped tolerably well ; but as the garden gate was open, this pig, who was one of those troops of pigs who go about a parish picking up a living in a most disorderly and clandestine manner, made a rush to get into the premises, and just met the highly indignant lady as she was getting out of them.

The consequence of this state of things was a collision, which had the effect of rolling both pig and female in a ditch that was a short distance from the wall of the garden.

Claude Duval at a glance saw the state of affairs ; and then he closed the garden gate, and took good care to fasten it.

A very short time, now, sufficed to make Claude's aunt and the attorney understand each other ; and that gentleman promised her his most active professional protection. Claude's last words to his aunt were :

“ Do not despair. I will bring Lucy back to you, aunt ; and those who know me best say that when I promise anything I am sure to do it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CLAUDE TAKES A HASTY RIDE TO DOVER, AND MISSES THE MAJOR.

No doubt Duval would gladly enough, under other circumstances, have lived for a short time beneath the roof of his aunt ; but well he knew that each moment was precious, and by the time he got back to the inn at Finchley, where he had left Luke and May, he was fretting at the delay that had already taken place in the pursuit of Major Brown and Lucy Thornton.

May was eagerly enough looking for him, and Luke had taken care that the horses were thoroughly refreshed, and ready again for the road. The slight rest they had had, and the rub down that Luke had taken care that they had, contributed not a little to freshen them.

“ Is all right ? ” said Claude, as he entered the inn.

“ Quite,” replied Luke ; “ there has not been a soul here since you left a short time ago.”

"No, sir," said the landlord, who was close at hand, "the more's the pity; but, somehow, we don't get the custom that we once did. Ah, times are not what they were."

Claude laughed. He well knew that that was the regular cry of all people in trades or professions of every kind or description, and he suspected that, let their circumstances be what they might, it would still continue to be the cry, and he was right enough there.

After liberally paying for what had been had, Claude sprang upon his horse, and May and Luke was soon by his side. The landlord was sorry to lose so liberal a customer, and stood looking after them as they went.

A man was coolly smoking his pipe by the stable door; and taking it from his mouth, he pointed with the stem of it after Claude, and said with all the deliberation in life—

"Do you know who that was, landlord?"

"Dear me, no. How should I?"

"Well, I do?"

"Who was it then?"

"Lor bless me, I thought to be sure you knew by the way you looked at him. Come now, you do know."

"Upon my word, I don't."

"Oh, well, I'm bound to believe you."

"Well, but who was it? Come on; do tell."

"Certainly; it's Claude Duval, the highwayman."

The landlord was so astonished at this information, that after staggering back a pace or two he actually sat down upon his own door-step, just in time for his wife to very nearly fall over him as she came to the door, hearing something going on.

"Dear me," she said. "What's the matter?"

"Oh—oh—oh!" was all the landlord could say.

"Why, drat the man, what does he mean? What's the matter with him now? Have you been at the old ale butt, John?"

"Oh, dear, no, wife; but what do you think? Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me, I have had such a chance!"

"A chance of what, idiot?"

"Why, do you know that tall fellow with the black hair, and the little moustache on his lip, was no other than Claude Duval, the highwayman."

"Goodness gracious!"

"Yes, and if we had only laid hold of him, there would have been at least five hundred pounds reward. Think of that."

"Yes," said the man with the pipe, "that's about it; but as for laying hold of Claude Duval, that is quite another affair."

“Yes,” said the landlady, “and if we had done so, and could have done it, I should have expected every guinea of the money to bring us nothing but bad luck. No, John, let us go on as well as we can; and if we are poor we can’t help it; but never let it be said that we got money by selling the life of any one.”

The man with the pipe walked slowly up to the landlady, and took her hand and gave it a shake.

“God bless you, missus,” he said. “That Claude Duval saved my life once. God bless you, marm. You will do more good by saying what you have said than as if you had all the rewards that were ever offered for all the highwaymen that ever were.”

“But, dear me,” cried the landlord, “do only consider, five hundred pounds. Why we shall not make half as much as that in a whole year, I assure you.”

“Hold your tongue,” said the landlady, “and don’t make a fool of yourself. Come in doors at once, do.”

The man with the pipe strolled leisurely off, and the landlord, with deep regret that the five hundred pounds had escaped him after it had seemed to be thus, as it were, quite in his grasp, followed his wife into the house, as an obedient husband should do.

Before this little colloquy at the door of the inn had come to an end, Claude Duval had got a couple of miles off, and there he and May and Luke had paused to consider what would be the most direct route to Dover, whither they did not entertain a doubt but that the major, with Lucy Thornton, had gone.

After some little pro and con upon the subject, Luke undertook to be their guide to the sea-port of Dover, as he happened to be tolerably well acquainted with the greater part of the way, so he rode on about twenty paces in advance, and May and Claude kept him in sight.

The pace they now went at was not one that well suited conversation, so we will conclude that nothing very important transpired in the first stage, which they made a twenty-five miles’ one; and then as the horses, without showing positive distress, evidently were in need of a pause, they drew up at the first eligible spot they came to, and determined upon halting for one hour.

All along the road Claude had made inquiries regarding the appearance of such a carriage as that occupied by the major with his prisoner, for such in good truth Lucy was, and he obtained frequent assurances that such a vehicle had passed on only a few miles ahead of him, and yet, by some extraordinary means, he could not overtake it.

Of course, being mounted upon good horses, they might

easily enough have come up with a vehicle of any sort, and it was not till they reached the inn at which they now stopped that they came to anything like a fair understanding of how it was that they missed the major's carriage. There they heard that there was what was called a lower road, as well as the high one which they had traversed, and that at once settled the difficulty, as, no doubt, the major had diverged to that lower road, thinking it better for his purpose, as it was less frequented than the other.

And now, were it not for the absolute necessity of resting the horses a little time, Claude, in his impatience, would have been off again at once; but any arrangement that was based upon humanity to animals always met with a ready acquiescence from him, and he determined that he would not abridge the hour that the cattle absolutely required for rest and refreshment.

The major had an advantage over Claude and his friends which counterbalanced in a measure the difference in speed that they made. The advantage consisted in the fact that as he traveled fast with hack horses, he got a change directly he came up to the post-house, and was off again without the necessity of any delay, and, besides, it will be recollected that from the commencement of what may be fairly called the chase, he must have been one post, that is to say, about ten miles in advance of Claude, since time sufficient to accomplish that distance had been lost unavoidably by Claude at his aunt's house.

Sailors will tell you that a stern chase is a long chase, and, no doubt, it is, so that ten miles difference is a wonderful thing in a pursuit, however great the difference of speed may be between the parties.

The fact, however, and Claude in his own mind considered it as a fact, that the major was wounded, had a great effect upon him as regards soothing his mind, to think that there would be no great harm, except the agony of mind that poor Lucy must suffer by the delay, and he waited the hour until the horses were again saddled and brought to the door of the inn.

In three minutes more they were all upon the road again, and to all appearance the horses seemed as though they were quite capable of doing another stage of twenty-five miles without any trouble to themselves. Perhaps they would do it better after the short rest they had had than if they had been indulged with a longer one, but certain it is they went on without any appearance of flagging in the least.

We need not pursue the journey to Dover in all its little incidents. Suffice it to say that after one other rest for the horses, and then a sharp trot, Claude and his friends reached

their place of destination, and drawing up at one of the principal hotels, Claude flung himself from his horse, and eagerly said to the first person connected with the establishment he met with—

“I want to know if you have seen a gentleman who is wounded, and a young lady with him? They came in a traveling carriage!”

“What, the mad young lady, sir?” was the reply.

“Mad?” said Claude. “Oh, no, she is not mad. Quite a young lady, I mean. But not a mad person.”

“Oh, dear, yes, sir; she is mad, sir. The gentleman said she was.

“The villain!” exclaimed Claude, for now it struck him at once that that was the excuse the major had made for the state of terror that Lucy would be sure to be in, and for the purpose of putting an end to all speculation concerning what she might say or do at the inn.

“Well,” said Claude, smothering his feelings as best he could, “they are the people concerning whom I inquire, I believe. Are they here?”

“Oh, dear, no, sir.”

“I am too late, then?”

“If you want to see them, sir, you are, indeed. The fact is, sir, they have gone off to Calais in the mail packet about two hours ago, sir. The young lady—poor thing!—had to be carried on board, for she took it into her head that her uncle was not her uncle.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, sir. You see, sir, her uncle who was with her had had quite a job in London to rescue her from a fellow who wanted to run away with her and seduce her; but the uncle was not going to stand that, you know, sir, so he flew like a shot after the guilty pair, and they fled from him like the forked lightning. The uncle found them out like one o’clock, but they packed up their things and took to their heels like bricks. The uncle, however, sir, was after them like a greased arrow, and then the villain of a seducer shot him like winking and then fled. The young lady went mad on the moment, and the uncle brought her here like a whirlwind, and paid his bill like the mild refulgence of a summer’s day, and then cut his stick.”

The waiter, for such he was, put himself into so many extraordinary attitudes while he delivered this harangue that Claude strongly suspected his wits were a little deranged, and looked at him in amazement.

“Perhaps, sir,” he said, as he wiped his brow with a rather ragged old handkerchief—“perhaps you think I am a little romantic?”

"Well, I do a little."

"Then you are right, sir; I am so; and I can assure you I have been in a wild fever ever since that mad young lady came here."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes—yes. I—I—Oh, Heaven! I don't mind telling you, sir, for you seem like a sympathetic gentleman—I say, I don't mind revealing my lacerated heart to you, sir, and so I tell you that—that—Oh, Heaven!"

"That what?"

"I love her!"

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, sir, I do say so. I love that mad young lady! From the first moment, sir, that I looked upon her face I said—'There is my fate!' I love her—how I love her! Oh, gracious! I keep dropping hot plates now, sir, every minute, and smash they go. I hear many bells a-ringing, and I take people things they didn't order, and I don't take them things they did, and I am a desperate waiter now, sir, I assure you, and my heart is broke into small bits."

"I am very sorry for you, indeed."

"Thank you, sir—oh, sir, thank you. The sympathy of a sympathetic individual is dear to a lacerated soul."

"You are quite welcome to all the sympathy that I can give to you. But you are sure the gentleman was wounded?"

"Oh, dear, yes, and he swore dreadfully."

"Well, now, can you tell me when I can cross the channel?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow? Not before to-morrow?"

"No, sir, you can't. There's the mail packet as comes from Calais to-night will be going back again, and you can go back with her. Oh, would that I could go, and then, perhaps, I should look upon that face—that form—that ankle—those eyes—that chin—Oh—oh!"

Claude turned rather abruptly from the enthusiastic waiter, and spoke to May and Luke in a low tone of voice.

"We cannot do better," he said, "than put up here for the present. Do you two stay at this house while I go down to the water-side and see what can be done in the way of procuring a means of crossing the channel. It is ridiculous to stay here till to-morrow with only some twenty miles of water to cross."

"Be careful, Claude," said May, "and look to your own safety. Remember that you may find enemies everywhere."

"I will not be too heedless, you may depend," said Claude

"I have your safety as well as my own to look to. I leave you now with perfect confidence in the care of Luke."

Claude then left the house and proceeded on foot to the water side, where he eagerly inquired if by any means a boat or vessel of any kind could be got to enable him to cross the water to Calais.

"Why, yes, it's smooth water enough," said a rough-looking fellow, "and there's a nice little consarn riding at anchor there that would do it in a couple of hours in a lively fashion, if so be as the job paid her."

"What do you want?"

"Well, perhaps a matter of five guineas."

"Say ten, and it is a bargain."

The man stared a moment or two at Claude, and then he said—

"To be sure it is a bargain. We shall be ready in as many minutes as the guineas count up to, sir, if you are."

"That will do. I have a lady and gentleman at one of the inns to fetch, that is all. There is no luggage, and we shall be here within the time you have just mentioned to me. Be sure that you are ready."

CHAPTER IX.

CLAUDE FINDS HIMSELF AND FRIENDS ON FRENCH GROUND.

