

SHAKESPEARE'S
CHRISTMAS

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH

“Q”

ornia
al

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO

www.libtool.com.cn

754

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/shakespeareschri00quiliala>

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS
AND OTHER STORIES

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn



WHIRLED DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE ROOM

Page 47

SHAKESPEARE'S
CHRISTMAS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

“Q”

(A. T. QUILLER-COUCH)

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

91 AND 93 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

1905

www.libtool.com.cn

Copyright, 1904

By A. T. QUILLER-COUCH

All rights reserved

Copyright, 1905

By LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.

All rights reserved

CONTENTS

	PAGE
SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS	I
YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!	65
CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES	115
FRENCHMAN'S CREEK	157
THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN	207
RAIN OF DOLLARS	243
THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR	291

www.libtool.com.cn

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

WHIRLED DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE ROOM	<i>Frontispiece</i>
LANDLORD OKE GAVE A FLOURISH WITH HIS CHALK AND WROTE	TO FACE PAGE 80
THE LITTLE OFFICER HAD TURNED WHITE AS A SHEET	113
'TIS TOO LATE, MY MASTER! TRECARREL CALLED CHEERFULLY DOWN THE TRAP	148
IN THE NAME OF H. M. KING GEORGE III, I CHARGE YOU TO COME ALONG QUIET . .	196
GET DOWN FROM YOUR HORSE, SIR	254
UNBAR THE DOOR! SHE COMMANDED	286
SHE CAUGHT UP HER GUITAR AND CHIMED IN . .	323

www.libtool.com.cn

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“And moreover, at this Fair there is at all times to be seen Jugglings, Cheats, Games, Plays, Fools, Apes, Knaves, and Rogues, and that of every kind. . . . Now, as I said, the way to the Celestial City lies just through this town, where this lusty Fair is kept; and he that will go to the City, and yet not go through this Town, must needs go out of the World.” — BUNYAN.

I

AT the theatre in Shoreditch, on Christmas Eve, 1598, the Lord Chamberlain's servants presented a new comedy. Never had the Burbages played to such a house. It cheered every speech—good, bad, or indifferent. To be sure, some of the *dramatis personæ*—Prince Hal and Falstaff, Bardolph and Mistress Quickly—were old friends; but this alone would not account for such a welcome. A cutpurse in the twopenny gallery who had been paid to lead the applause gave up toiling in the wake of it, and leaned back with a puzzled grin.

“Bravo, master!” said he to his left-hand neighbour, a burly, red-faced countryman well past

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

middle age, whose laughter kept the bench rocking. "But have a care, lest they mistake you for the author!"

"The author? Ho-ho!" — but here he broke off to leap to his feet and lead another round of applause. "The author?" he repeated, dropping back and glancing an eye sidelong from under his handkerchief while he mopped his brow. "You shoot better than you know, my friend: the bolt grazes. But a miss, they say, is as good as a mile."

The cutpurse kept his furtive grin, but was evidently mystified. A while before it had been the countryman who showed signs of bewilderment. Until the drawing of the curtains he had fidgeted nervously, then, as now, mopping his forehead in despite of the raw December air. The first shouts of applause had seemed to astonish as well as delight him. When, for example, a player stepped forward and flung an arm impressively towards heaven while he recited—

*When we mean to build,
We first survey the plot, then draw the model—*

and so paused with a smile, his voice drowned in thunder from every side of the house, our friend had rubbed his eyes and gazed around in amiable protest, as who should say, "Come,

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

come, . . . but let us discriminate!" By-and-by, however, as the indifferent applause grew warmer, he warmed with it. At the entrance of Falstaff he let out a www.libtool.com.cn bellowing laugh worthy of Olympian Jove, and from that moment led the house. The fops on the sixpenny stools began to mimic, the pit and lower gallery to crane necks for a sight of their fogleman; a few serious playgoers called to have him pitched out; but the mass of the audience backed him with shouts of encouragement. Some wag hailed him as "Burbage's Landlord," and apparently there was meaning, if not merit, in the jest. Without understanding it he played up to it royally, leaning forward for each tally-ho! and afterwards waving his hat as a huntsman laying on his hounds.