DUVAL hurried back to the hotel where he had left Luke and May, and the horses, and found that everything was just as he had left. He hastily explained to them both that he had secured a passage to Calais, and then asking for the landlord, he told him that as he projected going over to France for perhaps a week or two, he wished to leave the horses in his care, and ordered the best attention should be given to them.

The landlord was all smiles and sweetness. The value of the steeds was quite a sufficient guarantee that all would be right enough as regarded his bill for the meantime.

Duval, then, with Luke's assistance, packed all they thought they would want in the largest of the valises, and Luke carried it easily down to the quay, closely followed by Duval and May.

When they reached the spot where Claude had made his

bargain with the boatman, they found him and his mate waiting for them in a wherry, which they intended to pull off with to the little vessel that lay still at some distance.

"All ready?" said Claude.

"Ay—ay, sir, we are ready, if you are."

"That will do."

They were in the boat in another moment, and a boy went with them to take the wherry to shore again. The sea was tolerably smooth, there being but a light breeze from the southwest, which, although it was not favorable exactly for them, yet would not materially interfere with so short a passage as that across the straits of Dover.

The little vessel, which resembled a pilot boat more than anything else, was soon reached, and the whole party stood upon her deck. The boy went back with the wherry, and the two boatmen had up the anchor and sails set in a very few minutes. One took the helm and the other busied himself about the little craft.

"You have been the passage often, I suppose?" said Duval,

"Lord bless you, sir, yes, time out of mind I've been it, and in this here little bit of a craft too. The tide is ebbing fast, and we shall soon get along with it. Keep her head well up to east, Jem,"

"Ay—ay!"

"We shall get along, sir, somehow, and ten to one arter all but we shall beat that lubberly mail packet that went off some three hours gone by now, for she sails like a tub."

"I should like to land before she can place her passengers on shore, by all means," said Claude, "if it can be done."

"It's likely enough, sir. I'll take a long look a-head and see if I can catch a sight of her. I'll warrant she ain't far off with the wind, any how."

The mail packet was not to be seen, though, notwithstanding the boatman's idea that his little craft could get in before she did, and Duval was soon convinced that the notion of such a thing was just one of those idle boasts which persons connected with the sea are so fond of indulging in respecting their own vessel to the disparagement of all others. Nevertheless, the little vessel did its duty well, and it was skillfully conducted by the two men, so that in a less time than he could have expected the outline of the coast of France was plainly perceptible.

"There," said Claude, as he pointed it out to May. "There is France. What do you think now of making a long stay there?"

"Oh, no—no, and yet why do I say so? Perhaps, Claude, you would be happier, and, at least, you would be safer."

“No, May, I should not be happier, and I do not think that after a little time I should be very safe. I like old England, after all; and if I were to remain in France for long I know I should be compelled to speak out and utter the real genuine feelings of contempt that I have for one of the most unstable nations upon the face of the earth. Perhaps it is nothing but prejudice, May; but a Frenchman to me is an animal that I could not endure for long.”

“Nor I, sir,” said Luke. “They are only fit for dancing-masters and cooks.”

“Don’t say cooks,” said Duval. “The Lord preserve me from French cookery. Give me an English joint of meat, naturally cooked by the mere action of fire against it, in preference to all the wishy-washy compounds that tickle a French appetite, and that people in England, who ought to know better, pretend to like, because they think it is the fashion.”

“Yes,” said May, “as they pretend to be in raptures with the Italian Opera.”

“Just so.”

The little craft now was so near to the harbor at Calais that the owners shortened sail, and were within ten minutes more right alongside the old jetty. Duval had paid them the ten guineas, and now he sprang ashore, and assisted May to do so likewise, and Luke followed. The two Dover boatmen gave them a cheer at parting, and then were off again, and there stood our three friends on French ground.

A little man, with a face very much resembling an ape, but wearing a large cocked hat and an odd-looking uniform, advanced to them with many grimaces and bows, and asked for the favor of their company.

Duval spoke French well, and he said with a smile—

“Where to, sir?”

“To the bureau of the commandant,” replied the ape, “where you will be so good as to have your passports examined.”

“Passports?” exclaimed Claude. “I had quite forgotten that. May and you, Luke, listen to me. We are in a pretty mess here. I quite forgot, before leaving England, that everybody in France must be ticketed and labeled, and fully described to the police; in fact, that they are all suspicious characters here, and that passports were necessary to know who and what we are, for fear we should take the country by storm.”

The little ape-like officer, in the huge cocked-hat, stood grinning and smiling all this time, and then Claude turned to him and said in French—

“We have no passports.”

This announcement seemed to strike the Frenchman with profound terror, and he whirled round several times so oddly that Claude thought he would inevitably fall on the quay into the water, and stretching out his hand to save him, he caught him by the collar, and firmly held him at arm's length off his legs. That he was going now at once to be sacrificed was evidently the idea of the Frenchman, and he set up such a screaming for the guard that Claude and his friends were nearly stunned.

"Why, what on earth," said Claude, "is the matter with you? I don't want to hurt you, you contemptible animal."

"Murder!" roared the Frenchman. "Murder!—the English invasion! Murder! I'm a dead man. Murder! Guard! where is the guard—guard—guard?"

The cries of the little Frenchman soon had the effect of bringing the guard to the spot, and in the course of a few minutes Claude and his friends found themselves surrounded by about a dozen of the *gendarmerie*, looking as furious and as important as possible, and all talking at once, as it is the wont of Frenchmen to do.

The little officer with such extraordinary gesticulations that one would suppose a hot cinder was down his back, or that he was treading upon something that gave him the most excruciating agony to be still upon for a moment, explained to the guard the dreadful delinquency that Claude and his two companions had been guilty of.

"These wretched English," he said, "these perfidious John de Bulls have come here without a passport, on purpose to insult the great nation."

"Yes—yes!" cried the guard, "that is it. They always try to insult the grand nation."

"They must be taken before the commandant," said the little officer.

"Of course. "Yes—yes!" cried the guard. "March—march!"

"Really this is too ridiculous," said Claude, in English, to Luke. "I hardly know what to do. Of course it would be easy enough to throw these fellows over the quay; but that would not mend affairs, I am afraid."

"Not at all," said Luke.

"Don't think of violence, Claude," said May. "After all, they are only doing their duty, and I should think that when we come before any reasonable man; the motive of your visit to France will be quite sufficient to excuse the omission of a passport."

"Perhaps it may. I will speak to them."

Claude raised his voice and addressed the little officer and the gendarmes in a strain that met with the most ready at-

tention from them; for no ears in all the world are so readily open to flattery as those of a Frenchman.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am quite aware that France is the grandest nation on the face of the earth. The fact has long been familiar to me that a Frenchman inherits glory from the moment of his birth, and that in valor, wit, discretion, and modesty, no man can ever come near him."

"Exactly," said the gendarmes.

"Exactly," said the little officer.

"Just so," said the crowd of dirty-looking people, who began to collect upon the quay with the prospect of some amusement from the row that seemed to be on the tapis.

"Holding such opinions of France and Frenchmen," added Claude Duval, "and knowing that they are as gallant to the fair sex as they are terrible to their foes, I admit that I have come here without a passport, the reason of which I shall explain to the commandant, if this brave escort will do me and my friends the honor of conducting me to that functionary."

The little French officer was so enchanted at this address, that he first embraced Claude, and then insisted upon his taking a pinch of snuff out of a huge gilt box that he took from his waistcoat pocket.

"When one brave man," he said, "meets another, he knows how to treat him. It is quite clear that monsieur is a hero, and I may say what I may seldom say of any one not so fortunate as to be born here, that he is fit to be a Frenchman."

"He is," said the gendarmes.

"Perfectly," said the crowd.

"March!" cried the little officer, and so Claude Duval, and May, and Luke found themselves marched off as prisoners under an escort to the commandant of Calais. The manner in which Claude had spoken, though, had brought him and his party into such high favor that the little officer and the gendarmes conducted themselves more as if they had been a guard of honor to their prisoners than any thing else; and so, in great state, they all marched to the commandant's house.

By great good fortune that officer happened to be a reasonable man and a gentleman, and when Claude told him his errand that he came upon, he at once replied that he would do anything he possibly could to facilitate his views, and to promise him a special leave to hunt through France after the fugitives.

The English consul was sent for, who soon verified, from the account of Duval and his friends, that they were English, and when he heard the story, he had no hesitation, in making himself responsible for the good behavior of the parties, and

so special passports were granted to Claude in the name of Thornton, and to his two companions, Luke in his proper name, and May in the name of Charles Thornton—for it will be recollected that May was in a very handsome suit of male attire, and Claude passed her off very well as his brother.

When this was all arranged, and they had left the bureau of the commandant, the English consul asked them to his house ; but Claude shook his head, as he said :

“ I thank you, sir, for this act of courtesy ; but my great anxiety respecting my poor cousin, Lucy Thornton, will not permit me to accept of your kind offer. I have very little doubt but that the villain who stole her from her house has taken her over to Paris, and I do not wish to lose a moment in pursuing him.

“ You are wrong,” said the consul.

“ Wrong, sir ?”

“ Yes. I can give you information which I did not wish to give you before the commandant. The fact is, if I could have seen him and you alone, I should have had no difficulty about the matter ; for he is a gentleman and a man of honor ; but you perceived how his secretary kept in the room all the time, and as the commandant himself did not order him to retire, it was no part of my business to take that liberty.”

“ I did see him. A dark, thin man ?”

“ Exactly ; with gray moustache.”

“ Oh, yes. I noticed that he paid great attention to all I said to the commandant.”

“ Precisely. He did as you say pay great attention to all you said to the commandant ; and I have every reason to believe that he is well aware of the proceedings of the Major Brown, who has possessed himself in so violent and daring a manner of your young relation.”

“ Is it possible ?”

“ It is true.”

“ The villain ! I will at once then return to the commandant's, and force the secret from him, if I have to half throttle him in the operation.”

“ You need not take that trouble. I can give you the information you require, sir.”

“ You, sir ?”

“ Even I ; and now, as I give you so good a reason so to do, and as you may suppose that it is your best plan of operations, I hope you will be so good as to come to my house at once, and we will there consult about what is the best to be done in this matter. Recollect that you are not in England, where you would meet with ready assistance in this matter,

and where every hand would be raised up for you, you could at once go to the nearest magistrate, and easily substantiate your complaint.

The idea of his going to a magistrate was not exactly the most pleasant one to Claude Duval, and he merely said—

“Well, sir, I can only say, that if you can and will assist me in the one sole object that has brought me to France, you will be laying me under a great obligation, indeed, and I shall be truly grateful for so doing.”

“Come along, then. Follow me; and as you do so, you can explain to your young brother here, and to your young friend, Mr. Luke what I said.”

The consul walked a few paces in advance, and Claude Duval took the opportunity thus afforded him, and stated the effect of his conversation with the English consul, which had been carried on in too low a tone for them to hear it.

May was delighted at the idea that Claude had so soon found a friend who would be likely to assist him in the search for his cousin; and Luke was quite indignant at the commandant's secretary, whom he sincerely hoped he might meet some day upon English ground.

“Oh, if I could only encounter that fellow upon some such place now as Salisbury Plain,” said Luke, “how delighted I should be to show him how an Englishman can use his fists.”

“He would get the better of you, Luke,” said Claude. “A Frenchman is full of tricks when he fights, and you never know what he is going to do. When you least expect it, you would find him down at your feet, and hold of both your ankles.”

“Confound him,” said Luke, “I'd smash him for all that.”

CHAPTER X.

CONDUCTS THE READER TO AN OLD CHATEAU NEAR CALAIS,
AND SHOWS WHAT STRANGE EVENTS TOOK PLACE THERE.

THE consul did not wish to appear to be very intimate with his visitors, for he was quite aware that he was well watched by some of the emissaries of the secretary; and when a man

in particular stopped the party, to beg them to purchase some fruit, the consul turned and said :

“ I will take good care that you have cattle that will speed you well *en route* to Paris ; for there, I have no doubt, you will find the fugitives ; but you want a rest after your little voyage.”