The pace of the performance (it had begun at one o'clock) dragged sensibly with all this, and midway in Act IV., as the edge of a grey river-fog overlapped and settled gradually upon the well of the unroofed theatre, voices began to cough and call for lanterns. Two lackeys ran with a dozen. Some they hung from the balcony at the back, others they disposed along both sides of the stage, in front of the sixpenny stools, the audience all the while chaffing them by their Christian names and affectionately pelt-

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

ing them with nuts. Still the fog gathered, until the lantern-rays criss-crossed the stage in separate shafts, and among them the actors moved through Act V. in a luminous haze, their figures looming large, their voices muffled and incredibly remote.

An idle apprentice, seated on the right of the cutpurse, began for a game to stop and unstop his ears. This gave the cutpurse an opportunity to search his pockets. *Cantat vacuus*: the apprentice felt him at it and went on with his game. Whenever he stopped his ears the steaming breath of the players reminded him of the painted figures he had seen carried in my Lord Mayor's Show, with labels issuing from their mouths.

He had stopped his ears during the scene of King Henry's reconciliation with Chief Justice Gascoigne, and unstopped them eagerly again when his old friends reappeared—Falstaff and Bardolph and Pistol, all agog and hurrying, hot-foot, boot-and-saddle, to salute the rising sun of favour. "Welcome these pleasant days!" He stamped and clapped, following his neighbours' lead, and also because his feet and hands were cold.

Eh? What was the matter? Surely the fog had taken hold of the rogues! What was happening to Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet?

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

Poor souls, they were but children: they had meant no harm. For certain this plaguy fog was infecting the play; and yet, for all the fog, the play was a play no longer, but of a sudden had become savagely real. Why was this man turning on his puppets and rending them? The worst was, they bled—not sawdust, but real blood.

The apprentice cracked a nut and peeled it meditatively, with a glance along the bench. The countryman still fugged; the cutpurse cackled, with lips drawn back like a wolf's, showing his yellow teeth.

“Hist, thou silly knave!” said the apprentice. “Canst not see 'tis a tragedy?”

The rascal peered at him for a moment, burst out laughing, and nudged the countryman.

“Hi, master! Breeds your common at home any such goose as this, that cannot tell tickling from roasting?”

The apprentice cracked another nut. “Give it time,” he answered. “I said a tragedy. Yours, if you will, my friend; *his* too, may be”—with a long and curious stare at the countryman.

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

II

“My tongue is weary: when my legs are too, I will bid you good-night: and so kneel down before you; but indeed to pray for the Queen.”

Play, epilogue, dance, all were over; the curtains drawn, the lanterns hidden behind them. The cutpurse had slipped away, and the countryman and apprentice found themselves side by side waiting while the gallery dissolved its crowd into the fog.

“A brisk fellow,” remarked the one, nodding at the vacant seat as he stowed away his handkerchief. “But why should he guess me a rustic?”

“The fellow has no discernment,” the apprentice answered dryly. “He even took the play for a merry one.”

The countryman peered forward into the young-old face silhouetted against the glow which, cast upward and over the curtain-rod across the stage, but faintly reached the gallery.

“I love wit, Sir, wherever I meet it. For a pint of sack you shall prove me this play a sad one, and choose your tavern!”

“I thank you, but had liefer begin and discuss the epilogue: and the epilogue is ‘Who’s to pay?’”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“A gentleman of Warwickshire, Master What-d’ye-lack—will that content you? A gentleman of Warwickshire, with a coat-of-arms, or the College’s promise—which, I take it, amounts to the same thing.” The countryman puffed his cheeks.

“So-so?” The apprentice chuckled.