The look that the consul gave to the man who was offering the fruit for sale, convinced Claude and Luke that it was for his special edification he, the consul, said these words ; and then they both concluded, which was the exact truth, that this pretended fruit seller was nothing more nor less than one of the spies in the pay of the secretary of the commandant.

“ Yes,” replied Claude. “ Paris will be our place.”

“ Not a doubt of that,” said Luke, “ and there you will find your cousin, Miss Thornton, and that rascally major.”

“ Buy some fruits, sirs,” said the spy. “ Pray buy some fruit of a poor man.”

Claude was particularly anxious that this rascal should not get off quite scot-free, so as he walked along he pretended to tread upon a piece of orange peel that was upon the ground, and to fall, and in his fall he caught hold of the spy by the ankle, and over he went on his back in a moment, with such a crash upon the stones, that they all thought he was killed.

“ Quite an accident,” said Claude.

“ Oh, quite,” said the consul. “ Give the poor man a few coins. I dare say he is not hurt. Poor fellow.”

“ How sorry I am,” said Claude. “ But, you see, it was that treacherous piece of orange-peel that made me fall, and one is so apt, quite upon the impulse of the moment, to catch hold of anything or anybody to save oneself, that I am afraid I really upset this poor, but, no doubt, very honest man.”

The spy rose to a sitting posture, and as he held his head he uttered a string of the most horrible oaths in French that he could possibly recollect, and he flung the few pence, that Claude placed in a basket from him, with a rage that was quite ludicrous to see. It was quite as much as Claude and his friends could do to keep from laughing outright to see the look of rage and pain and doubt that was upon the face of the spy ; but they passed on, leaving him still sitting upon the ground in the center of a little throng of people, which gathered round him to hear how his mishap had chanced.

The house inhabited by the consul was now close at hand, and when they all reached it, the consul cried out in a loud voice—

“ Jacques—Jacques !”

“ Yes, sir,” replied a French servant.

“You will endeavor to have a caleche, with one pair of good horses, to take these gentlemen over to Paris, Jacques, and you will have it in readiness at the door in about an hour now, Jacques?”

“Certainly, sir.”

The consul then led the way to a private apartment, and, when he had shut the door, he said :

“The only way to prevent the man you seek receiving information that there is danger, is to make it pretty well believed that you will soon be on the road to Paris, and that you have no suspicion the end of your journey is in the immediate neighborhood of Calais.”

“But is it so?” cried Claude.

“Hush—speak low. I do not think that there is any danger of our being overheard, but, still, it is as well to be cautious. In answer to your question, I say, yes.”

“You surprise me,” added Claude. “But are you certain, sir, of what you state? Is there no possibility of a mistake?”

“I think none, and you will, yourself, be of the same opinion when you hear what I have to tell you. This Major Brown is very well known in Calais to some people, and when the packet came in a few hours ago, the commandant’s secretary went on board at once and came ashore with him. They had a sedan chair brought right down to the quay, and a rumor was spread about that a young English lady, who had been driven mad by being first seduced and then abandoned by an officer in the army, prepared the minds of all parties for what was to follow. The young lady, with a handkerchief tied over her mouth, or, I should rather say, placed in it, much in the same manner that you place a bit in the mouth of a horse, was brought out of the packet and placed in the sedan, and carried off to the lodging that the secretary of the commandant’s has.”

“And the major?”

“He, with his shoulder bound up, and looking very pale, went with her and the secretary.”

Claude sprang to his feet. “Is the lodging near at hand, sir?”

“Stop a bit. It is; but she is gone from there. I had a suspicion that all was not right, and I employed a servant of mine, upon whom I know I can rely, although he is a Frenchman, to watch these parties. He will be able to tell us all about them, and I suspect they are at a chateau that belongs to the commandant, in Calais, and which that gentleman, who is too easy and good-tempered by half, permits his rascally secretary to have the care of, and never inquires about it. The fact is, that the commandant’s wife died there, and

as he was tenderly attached to her, he never has gone near the place since."

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you?" said Claude. "I have a double interest in rescuing the poor girl from the villain who has stolen her, for it was by making use of my name that he got her to the unfrequented spot alone, from which he was able to kidnap her."

"Depend upon it," said the consul, "you shall have all the aid I can give to you in the matter, and I hope and trust we shall be successful."

"But," said Claude, "the commandant being the man he is, would it not be as well, and better too, to secure his aid?"

"Yes, if it could be done with anything like safety," replied the consul; "but from the first outset of that visit, the spies of the secretary would take the alarm, and all our efforts would be frustrated. Everything depends upon it not being supposed that you have any idea of staying here at all, and upon the notice that you are posting to Paris."

"I can well perceive that there is good, sound sense in what you say, sir," said Claude Duval.

"You may depend that there is," added the consul. "Now, there are but two ways of communicating with the commandant; either I must go to him, or I must send and ask him to be so good as to come to me. It is quite impossible that either of those events could take place without the secretary being at once acquainted of it, and coupling it with your presence here, of course, such a man would come to the instant conclusion that it concerned the hiding-place of the major, who, therefore, would receive intelligence within an hour that his position at the chateau was untenable, and the consequence would be, his flight in some direction that would leave us nothing but conjecture to go upon."

"I am quite bewildered," said May.

"And so am I," said Luke.

"Then allow me," added the consul, "to endeavor to get what information I can from the man I have mentioned."

As he spoke, the consul rang the bell, and a middle-aged man soon presented himself.

"Oh, Pierre," said the consul, "you are the very man I wanted. I was quite unhappy at the idea that you might not, yourself, have answered the bell, in which case I should really not have ventured upon asking for you. Monsieur Roche has so many spies about."

"Roche, then, is the name of the secretary?" said Claude.

"Just so," replied the consul. "Well, Pierre, what have you learnt?"

"The major and the mad young lady are at Lannes."

"Ah, as I thought. That is the chateau, Mr. Thornton. And you have excited no suspicion, Pierre, that you were on the watch?"

"None in the least, sir, I will answer for that. But don't trust Jacques, sir; I know that he calls upon Roche."

"Confound the rascal! I know that, too, and I will not trust him half so far as I can see him. Do you think, Pierre, you could guide us to the chateau in the dark?"

"Oh, yes, easily, sir. I know every inch of the way."

"But what is to be done about this carriage that was ordered for Paris?" said Duval, with some uneasiness.

"That is easily managed. You must go off in it, and get on the road for about an hour or so, and then you must stay at some halting place till dark, after which you must meet me and Pierre somewhere near the outskirts of the town here, and we will proceed to the chateau together. You can easily induce the driver of the carriage to wait for you, by saying you are going to make a call in the vicinity of the place you stop at, and all you have to do is to very carefully observe your route, so that you will have no difficulty in walking back."

"Yes," said Pierre, "that is the only way to do it, so as to appear to be fairly off. Roche has so many spies about him, whom he only pays when they bring him any intelligence, and then pays liberally enough, that one cannot be too cautious."

"Let it be so then," said Claude. "The carriage will not go very far in an hour, I suppose, and upon the roads about here?"

"Certainly not," said the consul. "Besides, you can stop it every now and then to look about you at the country, in which you can easily affect to be much interested; for recollect, it is time that is the object, not distance, and the sooner the night comes the better it will be."

"Where shall we meet the English gentleman?" said Pierre.

"At the ruined tower, I should say," replied the consul, and then turning to Claude, he said: "You will see, about one mile on the Paris road, from here, to the left of the road, a ruined tower, covered with ivy. There is a small gate leading from the main road up to it. At that gate Pierre and I will be at the hour of midnight, as nearly as possible; and should you be there much too soon, clamber over the gate, and stay in the tower. You will find no interruption there after sunset, I'll warrant."

"Not the least," said Pierre.

"Is there any special reason for that?" said Claude.

The consul smiled.

"It is haunted, that is all."

"Yes," said Pierre, "by fools."

"Well, we will not be scared from a place of refuge upon such a score as that," said Claude. "And now I think we fully and clearly understand what we are to do in this affair, which but for you, sir, would be quite unmanageable to us, I am afraid."

"Don't mention that," said the consul.

At this moment there was a tremendous rattling of wheels and cracking of a whip in the street, together with such a chattering of voices that one would have thought something very tremendous was about to happen, and that nothing near so simple as the arrival of a chaise and a pair of horses could have produced such an uproar and excitement; but that was the real fact. The vehicle that the consul had ordered for Claude Duval and his friends had arrived at the door of the house.

"There is the chaise," said the consul, and there, no doubt, is some spy of the secretary to see you safe off."

"Ah," said Pierre, "it will be a wonder if the driver himself is not in his pay, somehow or another."

The consul started rather at this alarming suggestion.

"Confound him," he said, "that may be true enough, and if so, I am afraid that our plans will be, after all, likely to miscarry, for if the rascal thinks you are all three back to Calais he will come likewise."

"But in that case," said Claude, "should we not see him on the road?"

"Of course you would."

"Very good, then, leave him to me. If he should attempt to pass us, I will adopt some means of convincing him that will not be a judicious step. If that is all the danger of the scheme miscarrying, I will meet it."

"In that case, then, start at once," said the consul. "and good fortune attend you on your route. Remember the old tower covered with ivy."

There came a tap at the door of the room now, and then it was opened, and Jacques appeared at the entrance.

"The carriage is ready for Paris," he said.

"That will do," said Claude. "I will write to you, Mr. Consul, from the capital, and let you know how we get on. I will not fail, too, to call upon the two gentlemen you have so kindly given me notes of introduction to."

"They will assist you, I am sure," said the consul, who was glad to perceive that Claude adopted a style of talking that would tend to mystifying Jacques. "For my sake, I know they will do all they can for you, and you can stay with him who resides in the Rue St. Honore."

The postilion's whip at the door was cracking away all this time at quite a terrible rate.

The look of low cunning that was upon the face of Jacques was quite a sight to see ; and Claude, if he had not been so really anxious about the actual result of the enterprise that he was upon, would have found no small amusement in the study of French character that was presented to him. As it was, he now hurried to the door to depart.

The carriage was just that sort of thing that never could have been produced in England at all, and if by any accident it had made an appearance there, it would have been as quickly converted into fire-wood. A more miserable, shaky concern Claude thought he had never seen. It was tied together by ropes in many places, and in fact it was upon a par with the two wretched animals who were, after the slovenly French fashion, harnessed to it, and they were dreadful to look at.

If Claude Duval had been really going to Paris instead of only a few miles away from Calais, he certainly would have made a stand against proceeding in any such vehicle, and with any such cattle ; but as it was, it did not matter even if they did break down within a short time, a circumstance which he considered to be exceedingly probable.

It was amusing, too, to see the look of May and of Luke as they got into the vehicle, and Claude said to the consul—

“Is this the usual kind of conveyance here?”

“Not exactly,” replied the consul with a smile, “but you must consider that they expect you pay well, and, therefore, they have turned out their best carriage and horses.”

“Their best?”

“Just so. There are many equipages in this place much worse than this one, I assure you.”

“Good gracious!” said Luke. “Then they must absolutely fall to pieces before they get a mile out of the town, for I thought it impossible anything could be worse than this.”

CHAPTER XI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS REACH THE OLD
CHATEAU DE LANNES.

THE postilion did not understand English, so he was not at all aware of the disparaging idea that the travelers had of his equipage; but he strutted to and fro, giving himself the airs of a field-marshal at the very least.

When Claude was seated, there came a couple of men, each of whom was bearing something that looked more like a gigantic churn than anything else, at a little distance, but as they came nearer, Claude said to May—

“Oh, they are boots. They are the sign, no doubt, to be fixed outside the house of some bootmaker, as we have seen them in London.”

“Not at all,” said the consul, “they are the postilion’s boots.”

“The postilion’s boots? Impossible!”

“You will see. A French postilion would no more think of going on the road without his boots than without his head. You will soon see that I am right.”

Claude and his friends did soon see that the consul understood these matters, for the two men with the boots advanced to one of the miserable horses and placed a boot each side of him. Then they assisted the postilion on to his back, and his legs naturally fell into the huge boots.

The next thing was to get the boots into the stirrups, otherwise of course they would have fallen into the road the instant the vehicle went on. For this purpose some half dozen Frenchmen got on each side of the postilion and hoisted him up by the boots, and so succeeded in fixing them in the stirrups; and there he was, looking as fierce as though he were the greatest man in all the world.

“Are the English ready?” said the postilion.

“Oh, yes, quite,” said Claude,

With a sharp crack of his whip he put the wretched horses to a strange kind of trot, and then shouting, “For glory!—glory!” he managed to get round the next corner and the carriage was fairly started on the Paris road.

What glory there could be in driving a pair of miserable

hacks that in England would be at once considered as too far gone for cats-meat, only a Frenchman could conceive; but when it is a positive fact that a Frenchman was once seen pulling perriwinkles out of their shells with a pin and muttering to himself it was "for glory," we need not wonder at anything of that sort that the Grand Nation may do.

There was a pause at the gate of Calais for the purpose of examining the passports, but as everything was regular now, Claude and his party were allowed again to proceed, and they got into that dull, flat, terribly uninteresting tract of country that lies between Calais and Paris, and which is decidedly the most tiresome in the world.

To the left appeared in the distance a much more fertile and woody district, but to the right everything was as barren as possible, there appearing to be nothing but immense plains, scarcely relieved by a single tree; and it was only now and then that the travelers saw a house, with its bit of garden attached, in some hollow.

The day was now rapidly sinking, and a dull glow was over the western sky as the sun, for that day, took its farewell of La Belle France. Then there came some sombre clouds out of the south, and in a very few minutes they managed to sweep over the entire canopy of sky; although, if you watched them ever so narrowly, they did not appear to be making any progress.

In another ten minutes it was night.

The wretched horses had gone indifferently well; and although the miserable vehicle cracked awfully, it did not absolutely break down, to the astonishment of both Claude and Luke, who fully expected it would have done so long before getting so far as it had.

The postilion made a horrible cracking noise with his whip, and now and then indulged himself by singing a highly national song, which, like the national songs of all Frenchmen, was about glory, and at the same time ardently intimated that the French nation was the first in the universe, and had always been such.

The vanity of a Frenchman is only to be equaled by that of an American; but then the latter is certainly too comical even to laugh at, while the Frenchman will always say or do something to excite your risibility.

"Claude," said May, "we must be looking out for the tower that the consul mentioned to us."

"Yes, I am keeping a wary watch."

"The postilion, I suppose," said Luke, "can't speak English."

"Oh, no, certainly not," replied Claude. "It is not in any respect probable that he has been in the way of acquiring

that language; so, I think, we may converse with perfect freedom."

"Nothing has passed us on the road," said May, "and although I listen as acutely as I can, I do not hear any vehicle or horseman upon our track now."

"Oh, there is the tower," said Claude. "Do you not see it covered with ivy, as the consul told us it was? There, against the night sky."

They all three now saw the tower quite plainly, and they now did not care how soon they came to some house or village at which the carriage might be put up for a time, while they went back to meet the consul and Pierre at the old tower.

For some distance further though, no available place to stop at presented itself to the travelers, and Claude was just thinking that their walk back would be too long a one to be pleasant, when the postilion, pointing with his whip forward cried out—

"Behold, there is the post-house, and there, if messieurs, the English, please, we will rest these noble steeds."

Claude saw a light about a quarter of a mile ahead, and he replied.

"By all means. I think the noble steeds and the glorious postilion both require rest and refreshment."

"You are right, sir, you are right—and, for an Englishman, tolerably considerate,"

"I thank you for the compliment," said Claude.

"Duval," said Luke, "I have been looking on this side of the splendid vehicle at the wheels, and I find that the linch-pin of one of them is nothing but an old nail."

"Indeed?"

"That is all, and nothing would be easier than to get it out so that when the glorious postilion had got a little further on he would find his carriage broken down. What say you to that?"

"Just this, Luke, that there is one great advantage combined with the extreme simplicity of our traveling arrangements, which is, that no accident can possibly happen that may not be repaired again in quite as efficient a manner as the affair was before. Our glorious postilion will just find another nail for a linch-pin and on we shall go."

"I did not think of that."

May laughed. "It won't do," she said. "Nothing but the positive death of the two horses will stop us."

"And it would be a mercy to help them from this world," said Claude.

"Stop a bit," cried Luke, "I have it. He can't make a wheel quite so easily as he can a linch-pin. I will wait till

we are in a dark part of the road before we execute the manoeuvre, and then I will try and throw the wheel away long before he can get out of those great boots of his."

"That is better," said Claude. "I think the loss of a wheel will pose him."

"Where shall I do it?"

"I think that you had better not meddle with the wheel at all till we get past the post-house at which he purposes to stop a little. Then, after we get about half a mile on the other side of it, nothing will be easier than the making of some excuse for him to stop. You can say that you have lost your hat, and then you can get out and remove the linch-pin; and when we go down, and you get rid of the wheel, we can appear to go back to the post house for help, and leave him alone on the road in his glory, while we make the best of our way to the old tower, and we shall meet our friend, the consul, and be off to this chateau he speaks of most likely before the postilion gets any one to help him."

"Yes, I see; that will be the best plan."

"And here we are," said May, "close to the post-house."

The postilion was quite determined that the people at the post-house should have no reasonable excuse for not knowing that somebody of importance was coming, for he cracked his whip with such force that it sounded like a sharp succession of pistol-shots, and he shouted at the same time with all his strength of lungs—

"Hilloa!—lilloa! House!—house! Mr. Lord Anglais and the brave postilion approaches!"

Such were the grand, eloquent tones in which the postilion thought proper to herald his approach to the post-house, and, no doubt, he well knew that they would have the desired effect; for, upon driving up with quite a dash to the door of quite a wretched-looking hovel, there were collected at the door of it the master, and the mistress, and the whole establishment.

The postilion was duly lifted out of his great boots; and then said something hastily to the landlord, which awakened the suspicions of Luke, who said to Claude Duval—

"Did you hear what he said just now? From his manner in saying it, I am afraid it was about us."

"You are quite right, Luke," replied Claude, with a smile. "It was about us; but it was nothing that we need care about. It was merely advising the man to charge us well for all that we had, for we were the cursed English, and had plenty of money."

"Confound his impudence!" said Luke.

"Yes, it is just what you may expect from such people. They will cringe and fawn to you before your face, and abuse

you in the grossest terms the moment they think they can do so out of your hearing."

"We will see. It is just possible that I may find a means of repaying the postilion for his compliments to us before I part with him."

"Don't attempt it, Luke, I beg of you. Let him alone. I have but two desires, and they are just now to rescue Lucy Thornton, and then to get out of France."

They now alighted from the carriage, being all but embraced by the people of the house; but Claude put a damper upon their delightful feelings, by saying—

"Postilion, we have no time to spare upon the road, and expect you to be ready to start again in one quarter of an hour."

The postilion bowed, and grinned, and swore he was at their service to go to the farthest end of the world, if necessary, at any period of time; and then Claude and his friends entered the house.

Some refreshments were ordered, and when it came, they could touch nothing but the bread, which looked white and pure. There was something in a dish, which looked like pigs' ears stewed in rancid butter with flour, and there was a bottle of wine, which was so frightfully sour that Luke would not be convinced that it was not a mistake, and that they had brought their stock of vinegar instead.

"No, Luke, it is of no use to complain. This is French wine."

"Is it? Well, give me one half-pint of English porter before a hogshead of it. It is enough to give any one the stomach-ache to think of it."

"And have you any idea," said May to Claude, "of what this is that they have served us up in this dish?"

"Not the remotest. But I have quite made up my mind not to touch any of it."

"And I," said Luke.

May, too, shook her head at the mess of shiny-looking rubbish; so they contented themselves with the bread and some water.

The quarter of an hour soon expired, and they all sallied out to the door of the inn and post-house; and then Claude asked what was to pay, and the landlord, with a terrible grimace, said—"Ten francs."

This was a sum equivalent in English to about eight shillings and sixpence, and was a great deal more than should have been charged, but Claude held up his hands, and said in quite a tone of surprise—

"Only ten francs!"

"Y—e—s," said the inn-keeper, doubtingly, for he had

fully expected a row about the exorbitant nature of the demand.

"Well," added Claude, in a loud voice, "I am quite surprised that you should ask so little. There are the ten francs; but I was quite prepared to pay twenty-five at the least, my friend."

Upon this the innkeeper's wife was so enraged at the idea of what had escaped her cupidity, that she flew at the innkeeper, and began scratching and buffeting him at an awful rate, because he had not demanded more. The attack brought the innkeeper's sister to his aid, and she began to assault the wife, and the carriage with Claude and his friends drove off, leaving the whole family in a rolling, fighting, scratching and kicking mass upon the ground in front of the house.

Luke clapped his hands with delight, and cried out—

"I only wish our friend the postilion were in the midst of that."

"It would serve him right," said Claude. "But we must now look to what we have to do. Luke, I rely upon your managing the wheel."

"I'll do it."

The night was so very dark that you could hardly have seen your hand held up within six inches of your eyes, and a cold wind, too, was sweeping over the flat, open country to the right of the road, and now and then it came in such a moaning blast that Claude was inclined to dread a stormy night for the enterprise he was upon.

Such an idea would not have given him any concern, but that May was with him, and he knew well that she was far from qualified to meet the evil influences of the weather. This consideration made him more anxious still that they should, at least, get to the tower as quickly as possible.

"Luke," he said, "this is a dreary bit of road. There seems to be nothing but hedges on each side; suppose you do it now."

"Very good. Call to him to stop, and say that I have dropped my hat."

"Hilloa! postilion!" shouted Claude.

"Ai—ai, monsieur?"

"Stop a minute. My friend has lost his hat in the road. Stop your horses."

There was no great difficulty in stopping the horses, who were, no doubt, glad enough of any temporary respite from their work, for which they were certainly in no proper condition; so the carriage was speedily brought to a standstill.

"I am afraid, gentlemen," said the postilion, "that if I were to alight, these fine horses, having no longer the fear of

my presence before their imaginations, would run away and hurl you to destruction."

It was the dread of not being able to get into his boots again that affected the postilion.

"Never mind," said Claude. "My friend will alight and get his hat himself. It is no trouble."

Luke sprang out of the carriage, and had the old nail out of the nave of the wheel in a moment.

"All's right," he said. "Hold on firmly on the near side."

Claude flung his arm round May's waist, to save her from the shock of the fall of the carriage when the wheel should come off, for fall it assuredly would, upon the off-side, in a few moments; and then he called out to the postilion:

"You can go on, my friend. It is all right now. You can make what speed you please."

CHAPTER XII.

MAJOR BROWN FINDS HIS FOES RATHER TOO MANY FOR HIM.

CRACK! went the postilion's whip again, and off set the horses at a better pace than before. The wheel made about half a dozen turns upon its axle, and then off it went, and dropped the carriage upon that side with a crash that bespoke the probability that the axle itself had given way with the sudden shock.

Our three friends being, as they were, prepared for the worst, did not sustain any damage whatever contingent upon it, but Claude thought it would be better to make an outcry, so he called out—

"Hilloa! hilloa! What's that?"

"The devil!" said the postilion, as he pulled up.

Luke jumped out of the carriage, and ran back till he found the wheel, which was a few paces off, and lifting it in his hand, he flung it right over the hedge by the side of a road, into a meadow. The state of perturbation in which the postilion was prevented him from hearing the slight noise that the fall of the wheel upon the damp grass made, and, besides, Claude took care to keep calling out, so that his attention was distracted.

“What in the name of all that’s abominable,” cried Duval, “do you mean by putting us in a vehicle that falls to pieces before we have well begun our journey? It is abominable. What do you mean by it?”

“The devil—it’s one of the wheels!” cried the postilion. “It’s one of the wheels, that’s all, and I’ll soon put it to rights. I must dismount, sirs, and light a lantern, and then you will see how the glory of the French nation will be vindicated by putting on the wheel again.”

“Confound you, and the French nation, too,” said Claude. “I do believe that the whole concern has broken to pieces.”