*“When we mean to build
We first survey the plot, then search our pockets.”*

How goes it? Either so, or to that effect.”

“The devil!” The countryman, who had been fumbling in his breek pockets, drew forth two hands blankly, spreading empty fingers.

“That was your neighbour, Sir: a brisk fellow, as you were clever enough to detect, albeit unserviceably late. I wish we had made acquaintance sooner: ’twould have given me liberty to warn you.”

“It had been a Christian’s merest duty.”

“La, la, master! In London the sneaking of a purse is no such rarity that a poor ’prentice pays twopence to gape at it. I paid to see the play, Sir, and fought hard for my seat. Before my master gave over beating me, in fear of my inches and his wife (who has a liking for me), he taught me to husband my time. For your purse, the back of my head had eyes enough to tell me

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

what befalls when a lean dog finds himself alongside a bone.”

He seated himself on the bench, unstrapped a shoe, slipped two fingers beneath his stocking, and drew forth a silver piece. “If a gentleman of Warwickshire will be beholden to a poor apprentice of Cheapside?”

“Put it up, boy; put it up! I need not your money, good lad: but I like the spirit of that offer, and to meet it will enlarge my promise. A pint of sack, did I say? You shall sup with me to-night, and of the best, or I am a Dutchman. We will go see the town together, the roaring, gallant town. I will make you free of great company: you shall hear the talk of gods! Lord, how a man rusts in the country!—for, I will confess it to you, lad, the rogue hit the mark: the country is my home.”

“I cannot think how he guessed it.”

“Nor I. And yet he was wrong, too: for that cannot be called home where a man is never at his ease. I had passed your years, lad, before ever I saw London; and ever since, when my boots have been deepest in Midland clay, I have heard her bells summon me, clear as ever they called to Whittington, ‘London, thou art of townes *a per se.*’ Nay, almost on that first pil-

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

grimage I came to her as a son. *Urbem quam dicunt Romam*—I was no such clodpate as that rustic of Virgil's. I came expecting all things, and of none did she disappoint me. Give me the capital before all! 'Tis only there a man measures himself with men."

"And cutpurses?" the apprentice interjected.

"Good and bad, rough and smooth," the countryman assented, with a large and catholic smile. "'Tis no question of degrees, my friend, but of kind. I begin to think that, dwelling in London, you have not made her acquaintance. But you shall. As a father, lad,—for I like you,—I will open your eyes and teach your inheritance. What say you to the Bankside, for example?"

"The Bankside—hem!—and as a father!" scoffed the youth, but his eyes glistened. He was wise beyond his opportunities, and knew all about the Bankside, albeit he had never walked through that quarter but in daylight, wondering at the histories behind its house-fronts.

"As a father, I said; and evil be to him who evil thinks."

"I can tell you of one who will think evil; and that is my master. I can tell you of another; and that will be the sheriff, when I am haled before him."

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“You said just now—or my hearing played a trick—that your mistress had a liking for you.”

“And *you* said, ‘Evil be to him that evil thinks.’ She hath a double chin, and owns to fifty-five.”

“What, chins!”

“Years, years, master. Like a grandmother she dotes on me and looks after my morals. Nathless when you talk of Bankside——” The apprentice hesitated: in the dusk his shrewd young eyes glistened. “Say that I risk it?” He hesitated again.

“Lads were not so cautious in my young days. I pay the shot, I tell you—a gentleman of Warwickshire and known to the College of Arms.”

“It standeth on Paul’s Wharf and handy for the ferry to Bankside: but the College closes early on Christmas Eve, and the Heralds be all at holiday. An you think of pawning your coat-of-arms with them to raise the wind, never say that I let you take that long way round without warning.”

“Leave the cost to me, once more!” The countryman gazed down into the well of the theatre as if seeking an acquaintance among the figures below. “But what are they doing? What a plague means this hammering? A man cannot hear himself speak for it.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“’Tis the play.”

“The play?”