“Oh, no, sir—oh, no. Have patience and be tranquil. All will be well. Oh, *sacre*, where is my lantern, and where are my matches? Oh, here they are. Now, sirs, you will perceive how it is that the grand nation conquers all the world, and always means to continue to do so.”

With some difficulty the postilion, from a square box that hung dangling from one of the shafts, procured the means of lighting a lantern, and then he set about examining the extent of the injury the carriage had received; but even his wish to make things out at the best could not prevent him from putting on a longer face even than nature had given him, as he said:

“I cannot help perceiving, noble sirs, that the wheel has come off in consequence of the disarrangement of the admirable apparatus for keeping it on.”

“Admirable apparatus?” said Claude. “Why, it was nothing but an old nail.”

“Begging the pardon of so illustrious a person as Monsieur for differing with him in the least, I admit that it looked like an old nail, but that was the artifice of it, for it was in reality a wonderful piece of mechanism.

“And greatly to the glory of the French nation, no doubt?”

“Precisely so; but—but I can’t see the wheel, and I am sorry to state that there is another little derangement.”

“What is that?”

“Only a broken axle, that is all.”

“And enough, too, I think. I doubt, Mr. Postilion, if all the glory of the French nation is able to put us on our route again.”

“Pardon me again, sir. I will find the wheel, and tie the axle with a piece of string, and then we shall go on again like the fiery winged Pegasus.”

“Oh, indeed. Very good.”

The postilion looked for the wheel, but to find it was quite another thing, and they saw him peering about with his lan-

tern and uttering curses at his non-success and the extraordinary disappearance of the wheel.

"What can the meaning of this be?" they heard him then mutter as he paused, and tried to think of some probable explanation of the really, to him, inexplicable phenomenon.

"This is not glory, I am afraid."

"Have you found it?" said Claude.

"I am compelled to say, Monsieur, that hitherto I have not, but I soon shall, for, after all, nothing is impossible to the grand nation."

"Be quick about it, then."

"I shall—I shall."

The postilion now went over the ground still more carefully than before, but, of course, with a similar result, and then he came to the side of the carriage, and holding up his light, he looked in the face of Claude with a very woeful expression.

The wind appeared to have increased in force now, and it was quite evident that it bore upon its gusty wings particles of rain, so that the prognostications of Claude regarding the night seemed about to be truly fulfilled by the coming of wet, and most probably a squall.

"Well?" said Claude, after the postilion had shaken his head several times with a look of great wisdom.

"Alas! alas!"

"What is the matter now?"

"Nothing, now, gentlemen. Only, I cannot find the wheel, and such being the case, the glory of Europe is departed forever."

"Indeed?"

"My impression," said Luke, "is, that you have swallowed it."

"Will you have the goodness to say that again, sir?" said the postilion.

"My impression is, that you have swallowed the wheel."

"Sir, I am a Frenchman, and a man of honor, and I shall expect——"

"What?" said Luke, preparing to get out of the carriage.

"Nothing," added the postilion, "but your most patient consideration, under the present painful circumstances. I cannot tell what has become of the wheel. I do not deny certainly that I am in despair, and that the glory of my life has faded away to leave not a trace behind."

"I think," said Claude, "I can explain this singular occurrence."

"Oh, sir, if you can——"

"Well, at the moment that the wheel came off, something went through the air like a cannon-shot; I heard it go sing-

ing along at a tremendous rate ; and I think the speed with which we were proceeding, combined with the revolution of the wheel on its own axle, and the composition of forces generally, made it fly from here with a velocity that renders its destination very doubtful."

"I am much indebted to you, sir," said the postilion, "for so highly scientific and satisfactory an account of the affair ; but as it is difficult to get on upon three wheels, I—that is I——"

"Don't know exactly what to do?"

"Exactly so."

"Where will it be possible to get a new wheel?"

"At the post-house which was honored a little while ago by your noble presence, gentlemen. There no doubt ; another, although not a new wheel, can be got, and if you will all wait here with patience, I will go there and procure assistance."

"Not so," said Claude, "I feel cramped by sitting so long, and would much rather, for the sake of the exercise, go myself."

"So would I," said May.

"And so would I," said Luke,

"Then we will all go," added Claude, "and leave our friend the postilion here in charge of the chaise."

The postilion had to combat this arrangement as well as he could, for somehow he did not feel at all inclined to be left alone in the middle of the road with the carriage and horses. Solitude is a Frenchman's bane ; he can bear anything but that ; and but for the necessity there was of some one staying with the horses and carriage, no doubt the postilion would have insisted upon accompanying the party back to the post-house, but he dreaded the censure he should get for such a desertion of his employer's property, so with a sigh he saw that fate meant he should stay.

"Adieu!" he said. "Of course Messieurs will be back as soon as possible?"

"Oh, of course," cried Claude.

They all three now set off to walk back upon the road they had come, and the last they saw of the postilion was his getting into the carriage, and placing the lantern upon the most prominent part of the roof of it to warn any other vehicle that might be upon the road not to run against him, as he had no means of getting out of the way quickly.

"Now," said Claude, "the thing will be to get past the post-house without observation. How is that that to be done?"

"By going singly," said Luke, "I think, or you two can go together first, and I will follow in a few moments more. By

keeping upon the opposite side of the road, too, there is very little likelihood indeed that we shall be seen by any one at the post-house."

"And if dimly seen," said May, "in the dark, it will seem so utterly impossible that we should be the travelers who stopped there so short a time ago, that we shall escape inquiry."

"Be it so, then," said Claude, "I did think of taking to the fields."

"I am afraid," remarked Luke, "that in a totally unknown country that would be a hazardous proceeding."

"Perhaps so. We will try, then, to pass the post-house."

They walked with rapidity, for they were quite fresh, having not endured any fatigue of that character for so long, and the lights in the window of the post-house soon showed themselves a little in advance. They then separated, as Luke had suggested, and without the smallest difficulty they contrived to pass the post-house.

"We are of no importance now, you see," said Claude, "so we are not even looked at. If we had come back in the carriage, we should have been again much honored guests."

"Not a doubt of it, Claude," said May, "but we are much more obliged to them now for their neglect than for their homage."

"We are, indeed. Do not let me hurry you, May, but as fast you can go with ease to yourself, we will keep up by adopting your pace."

These words were quite sufficient to let May know how anxious Claude was to get on with speed, and she went on at a pace that one would hardly have thought it possible she could have assumed; but May was of a hardier frame than any one would have thought to look at her; and, after all, when there is the will to encounter fatigue or danger, the physical powers generally surmount it.

From the point at which the carriage broke down to the tower covered with ivy, which was the place of rendezvous with the consul, was, as near as Claude and Luke could guess, about four miles, so that they considered, if they did the distance in any space of time within the hour, they would be doing very well indeed, considering that May was with them, who ought not to be expected to keep up any great speed.

Not a soul met them on the road, and it was strange that such should be the fact upon such a high-road; but the probability was, that except the diligence to and from Paris, and any chance travelers who might be able and willing to go to the expense of a private conveyance, the road was but little used.

It was not so fashionable a thing as it is now to make a

journey to Paris, and, besides, the state of France was just then anything but settled, and that circumstance, no doubt, had its effect in diminishing the number of tourists.

"This is the tower," said Luke, suddenly.

Claude looked in the direction where it was sure to be, if in sight, and there, sure enough, he saw rising blackly against the night sky the dark outline of the old building.

"It's a welcome sight," he said.

"It is, indeed," said May.

The tone of voice in which May spoke made Claude think that the walk had been rather too much for her, and he said:

"You are fatigued, May. We should have made our break down of the carriage closer at hand, Luke."

"Oh, no—no!" said May. "It was not any sense of fatigue that made me speak, Claude, but an earnest desire that this adventure should be terminated to your satisfaction, that's all."

"You are kind and good to say so; but, after all, it has struck me several times that it would have been more generous of me to have left you somewhere in safety in England than brought you here."

"Can you think so?"

"Yes, May, whatever the self-denial might have cost me."

"Let me beg of you not to think so, then, and even to believe that the most generous course you can pursue towards me is to let me be ever with you."

Claude pressed her hand in silence, and they continued their route towards the old tower, which each moment was more plainly visible to them. Luke ran on some little distance in advance to be certain that there was no one there upon the watch who might turn out to be a foe, as well as to let the consul and Pierre know that they were coming, if they should chance to have arrived at the place of meeting. All, however, was profoundly still by the little gate which had been mentioned.

"We are in good time," said Luke, entering.

"Oh, yes," replied Claude; "it yet, I think, for I cannot see the hands of my watch, wants a good hour to midnight. We will have a light when we get under cover, and then see how the time goes. Lean upon my arm, May."

"Nothing will convince you, then, that I am not equal to such a walk as this?" said May. "Is it not so?"

"Well, I admit it. But one's fears, you know, are so apt to outrun even one's reason, that you must excuse me."

"Excuse you? Ah! there wants no excuse for the fears that are engendered by affection."

When they reached the little gate which conducted through

an old tangled garden, long since left to grow as nature pleased, they all three paused and listened attentively for the space of three or four minutes, in order to assure themselves of the fact that no one was coming upon the road.

"We have it all to ourselves," said Claude.

"Assuredly so," said Luke.

"Open the gate, then, and let us seek the old tower."

Luke opened the gate, which made rather a harsh tone upon its hinges; and then May in a low tone, said—

"Did they not say this old place was haunted?"

"Yes, with owls."

"Nay, but, Claude, after our experience at that house by Old Pimlico, I have a dread of experiencing even certain disbelief in the fact of supernatural visitations."

"Well, I can't but admit, May, that we had, all of us, sufficient reason given us at that time to induce the belief that there was something of a strange and supernatural character going on there."

"We had, indeed."

"And yet, I still cling to the idea that even what we saw there was and is susceptible of some explanation."

"I hope so, Claude, for I would not willingly live under the impression that we human beings can in any way be open to the assaults of the supernatural world; and in our case all that we saw and heard appeared to be of a friendly character towards us, yet even that friendliness had its share of terrors, from which it was in vain to try to fly."

"Think no more of it, May. We shall not make a long stay in this place; and only see now, or rather feel, for see we scarcely can at all, what a strangely condensed spot of vegetation this is. We can hardly get along for the clinging of branches around our feet, and the trees quite meet overhead, forming an impenetrable roof of green. It, no doubt, is very beautiful in sunshine."

CHAPTER XIII.

CONTAINS A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE TOWER ON THE
ROADSIDE.

CLAUDE DUVAL was right enough in speaking as he did of the luxuriant vegetation of that spot of earth. No doubt at one time it had been a well trained and admirably kept garden, and many plants, far from being indigenous to the soil, had been placed there; but for years past scarcely a human foot had trodden in the place, and it had become a little wood.

Garden plants that kept within due limits and properly cultured had been, no doubt, here very beautiful; had gone back to a completely wild state, growing out of all size, such as they ordinarily present, and clustering up the old trees and trailing along the ground in wanton freedom.

The low boughs, too, of many of the trees had so completely blocked up the pathways that it was with the greatest difficulty, especially in the dark, and then only by stooping low, that they could be passed; but at length our friends reached a spot that was a little more open, close to the tower, and where there appeared to have been a well kept lawn.

The grass under foot at this part of the garden was short and thick, and of a very fine quality, and the tower, old and covered with immense ivy leaves, rose up abruptly out of it, like a tall ship from the sea.

There they all three paused.

"Perhaps, after all," said Claude, "it would have been more prudent for us to have remained by the gate, since no one was there to disturb us."

"And yet," said May, "I had, and still have, a strange curiosity to see this old neglected tower, and, no doubt, the consul will conjecture we are here."

"But it is almost a pity to give him the job of fighting his way through such a tangled mass of vegetation; and yet, as we are here, we will not fail to have a look at the old building. You have the means of procuring a light, of course, Luke?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, suppose then we venture upon our exploration of the place. I can see no entrance, although it don't seem so dark as it was."

"No," said Luke, "the change from the intense shadow of the vegetation to this open space makes us think it lighter, no doubt; but I will soon have a small hand lantern, which I took care to provide myself with at Dover, while you were down at the quay, alight, and then we shall see where we are much better than we can now, for, as yet, I confess that there appears to be no entrance to the tower."

Luke lit one of the matches, and then soon had his lantern in good order, and through the powerful lens of it he cast a broad stream of light upon the old tower.

The stream of light moved up and down, exhibiting the ivy to great advantage, and disclosing about fifteen feet from the ground a small gothic window, but no doorway was at all visible.

"The entrance must be upon the other side," said Claude.

"No doubt," responded Luke, "and here, I see, are the remains of a path that winds, evidently round the tower."

The path, which was nearly all overgrown with grass and weeds, they followed, and they found that it led onward with a curve, and conducted them to a gothic old doorway that was in the side of the tower. The old oaken door was close shut, and they saw that it was studded with immense nails.

"If this be fast within," said Claude, "I am afraid we shall have to satisfy our curiosity as best we may, with a sight of the outside of the tower, May."

"We will try it," said Luke.

"You hold up the lantern, then," interposed Claude, "and I will see what I can do with the old door."

With all his force Claude Duval made a rush against the door, and it flew open at once before him, and he fell right into the tower. May uttered a cry of alarm, and Luke sprang forward, but Claude called out—

"All's right—all's right. It really serves me right. The door was not fast at all, and I don't know how I came to assume that it was. We might have opened it with a touch, you see?"

"Yes, I see now," said Luke. "But I should have done just as you did. The appearance of strength and solidity about the door would evidently lead to the idea that it was quite fast, and would require no ordinary force to open it."

"Just so," said Claude, laughing, and rubbing the dust off his clothes. "But here we are, at all events, within the haunted castle."

May laughed likewise at the little mishap, now that she saw that Claude was in no way injured by his tumble, and they entered the ground floor of the old tower.

It was quite easy to see at a glance that the place had not been visited for a considerable time, for the dust lay so thickly upon the floor that their feet picked it up just as they would have done a light covering of snow upon a hard bit of roadway.

The room into which the door quite abruptly opened was of an octagon shape, and there was but one window to it, which occupied one of the faces of the octagon. The roof was shaped dome fashion, and there was not an article of furniture of any sort or description in the place.

"Quite deserted," said Claude.

"Yes, and not very tempting," said Luke.

"Hush," said May, suddenly. "What is that?"

They all three listened, and they distinctly heard overhead a strange bumping noise, and then a peculiar cry, something between a groan and a shriek.

For some few moments after these strange sounds had come upon their ears they all three remained motionless, listening to note if they would be repeated, but the most profound stillness then reigned in the forsaken tower.

"What on earth," said Luke, "can it be?"

Claude shook his head.

"It is human?" said May.

"Oh, yes—yes," said Luke. "We must not hastily conclude that it is aught else."

"Not hastily conclude that it is not," added May, solemnly.

"Claude, what is your real opinion regarding the noises?"

"I have no opinion, but I have a determination."

"What is it?"

"To get up to the room from whence they come, if it be at all possible so to do, May."

"Nay, but there may be danger."

"That I don't think will deter me. I hate to let anything make an impression upon my imagination without some attempt to remove it. There surely must be some door from this room to the upper part of the tower. Cast your light well about the walls, Luke, and if there be a door it can't escape us for long. It ought to be in one of these sides."

"Here it is" said Luke.

"Both May and Claude hurried to the part of the room where Luke was, and there they saw that he had found a key-hole although the door with which it was associated was so nicely fitted to the octagonal side of the room that it would no doubt otherwise have escaped observation.

"Where there is a key-hole there is a lock," said Luke.

“And a door I should say, too,” added Claude, “where the key-hole and the lock both happen to be, in such a position as this.”

Claude rapped with his knuckles on the wainscoat, and the hollow sound that was produced was quite conclusive upon the subject.

“It opens, most likely this way,” said Luke, “and, therefore, although locked, no doubt, that will be the only mode by which it is fastened. Suppose we try if a French lock is as easily picked as an English one? I have seen you soon make one yield.”

“I will try,” said Claude.

Duval always had about with him a few tools that might be useful during the many dangers he encountered in his adventurous career, and among them were several picklocks of different sizes to suit different locks. Judging by the eye of the size he wanted, he now introduced one of the simply-shaped implements into the lock, and by a little skillful use of it he soon heard the click of the bolt back, and then a slight pull by the aid of the picklock at once opened the door.

Quite a volley of thick, black dust came down upon Claude as the old door, that did not seem to have been open for many a year, slowly creaked upon its rusted hinges.

“Be careful, Claude,” said May.

“Yes, it is as well to be upon your guard,” said Luke.

Claude drew back more on account of the dust than from the idea of there being any danger in the old place; but scarcely had he done so than a strange moaning noise came from some distance on the other side of the door, and then they all thought they heard a footstep.

“Ah,” said Claude, “this is worth looking to. See to your arms, Luke. It is just possible enough that this old tower, after all, may be the haunt of banditti, and, in that case, we shall do a public service in France that ought to entitle us to the thanks of the government.”

“Yes,” said Luke, “and a frog-pie once a year. But listen—there is the same noise overhead that we heard some time ago.”

“What can that be?” said Luke.

“I am as much puzzled as you are,” replied Claude. “But do you think your lantern will keep its light for some time longer, Luke?”

“For hours, if necessary.”

“Then come on. I propose that we put an end to all these doubts and surmises by thoroughly exploring the tower.”

“Oh, look!—look!” cried May, at this moment, as she

pointed through the open doorway that they had succeeded in making available. "Look! Oh, Claude, what is that?"

Both Claude and Luke kept their hands upon their pistols as they each darted an eager glance in the direction indicated by May, and there, amid the gloom that lay beyond the door, they saw what could not be mistaken to be anything else than a pair of eyes glaring at them.

"Good Heavens!" cried Claude. "They are eyes."

"Not a doubt of it," added Luke.

"Are they human?" said May, as she shrunk close to Claude and kept her eyes riveted upon those eyes with a glare of fascination. If worlds had depended upon her doing so, she could not have withdrawn her steady gaze from them.

"Speak!" cried Duval. "Be you whom you may, speak, and proclaim yourself. We came here with no hostile intent towards you. Only speak and assure us that you here bear no ill will against us, and you are safe."

There was no reply; but there, amid the intense darkness, remained the two eyes glaring at the little party like coals of fire.

"Oh, let us come away," said May. "This is too dreadful."

"No—no!" said Claude. "It would ill-become us now to leave this place without making at least an effort to penetrate this mystery."

"Shall I fire?" said Luke.

"Oh, no—no!" said May. "We might regret that."

"Yes, I don't like the idea of a shot at random," said Claude. "Give me the light, Luke."

"But you will never go towards those eyes?" cried May. "Oh, think, Claude, that it is possible that you may be going into some terrible and unknown danger. Oh, do not—do not go!"

"Nay, May, I think that the only plan is to go. The eyes continue as they were, and so——"

"No—no! They do not continue as they were," cried May. "Look—oh, look at them!"

Suddenly the two great eyes now appeared to rise higher and higher through the darkness, until at last they disappeared altogether, leaving Claude and his friends quite bewildered to know what it could possibly all mean. For the space of about five minutes they remained quite motionless and silent; and then it was May who spoke.

"Come away at once," she said in a low voice. "Oh, surely we have seen enough of the horrors of this place."

"Luke, what do you say?" inquired Claude.

"I am willing for anything you think proper."

"Well, my opinion, then, is that if we were to go away now, and leave the mystery just as it is, that we should in broad daylight, when we came to talk it over, very much regret having done so. I never will willingly give way to the impression that what I see is supernatural, and, therefore, I again say, give me the lantern, Luke, and I will go forward and try to find out the meaning of all this."

May shuddered.

"After all," said Luke, and he intended it quite sincerely when he said it—"after all, Duval, it is only a French ghost, if it be such a thing at all, so there won't be much to fear from it."

Claude could not help smiling at the contemptuous idea that Luke had of the French ghosts, and he took the lantern, as he said—

"You two remain here, and if I want any assistance, I will call to you."

"No—no; that will not do," said May. "If you go, we all go. I will follow you, Claude."

"I think," said Luke, "that will be the best way; so let us get on at once, and I hope we shall find out to whom the wonderful eyes belong to, after all."

Claude agreed to this proposition, for he could not help seeing that May was much too alarmed for his safety to let him go alone, so, holding the lantern as high as he conveniently could, so as to diffuse its light as much as possible, he crossed the threshold of the mysterious door.

A few steps were sufficient to take him to the foot of a flight of old black-looking steps, that, no doubt, led to the upper apartments of the tower, and they accounted for the odd manner in which the eyes had disappeared by ascending.

CHAPTER XIV.

PURSUES THE ADVENTURES OF DUVAL AT THE TOWER AND THE CHATEAU.

"ONE of the mysteries is over," said Claude, "for the one of the eyes seeming to ascend was by their owner going backwards up these stairs."

"Oh, yes," said May, "that may be true; but—but——"

"But what, May."

"There may be dangers as well as mysteries—dangers which we have to dread much more than anything the supernatural world may say or do regarding us."

"That is very true, May. But yet, you may depend, that the only way to make any danger decrease in importance is to look it boldly in the face; so come on, and don't be afraid. After all, we may find that there is nothing to excite our apprehension, and we shall only laugh at ourselves to-morrow if we were to suffer a pair of eyes to scare us from this place. Don't you think so, Luke?"

"Likely enough," said Luke; "but I am quite sure that it is for your sake May feels, and not for her own; so I propose that you both remain here where you are, while I ascend these stairs and ascertain where they lead to, and what there is to be seen at the top of them."

"And do you think, Luke, that I have no consideration for you?" said May. "Do you think that I forget your many acts of gallantry and discretion? No, I feel for you as well as for Claude, most sincerely. But as we are getting rather too sentimental over this business, I propose that we all go, and then we shall live or die together, at all events, which will be, I think, one great consolation."

"I will," said Luke.

"Yes, but I don't intend to do anything in the dying way," said Claude, laughing, "and so, May, we will not talk about that."

"Come on, then," she said, and before Claude or Luke could make the least effort to prevent her from so doing, she had passed them both and bounded up the dark staircase like a young fawn before them.

"Stop—stop!" cried Claude.

"Stop—stop!" shouted Luke. "There may, after all, be some unknown danger."

"Come on," cried May, "all is safe and clear. Follow me!"

"Now, this is too bad," said Claude, as he dashed up the old rickety staircase two stairs at a time. "Stop, May, if you love me. If you have no consideration for yourself, have some for those who would rather suffer a hundred deaths than a hair of your head should be injured. Stop, I say! Where are you?"

"Here."

"But who is here? I don't see you. A light, Luke, a light."

"I am getting one," said Luke, "as fast as I can, I had

a match alight, but the movement in the air blew it out. Here is another; all's right, I hope."

"Oh, yes," said May, from the landing at the top of the stairs, "all is right. Here is a door, you see, or, rather, you will see when you both get up here, and I assure you there are no ghosts, unless the light should reveal a few to us."

"Oh, May," said Claude, as he reached the landing-place upon which she was standing, "you should not play me these tricks; you did not know—you could not know but that there might have been danger."

"Ah, now," said May, with a smile, "now you see we have changed places, and it is you who talk of the unknown dangers that you made light of when you were below only a few minutes since. How is that?"

"Do you not know how that is? Ah, you do."

"No, how should I know?"

"Shall I tell you? It is because your safety instead of mine is now in question, or was, rather, before I reached this spot, for now I think Luke and I sufficient to protect you."

May answered this only by a look, but that look said much more to the heart of Claude Duval than the most eloquent rejoinder to his speech could have done. Luke reached the landing with a light, and then they all turned their attention to a door which appeared as though it were calculated to resist their further progress

The door was of massive strength, and studded with iron nails, set very close to each other all over its surface. It was of a gothic shape, and to all appearance was fast closed.

"Strong enough," said Luke, as he tapped at it with his knuckles.

The moment he did this, there arose from within the room at the other side of the door, a strange hoarse kind of cry, such as they had neither of them ever heard in their lives from the lips of man or beast, and they instinctively shrank back with a feeling of dread even from a contact with the door.