“The true play—the play you applauded: and writ by the same Will Shakespeare, they tell me—some share of it at least. Cometh he not, by the way, from your part of the world?”

The countryman’s eyes glistened in their turn: almost in the dusk they appeared to shine with tears.

“Ay, I knew him, down in Warwickshire: a good lad he was, though his mother wept over him for a wild one. Hast ever seen a hen when her duckling takes to water? So it is with woman when, haply, she has hatched out genius.”

The apprentice slapped his leg. “I could have sworn it!”

“Hey?”

“Nay, question me not, master, for I cannot bring it to words. You tell me that you knew him: and I—on the instant I clapped eyes on you it seemed that somehow you were part of his world and somehow had belonged to him. Nearer I cannot get, unless you tell me more.”

“I knew him: to be sure, down in Warwickshire: but he has gone somedel beyond my ken, living in London, you see.”

“He goes beyond any man’s kenning: he that

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

has taught us to ken the world with new eyes. I tell you, master,"—the apprentice stretched out a hand,—“I go seeking him like one seeking a father who has begotten him into a new world, seeking him with eyes derived from him. Tell me——”

But the countryman was leaning over the gallery-rail and scanning the pit again. He seemed a trifle bored by a conversation if not of less, then certainly of other, wit than he had bargained for. Somebody had drawn the curtains back from the stage, where the two lackeys who had decked the balcony with lanterns were busy now with crowbars, levering its wooden supports from their sockets.

“Sure,” said he, musing, “they don't lift and pack away the stage every night, do they? Or is this some new law to harass players?” He brought his attention back to the apprentice with an effort. “If you feel that way towards him, lad,” he answered, “why not accost him? He walks London streets; and he has, if I remember, a courteous, easy manner.”

“If the man and his secret were one! But they are not, and there lies the fear—that by finding one I shall miss the other and recover it never. I cannot dare either risk: I want them both.

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

You saw, this afternoon, how, when the secret came within grasp, the man slipped away; how, having taught us to know Falstaff as a foot its old shoe, he left us wondering on a sudden why we laughed! And yet 'twas not sudden, but bred in the play from the beginning; no, nor cruel, but merely right: only he had persuaded us to forget it."

The countryman put up a hand to hide a yawn: and the yawn ended in a slow chuckle.

"Eh? that rogue Falstaff was served out handsomely: though, to tell the truth, I paid no great heed to the last scene, my midriff being sore with laughing."

The apprentice sighed.

"But what is happening below?" the other went on impatiently. "Are they taking the whole theatre to pieces?"

"That is part of the play."

"A whole regiment of workmen!"

"And no stage-army, neither. Yet they come into the play—not the play you saw without understanding, but the play you understood without seeing. They call it *The Phœnix*. Be seated, master, while I unfold the plot: this hammering deafens me. The Burbages, you must know——"

"I knew old James, the father. He brought

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

me down a company of players to our town the year I was High Bailiff; the first that ever played in our Guildhall. Though a countryman, I have loved the arts—even to the length of losing much money by them. A boon fellow, old James! and yet dignified as any alderman. He died—let me see—was it two year ago? The news kept me sad for a week.”

“A good player, too,”—the apprentice nodded, —“though not a patch upon his son Richard. Cuthbert will serve, in ripe sententious parts that need gravity and a good memory for the lines. But Richard bears the bell of the Burbages. Well, Sir, old James being dead, and suddenly, and (as you say) these two years come February, his sons must go suing to the ground landlord, the theatre being leased upon their dad’s life. You follow me?”

The countryman nodded in his turn.