May, notwithstanding she had braved so much in ascending the staircase alone, clung to Claude's arm, as she ejaculated—

"Gracious Heaven what is that?" and Luke held a pistol in his right hand pointed towards the door, while with his left he elevated the light as far as he could above his head.

"What on earth can it be?" he said.

Claude shook his head.

"It puzzles me, Luke; knock again."

Luke did not seem to like the job very well, but he did not refuse to do it. He knocked this time with the barrel of his

pistol, and an impotent kind of shriek from some living thing in the room at once responded to the summons.

"I wonder if that means come in?" said Claude.

"Oh, Claude, can you jest at such a moment?" said May. "Let us go now, surely we have had enough of the mysteries of this old tower."

"Not a bit of it," replied Claude, and advancing close to the door, he dealt it a vigorous kick with his toe, as he called out:

"Hilloa, there, anybody at home? Hilloa!"

A scuffling of feet now was the only answer to this bold inquiry, and Luke called out:

"The door is giving way, Duval—look out!"

The door did give way about an inch, but in another moment, clap shut it went as it had been before.

"There is some one in there," said May. "There can be no doubt of that now."

"Not a shadow of doubt," said Claude. "No more doubt than that I will find out who it is. Stand aside, May."

"What are you about to do?"

"Why, it strikes me that the door has no fastening within, and that it will be easier for us to force it open than for anybody on the other side to hold it shut."

"That," said May, "is the owl's gratitude, I suppose?"

Claude laughed immoderately.

"Oh, dear," he said, "I have no doubt in the world but that they thought we intended to take up our abode in the old tower, and that it was for our own convenience, and not for theirs that we removed the great stone at the window, and so they were determined to fight for their lodgings."

"Hush," said Luke, "what is that?"

A faint whistle from the outside of the tower fell upon their ears, and Claude at once ran down stairs and out into the open air.

"Speak them fairly first," said Luke, "for as we really do not intend any injury to any one who attempts to do none to us, it is as well that whoever is there should not take up a mistaken notion concerning our motives."

"That is right, Luke," said Claude, and then, elevating his voice, he cried out—"Be you whoever you may who are in the tower, let me assure you that we are only travelers, and have no desire to injure, or even disturb you in any way. We feel, though, that we are bound to satisfy ourselves that you are human beings like ourselves, and then we will go our way. We are English, and can have neither interest in anything that may concern you, nor intention to harm you."

Not a syllable of reply was vouchsafed to this highly ap-

cific speech from Claude Duval to the unknown inhabitants of the old tower.

"Well," said Claude, "they might have the civility to say something."

"I don't like this silence much," said Luke.

"It is ominous," faltered May.

"Here goes, then," said Claude. "Mind the light is kept all safe, Luke."

"Oh, yes. I'll see to that."

Duval made a dash for the door with all his strength, and open it flew, and down he fell at full length in the room. In a moment, something of the most awful-looking description sprang over him, and darting between Luke and May, rushed down the stairs, making the most hideous cries. May screamed, and Claude Duval swore, while Luke had quite enough to do not to let darkness be added to the terrors and the uncertainties of the scene by the failure of the light.

"What the duce is it?" cried Duval, springing to his feet. "The light—the light! Here with it. Confound it, here are the two eyes glaring at me from a corner."

"Oh no—no," said May. "Impossible."

"True, though, for all that."

Both May and Luke rushed into the apartment, and the latter holding up the light, while May crouched down by the side of Claude and shook in every limb, she saw in one corner of the room the most gigantic owl they had ever beheld, or dreamt there was to behold.

The creature was winking at the light, and shivering no doubt with fright at the presence of the strange intruders, and it is no exaggeration to say that it stood a good three feet from the floor. Its large flat face and its brilliant eyes, with a circle of yellow at the outside of them, were immease; and take it for all, it looked a most fearful bird.

"There's the mystery cleared up," said Claude.

"Why—a—yes," said Luke. "Confound it! why did we not think of that before?"

"And the consul told us there were owls here," said May.

"To be sure he did; but whoever thought of seeing such a monster owl as that? Why, what's that? Hilloa! who are you?"

From behind the large owl there now emerged a small one, who, with a stately, curious kind of hop, step and jump, approached Luke, and tried to bite his ankle.

"Curse you!" cried Luke. "Get away, will you?"

Claude burst into a shout of laughter as the little owl now flew on to Luke's back, and would not go down upon any account for some time; and it was not until the old owl in the

corner had uttered a peculiar sound, that the little one jumped off Luke's back, after giving him several digs about the neck, and hopped back to where it had come from.

"Well, this is truly ridiculous," said Claude.

"Oh, look!" cried May, as she pointed to the door. It was slowly pushed open, and the other owl, which had made the rush over Claude down the staircase of the tower, made its appearance again, and glared defiance upon the intruders.

"Is he dangerous?" said May.

"Well, he may be; but if he tries any nonsense, I shall take the liberty of putting a bullet through him."

"But how can they live?" said Luke. "That is the mystery. I don't see any outlet for them from this place at all."

"Behold," said May, as she pointed to an old square opening in the wall of the tower. "Do you not see what has happened?"

Claude and Luke glanced at the spot, and there they saw that a large piece of stone which had formed the upper portion of this opening in the wall had got dislodged in some way, and had fallen so far down as quite to make it impossible for such great creatures as the owls to pass through, so that, as the outer door of the tower was shut, they were prisoners in it.

"Well," said Claude, "one never can tell when or how one can have an opportunity of doing a kind thing. It is quite clear that these creatures have not been very long in their present predicament, or they would have been starved to death, for they cannot get much food here."

"A few mice and spiders, I suppose," said Luke, "is about the extent of the game in this rather bare preserve."

"About it; but you hold the light, May, and we will see if we cannot clear this entrance for the owls of its obstruction."

The stone was rather securely wedged into the opening in the wall by its own weight, which was considerable, and it was not without great difficulty that the united exertions of Claude and Luke could succeed in moving it.

While they worked at it, it was quite a curious thing to see how deeply interested the pair of old owls were in what was going on. They flapped their immense wings, and made the most strange and uncouth noises that can be imagined, sometimes beginning with a cry like that of a child, and ending with a loud hoot, that would have been very alarming if one had not known from whence it proceeded.

One thing was quite clear, and that was, that the gigantic creatures knew what their visitors were about.

After considerable trouble they got the great square stone to move and then by suddenly uniting their force, they succeeded in giving it a push that sent it through the window, thundering down the side of the tower.

The two owls set up shrieks of satisfaction, and one of them made a sudden swoop through the window into the night air.

"Gone!" said Luke.

"And come back again," said Claude, as the great creature dashed into the turret again with a hoot and a shrill shout.

"This is strange, indeed," said May. "These creatures now really seem grateful for the service you have rendered them."

"Well, I must say that they do."

"Yes," said Luke, "and you may depend upon it that these kind of creatures have much greater reflective powers than people at large are commonly inclined to give them credit for. One thing was quite evident, and that was, that they knew what we were about, and now——"

"Look out," said Claude, as he caught May round the waist and hurried her from the room.

Luke had just time to follow them, and get the door shut, as the two old owls and all their family made a rush to attack them.

"The consul?" he said.

"Yes, the same. I am afraid we have kept you waiting."

"Don't mention it, sir. We have been agreeably entertained by the owls."

"Ah, by-the-by, I ought to have warned you against them, for they are considered to be most particularly furious creatures. They commit all sorts of ravages in the neighborhood, and people are afraid to come to the tower after them. They have been fired at times out of number, but they seem to be shot-proof, for nobody has been able to hit them at all."

"Well, we have had rather an interesting interview with them, at all events, although I must confess that at last we retreated rather ignominiously before them, and left them master of the field. But now, sir, if you can show us the way to the chateau, we shall be your debtors for a great service."

"I will. Come this way. I have no conveyance here, for if I had attempted to buy one large enough to take us all, it would have attracted notice, and possibly might have frustrated all our attempts at the rescue of the young lady. The distance is not very great, if you are ordinarily good pedestrians."

"Never fear us," said May, "we can walk."

"Very good, then, let us come on at once. I thought I heard a strange noise a little while ago as I approached the tower, as though some of it were falling to pieces. Was it so?"

"No," replied Claude Duval, "I can explain to you the cause of that noise as we go along."

"I shall be glad to hear it, for it frightened my mare, and rather induced me to think that the old tower had fallen at last."

Duval laughed, and then, in rather a humorous style, he recounted to the consul how he and Luke had thrown the block of stone from the window of the tower, and how great the joy of the owls seemed upon the occasion.

"They and all the progeny," said the consul, "would soon have been starved to death. Why, you have established, no doubt, a high character among the owl race, and are entitled to their everlasting gratitude."

Duval smiled again, as he said—

"To tell the honest truth, sir, I think there is a great and striking similarity between owls and the human race."

"Indeed, how so?"

"Why, you will, I am sure, admit it when I tell you, that no sooner had the owls, by actual experiment, found out that egress from and ingress to the tower were all right, than they commenced an attack upon us, their deliverers, and if we had not effected a speedy retreat, I don't know but we might have had our eyes pecked out in the conflict."

CHAPTER XV.

The consul shook his head and laughed a little at this speech of Duval's, after which he said—

"I can very easily perceive, sir, that you have suffered something from the ingratitude of your fellow-creatures, but I do not at all say that with any obtrusive curiosity concerning you."

Claude Duval felt that this was a kind of hint to him to say something about who and what he was, but he replied in rather a sad tone of voice—

"My mind is so full of the possible fate of Lucy Thorn-

ton that I can think of nothing else for many minutes. Shall we soon reach the chateau?"

"I hope so. Let us push on a little faster, if you have no objection?"

"None in the least."

The party now increased in speed, and Claude Duval would have been glad to be able to help May on a little, but he feared to show her any marked attention, for fear the secret of her sex should become apparent, for as yet, dressed as she was, the consul only knew her as a young gentleman in the company of Mr. Thornton, as Claude Duval chose, upon that occasion, to call himself to every one.

The rain still continued, but the wind was nothing nearly so violent as it had been, and it was well for them all four that it was not, as they were traversing a very bleak and exposed bit of country.

The consul's servant had gone on in advance, he being well acquainted with the road, for the purpose of reconnoitering the environs of the old chateau before the others should arrive, a proceeding which might have the effect of saving a good bit of time.

This open tract of country, however, soon disappeared, and they descended into a valley, which was well wooded, and at the bottom of which was a little stream. The consul shaded his eyes with his hands—to penetrate the darkness, as he said—

"From this spot in daylight the turrets of the old chateau are easily to be seen, but now I fear that they are too much confounded with the night sky for anything of that sort."

"I can see nothing," said Claude, "but a very dark mass before us, but whether it consists of clouds or of trees I cannot say."

"It is the wood in which the old chateau is embedded," said the consul. "It is not a natural wood, but one created by art, and which in time has grown to be all but impervious."

"Ah!" said May, suddenly, "there is a light in the sky."

They all looked in the direction that May pointed, and they saw a strange light right above the tree-tops. It did not take them many moments to come to the conclusion, though, that this light, which May had judged to be in the sky, was at the topmost apartment of one of the turrets of the old chateau.

"You now see," said the consul, "how high some part of the building is."

"I do, indeed," said Claude.

"It is quite clear to you that that light shines through a

loop-hole, or very narrow casement in a turret, you can see the shape of it."

Before they could speculate any further upon the little light it was gone, and the sudden cessation of its brief radiance only served to make the darkness that now succeeded it all the more black and dreary.

"It is gone," said May, with a sigh.

"Yes," said the consul; "but let us hope that we shall soon see it closer. We are at the commencement of the wood, and we shall soon be close to the chateau; but I warn you to be very cautious."

"That we will be," said Duval.

"And there is another thing," said the consul, "that I hope, for my sake, you will try to do it."

"Name it," said Claude, "and you may depend that if it lies within our power at all, we will do it."

"It is this," continued the consul. "Situated as I am in an official position at Calias, it would do me great injury to be mixed up in any serious fracas; therefore, in preference to force if you could accomplish your object in visiting France by finesse, you would greatly oblige me."