“Very well. The landlord, being a skinflint, was willing to renew the lease, but must raise the rent. If they refuse to pay it, the playhouse fell to him. You may fancy how the Burbages called gods and men to witness. Being acquainted with players, you must know how little they enjoy affliction until the whole town shares it. Never so rang Jerusalem with all the woes of Jeremy as

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

did City and suburb,—from north beyond Bishopsgate to south along the river, with the cursings of this landlord, who—to cap the humour of it—is a precisian, and never goes near a playhouse. Nevertheless, he patched up a truce for two years ending to-night, raising the rent a little, but not to the stretch of his demands. To-morrow—or, rather, the day after, since to-morrow is Christmas—the word is pay or quit. But in yielding this he yielded our friends the counterstroke. They have bought a plot across the water, in the Clink Liberty: and to-morrow, should he pass this way to church, no theatre will be here for him to smack his Puritan lips over. But for this hammering and the deep slush outside you might even now hear the rumbling of wagons; for wagons there be, a dozen of them, ready to cart the Muses over the bridge before midnight. 'Tis the proper vehicle of Thespis. See those dozen stout rascals lifting the proscenium——”

The countryman smote his great hands together, flung back his head, and let his lungs open in shout after shout of laughter.

“But, master——”

“Oh—oh—oh! Hold my sides, lad, or I start a rib. . . . Nay, if you keep st-staring at me with that s-sol-ol-ol-ol-ol-ol-ol face. Don't—oh, *don't!*”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

"Now I know," murmured the apprentice, "what kind of jest goes down in the country: and, by'r Lady, it goes deep!"

But an instant later the man had heaved himself upon his feet; his eyes expanded from their creases into great O's; his whole body towered and distended itself in gigantic indignation. "The villain! The nipcheese curmudgeonly villain! And we tarry here, talking, while such things are done in England! A Nabal, I say. Give me a hammer!" He heaved up an enormous thigh and bestrode the gallery-rail.

"Have a care, master: the rail——"

"A hammer! Below there. A hammer!" He leaned over, bellowing. The gang of workmen lifting the proscenium stared up open-mouthed into the foggy gloom—a ring of ghostly faces upturned in a luminous haze.

Already the man's legs dangled over the void. Twelve, fifteen feet perhaps, beneath him projected a lower gallery, empty but for three tiers of disordered benches. Plumb as a gannet he dropped, and an eloquent crash of timber reported his arrival below. The apprentice, craning over, saw him regain his feet, scramble over the second rail, and vanish. Followed an instant's silence, a dull thud, a cry from the workmen in the area.

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

The apprentice ran for the gallery stairs and leapt down them, three steps at a time.

It took him, maybe, forty seconds to reach the area. There already, stripped to the shirt, in a whirl of dust and voices, stood his friend waving a hammer and shouting down the loudest. The man was possessed, transformed, a Boanerges; his hammer, a hammer of Thor! He had caught it from the hand of a douce, sober-looking man in a plum-coloured doublet, who stood watching but taking no active share in the work.

“By your leave, Sir!”

“With or without my leave, good Sir, since you are determined to have it,” said the quiet man, surrendering the hammer.

The countryman snatched and thrust it between his knees while he stripped. Then, having spat on both hands, he grasped the hammer and tried its poise. “’Tis odd, now,” said he, as if upon an afterthought, staring down on the quiet man, “but methinks I know your voice?”

“Marry and there’s justice in that,” the quiet man answered; “for ’tis the ghost of one you drowned erewhile.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

III

“Tom! What, Tom! Where be the others?
I tell thee, Tom, there have been doings . . .”

“Is that Dick Burbage?” A frail, thin windlestraw of a man came coughing across the foggy courtyard with a stable-lantern, holding it high. Its rays wavered on his own face, which was young but extraordinarily haggard, and on the piles of timber between and over which he picked his way—timbers heaped pell-mell in the slush of the yard or stacked against the boundary wall, some daubed with paint, others gilded wholly or in part, and twinkling as the lantern swung. “Dick Burbage already? Has it miscarried, then?”

“Miscarried? What in the world was there to miscarry? I tell thee, Tom—but where be the others?”

The frail man jerked a thumb at the darkness behind his shoulder. “Hark to them, back yonder, stacking the beams! Where should they be? and what doing but at work like galley-slaves, by the pace you have kept us going? Look around. I tell you from the first ’twas busy-all to get the yard clear between the wagons’ coming, and at the fifth load we gave it up. My shirt

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

clings like a dish-clout; a chill on this will be the death o' me. What a plague! How many scoundrels did you hire, that they take a house to pieces and cart it across Thames faster than we can unload it?"

"That's the kernel of the story, lad. I hired the two-score rogues agreed on, neither more nor less: but one descended out of heaven and raised the number to twelve-score. Ten-score extra, as I am a sinner; and yet but one man, for I counted him. His name, he told me, was Legion."

"Dick," said the other sadly, "when a sober man gives way to drinking—I don't blame you: and your pocket will be the loser more than all the rest if you've boggled to-night's work; but poor Cuthbert will take it to heart."

"There was a man, I tell you——"

"Tut, tut, pull yourself together and run back across bridge. Or let me go: take my arm now, before the others see you. You shall tell me on the way what's wrong at Shoreditch."

"There is naught wrong with Shoreditch, forby that it has lost a theatre: and I am not drunk, Tom Nashe—no, not by one-tenth as drunk as I deserve to be, seeing that the house is down, every stick of it, and the bells scarce yet tolling midnight. 'Twas all this man, I tell you!"

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Down? The Theatre down? Oh, go back, Dick Burbage!”

“Level with the ground, I tell you—his site a habitation for the satyr. *Cecidit, cecidit Babylon illa magna!* and the last remains of it, more by token, following close on my heels in six wagons. Hist, then, my Thomas, my Didymus, my doubting one!—Canst not hear the rumble of their wheels? and—and—oh, good Lord!” Burbage caught his friend by the arm and leaned against him heavily. “*He’s* there, and following!”

The wagons came rolling over the cobbles of the Clink along the roadway outside the high boundary-wall of the yard: and as they came, clear above their rumble and the slow clatter of hoofs a voice like a trumpet declaimed into the night—

*“Above all ryvers thy Ryver hath renowne,
Whose beryall streamys, pleasaunt and preclare,
Under thy lusty wallys renneth downe,
Where many a swan doth swymme with wyngis fair,
Where many a barge doth sail and row with are —*

We had done better—a murrain on their cobbles! —we had done better, lad, to step around by Paul’s Wharf and take boat. . . . This jolting ill agrees with a man of my weight. . . .

Where many a barge doth sail aund row with are —

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

Gr-r-r! Did I not warn thee beware, master wagoner, of the kerbstones at the corners? We had done better by water, what though it be dark. . . . Lights of Bankside on the water. . . . no such sight in Europe, they tell me. . . . My Lord of Surrey took boat one night from Westminster and fired into their windows with a stone-bow, breaking much glass . . . drove all the long-shore queans screaming into the streets in their night-rails. . . . He went to the Fleet for it . . . a Privy Council matter. . . . I forgive the lad, for my part: for only think of it—all those windows aflame on the river, and no such river in Europe!—

Where many a barge doth sail and row with are;

Where many a ship doth rest with top-royall.

O towne of townes! patrone and not compare,

London, thou art the flow r of Cities all!

Who-ooop!”

“In the name of——” stammered Nashe, as he listened, Burbage all the while clutching his arm.

“He dropped from the top gallery, I tell you—clean into the pit from the top gallery—and he weighs eighteen stone if an ounce. ‘Your servant, Sir, and of all the Muses,’ he says, picking himself up; and with that takes the hammer from my hand and plays Pyrrhus in Troy—Pyrrhus with all the ravening Danai behind him: for those

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

hired scoundrels of mine took fire, and started ripping out the bowels of the poor old theatre as though it had been the Fleet and lodged all their cronies within! It went down before my eyes like a sand-castle before the tide. Within three hours they had wiped the earth of it. The Lord be praised that Philip Gosson had ne'er such an arm, nor could command such! Oh, but he's a portent! Troy's horse and Bankes's bay gelding together are a fool to him: he would harness them as Samson did the little foxes, and fire brushwood under their tails. . . ."