"I have but one wish," said Claude, "and that is to rescue Lucy Thornton, and if that can be done quietly, I have no desire to make any disturbance; but you do not at all wish me to fail in such an enterprise for lack of courage to enforce the object of my visit?"

"Certainly not. If nothing but force will do, we must have recourse to it. Don't forget that I am an Englishman."

"I never can forget that," said Duval, "nor that you have in the most noble and disinterested way assisted us in this affair. Without all that you have done for us in it, I doubt now if it would have been at all possible to bring it to a successful issue, and I do not doubt now we shall do so."

"Well, my good friend, we will do our best."

A low, chirping sound, like the call of some forest bird, came upon the night air at this moment, and the consul said:

"That is my man. He has something to say to us."

The consul then made a very similar noise, although it was not so well executed as that which his man made, and then through a thicket came the servant, moving with extreme caution.

"Well, how is the route to the chateau?"

"Guarded."

"Ah, indeed? Can they have procured information?"

"No, sir, I think not. There is one man only on the watch, with one old carbine, and he is nearly asleep. He keeps his post by the front of the chateau; but you may depend upon it that nothing is at all suspected regarding our visit."

“That is good news, then.”

“Yes,” said Claude, “but if he chooses to fire the carbine, he gives an alarm, although we, of course, could easily enough conquer him.”

“Oh, that is well thought of. Confound the carbine! And that, when one comes to think of it, is the sole reason why he is put upon guard. It is to give an alarm to the inhabitants of the chateau—not to fight.”

“I should feel inclined to make a dash at the chateau,” said Luke, “and carry it by storm, without any further trouble.”

“In which case, long before we could break into it,” said the consul, drily, “the young lady would be placed in some hiding place, of which there are always plenty in such old buildings, and all search for her would be in vain. Mr. Thornton, I say again, we must proceed with the utmost caution in the matter.”

“Of that I feel assured, and so does my friend here, upon reflection.”

“Oh, yes, I am contented,” said Luke.

The consul was rather put out at the idea of the man with the carbine being on guard; but Claude Duval, after a little reflection, said gently:

“I can't see much difficulty in the matter. If I can only be brought near to him, I will engage to silence him.”

“You would not kill him?”

“Oh, no—no. There is nothing that I so much dislike as the unnecessary effusion of blood; but I would manage to get his carbine from him, and we might then easily make a prisoner of him.”

“That will do—that will do. You say that he is a sleepy-looking fellow?”

“He was yawning,” said the scout.

“Come on, then. Come on. We can surely manage him.”

They now crept along with redoubled caution, and any one to have seen them in the dim night, stealthily creeping along through the trees, and bending low to escape the branches that grew sometimes within four feet or less from the ground, would have taken them for some party of Indians about to surprise an enemy.

If it had been daylight for them to see around them, no doubt Claude and his friends would have been very much entertained by the scenery they passed; for, in good truth, it was a most charming spot, owing all that it could to art, while the sweet wildness of nature was still about to make it beautifully diversified, and full of rich, straggling vegeta-

bles, such as seemed to have spontaneously sprung from the earth.

There is always something cheering and picturesque in a spot in which art has endeavored to do much, and then neglected entirely to nature. There will be found that strange mixture of plants indigenous to many soils, but yet making a home together, although changing, perhaps, largely their natural characteristics; and there will be seen, likewise, some of the flowers of nature blooming in far greater beauty, unchecked and untrammelled by the hand of man, than as if attended to by the connoisseur in such matters, and believed to be the peculiar result of human care.

Night as it was, there would come upon the senses of the advancing party the rich odor of some fair flower which they unknowingly trod down on their way; and ever and anon they could hear the trinkle of a little waterfall, which seemed to wind among the roots of the old trees in its passage to the stream in the valley.

Claude was now by the side of May, and, as he placed his arm around her waist in the darkness, with a perfect safety from being seen in that leafy shadow, he whispered to her—

“You are weary, May—is it not so?”

“Oh, no—no.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“Quite. How can I feel tired when I know that you are with me, Claude? Besides, is not this a just and noble expedition that you are going on? Ah, yes, Claude, it is thus that your chivalric spirit should find employment, and not in—

in—”

Claude was silent. He well knew how she might have finished what she had to say, and he well appreciated the delicacy of thought and feeling that left it unfinished; but May was afraid she had offended him, and she said, after a pause—

“I am ever saying too much or too little.”

“No, May, no—you cannot say too much, for I well know your motive, and fully and entirely appreciate it, and—

“Hush!” said the consul. “Do you hear that?”

They were immediately still, and then there came the same low chirping sound from among the trees, as though some forest bird had been disturbed in its slumbers, that had before betokened the approach of the consul's man. In another moment he was with the little party, and in a low voice he said—

“We are just upon the verge of this cluster of trees, and shall in a few more moments emerge upon the plateau in front of the chateau. The man with the carbine is sitting down half asleep.”

"Show me to him," said Claude Duval in the same low tone.

"This way, sir."

It was now so very dark that Claude Duval had to tread in the very footsteps of the guide for fear he should lose him; but in the course of half a minute they both quite suddenly emerged from amid the deep shadow of the trees, and although the obscurity of rather an unusually dark night was upon all things, yet the change from the little wood to an open spot was very great, and Duval shrunk back with an idea that any one looking that way must certainly see them.

"Where are we now?" he said.

"Speak low—all is safe. This is the piece of garden close to the chateau. The man is not far from us."

"Oh, I see him."

"Where?—where?"

"There, stretching out his hand. He is standing upon something."

"The saints be good to us! Monsieur, that is a statue of some heathen goddess, they say. There are many such in the garden, and you come upon them at odd times in the walks, and they make the blood freeze in your veins again. You should see them as I have seen them once or twice, upon a moonlight night, when the broad patches of silver light, and the dark abrupt shadows alter the whole aspect of the garden so that you would scarcely know it if you had been brought up in it. Then, indeed, you would start, and think that some of them meant to come off their pedestals and chase you till you went mad."

"Well—well, don't excite yourself, my friend; but tell me where the sentinel is."

"That is true. I have been puzzled once or twice in the old garden, and once I ran madly into the fish pond. But follow me, monsieur—this is the way, and don't speak till I say something to you, and then don't let it be louder than as if you were about to whisper something in the ear of a ladybird."

The man now bent almost quite down to the earth as he crept slowly on, and Claude Duval followed him, imitating his movements as closely as he could. The rest of the party lingered by the verge of the trees, keeping just within their shadows, in case, by accident, they should be visible to eyes that they by no means wished to see them.

After proceeding in this way for some time, they rounded a clump of bushes, and came to a kind of artificial embankment. Then the guide laid his hand gently on Claude's arm, and placing his mouth close to his ear, he whispered in the lowest of all low tones—

"Here he is."

"Where?" said Duval in the same tone.

"Just on the brow of the embankment. Look steadily, and you will see his back, and the top of his head. He is sitting down.

Claude did look steadily; and about a dozen paces from him he saw, or he thought he saw, the dim outline of a dusky looking figure. It was perfectly motionless.

"You are sure he has a carbine with him?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur; and if you can only get hold of it before he discharges it all may be well; but if he takes the alarm, and has time to pull the trigger, why, then, we may as well go back to Calais for all the good we shall do here."

Duval felt now the full importance of preventing the man from giving the alarm by firing his carbine; and he wished to use every possible means he could command to prevent him from doing so.

Whispering to the guide to stay where he was, Claude slowly advanced.

The greatest difficulty that Claude Duval had to contend with in his advance towards where the sentinel was placed, consisted in the fact that the ground was so saturated with moisture that it was as slippery upon the surface of the short, fine grass, as ice.

The moment he made an attempt to ascend the embankment he felt quite convinced that he could not keep his feet, so he wisely abandoned the idea; and dropping upon all fours, he crawled to the top of it.

The great object of Claude was to get a sight of the carbine; for if he could once find out the position in which the man held it, he could, with something like certainty, pounce upon it; but if he were in the dark upon that point, any sudden attack upon the man would, in all likelihood, only result in the immediate discharge of the fire-arm.

Time and patience conquers most difficulties; and so Duval waited until the man stooped to rest his head upon his hands, and then he saw about six inches of the top part of the barrel of the carbine; and he felt confident, by the position of it, that it was lying along his arm. In such a position a very slight touch indeed would, of course, be sufficient to discharge it; and, therefore, it behooved Claude to do what he had to do with great judgment.

"Ah, dear me," said the man. "Wet through already. Well, I suppose one can't be more wet through, that is one comfort; because after that, the extra rain most naturally begin to pour out of one's clothes. I wonder now what put it into the stupid head of Brown to place me out here on the watch after nothing and nobody? He's a coward, like all the

English. Of course all the English are cowards; and it's a shocking reflection for them to think how dreadfully we treat them, both by sea and land always."

"Confound your national vanity!" thought Claude.

"Yes," added the sentinel, "I suppose some day we shall have to go and take possession of England, and make it a province of France."

Duval stretched out his hand slowly, till it was within an inch of the barrel of the carbine, and then, feeling sure that the right hand of the sentinel was not upon the trigger, he made a dart at it, and dragged it over his shoulder in a moment, and, with his left hand, he gave him a blow on the head that sent him rolling down the little declivity.

"Take the carbine," whispered Claude—"take it."

"I have it," said the consul's man. "All's right."

The moment Claude was released from the carbine he rolled down the embankment after the sentinel, and caught him by the throat just as he was recovering from the shock he had sustained.

"Make the least resistance or noise," said Claude, "and I will stop your breath on the momont. Do you understand that?"

"Murder!"

"Silence!"

Claude tightened his grasp upon the fellow's throat, until he felt quite satisfied that he went within an ace of strangulation, and then he relaxed his hold a little, and said—

"Do you understand me now?"

"Yes," gasped the Frenchman. "Have mercy upon me."

"Ah, that is quite another thing," said Claude. "Now attend to what I say. Nobody wishes to take your worthless life, if they are not compelled to do so. I have a strong force here, but I do not wish to make any alarm; so now, if you please to act with discretion you may save your life; but if you attempt to escape or to give any alarm, you won't live another moment."

"I won't—oh, dear, indeed, I won't; only spare my wretched life."

"Come this way, then."

Claude still kept a hold of the fellow's collar, who followed him with whining supplications for his life, until he brought him to the verge of the little wood again, which was reached in a quarter of the time that it had taken Claude and the consul's servant to get to the spot where the sentinel had been sitting, because they had taken a round so as not to cross his line of possible vision, while, now, Duval boldly crossed the grass flat.

The consul's man arrived at the same moment with the carbine in his hand ; so that the whole of the little party was together again, having made, at all events, one prisoner.

The consul, who, from prudential reasons connected with his official position, kept in the background, was very much delighted at the success with which the supposed Mr. Thornton had captured the man with the carbine, and he whispered to Luke—

“ I dare say your friend will go through a long life without again meeting with such an adventure as this.”

“ Such an adventure as this ?” said Luke. “ Why, it is nothing to us.”

“ Indeed !”

“ No—that is to say, I am quite sure that in such a cause my friend, Mr. Thornton, thinks nothing of any danger or trouble that he may have to encounter.”

“ Oh, yes, I understand you.”

Luke had very nearly gone too far in his surprise at the idea of the consul thinking that Claude Duval was not used to adventures ; but he had his thoughts about him luckily in time, and got out of what might have been a scrape pretty well, considering.

Duval now spoke in a tone of calm decision to the man whom he had made prisoner.

“ Now, my friend, as I told you before, your life is in your own hands. If you are obedient to me, and truly answer the questions that I put to you, you will be safe enough, but if you choose to be obstinate and contumacious, I will blow your brains out rather than have any further trouble with you.”

“ Oh, dear—oh—oh !”

“ Don't be making that noise.”

“ Well, but good Mr. Brigand, I assure you I have no money. I am only a poor fellow at the best of times ; and just now, good Sir Robber, I am particularly poor, give me leave to assure you.”

“ You are mistaken in your ideas concerning us. We do not come here to rob, but to rescue the young lady who is with Major Brown now at the villa.”

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