"Of a certainty you are drunk, Dick."

"Drunk? I?" Burbage gripped the other's thin arm hysterically. "If you want to see a man drunk come to the gate. Nay, then, stay where you are: for there's no escaping him."

Nor was there. Between them and the waggoners' lanterns at the gate a huge shadow thrust itself, the owner of it rolling like a ship in a sea-way, while he yet recited—

"Strong be thy wallis that about thee standis,

(meaning the Clink, my son),

Wise be the people that within thee dwellis,

(which you may take for the inhabitants thereof),

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

*Fresh is thy ryver with his lusty strandis,
Blith be thy chirches, wele sowning be thy bellis."*

"Well sounding is my belly, master, any way,"
put in a high, thin voice; "and it calls on a gentle-
man of Warwickshire to redeem his promise."

"He shall, he shall, lad—in the fullness of time:
'but before dining ring at the bell,' says the
proverb. Grope, lad, feel along the gate-posts if
this yard, this courtlage, this base-court, hath any
such thing as bell or knocker.

*And when they came to mery Carleile
All in the mornyng tyde-a,
They found the gates shut them until
About on every syde-a.*

*Then Adam Bell bete on the gates
With strokes great and stronge-a*

Step warely, lad. Plague of this forest! Have
we brought timber to Sherwood?

*With strokes great and stronge-a
The porter marveiled who was thereat,
And to the gates he thronge-a.*

*They called the porter to counsell,
And wrange his necke in two-a,
And caste him in a depe dungeon,
And took bys keys hym fro-a.*

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

Within! You rascal, there, with the lantern! . . . Eh? but these be two gentlemen, it appears? I cry your mercy, Sirs."

"For calling us rascals?" Nashe stepped forward. "'T hath been done to me before now, in print, upon as good evidence; and to my friend here by Act of Parliament."

"But seeing you with a common stable-lantern ——"

"Yet Diogenes was a gentleman. Put it that, like him, I am searching for an honest man."

"Then we are well met. I' faith we are very well met," responded the countryman, recognising Burbage's grave face and plum-coloured doublet.

"Or, as one might better say, well overtaken," said Burbage.

"Marry, and with a suit. I have some acquaintance, Sir, with members of your honourable calling, as in detail and at large I could prove to you. Either I have made poor use of it or I guess aright, as I guess with confidence, that after the triumph will come the speech-making, and the supper's already bespoken."

"At Nance Witwold's, by the corner of Paris Garden, Sir, where you shall be welcome."

"I thank you, Sir. But my suit is rather for

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

this young friend of mine, to whom I have pledged my word."

"He shall be welcome, too."

"He tells me, Sir, that you are Richard Burbage. I knew your father well, Sir—an honest Warwickshire man: he condescended to my roof and tasted my poor hospitality many a time; and be-like you, too, Sir, being then a child, may have done the same: for I talk of prosperous days long since past—nay, so long since that 'twould be a wonder indeed had you remembered me. The more pleasure it gives me, Sir, to find James Burbage's sappy virtues flourishing in the young wood, and by the branch be reminded of the noble stock."

"The happier am I, Sir, to have given you welcome or ever I heard your claim."

"Faith!" said the apprentice to himself, "compliments begin to fly when gentlefolks meet." But he had not bargained to sup in this high company, and the prospect thrilled him with delicious terror. He glanced nervously across the yard, where some one was approaching with another lantern.

"My claim?" the countryman answered Burbage. "You have heard but a part of it as yet. Nay, you have heard none of it, since I use not past hospitalities with old friends to claim a return

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

from their children. My claim, Sir, is a livelier one——”

“Tom Nashe! Tom Nashe!” called a voice, clear and strong and masculine, from the darkness behind the advancing lantern.

“Anon, anon, Sir,” quoted Nashe, swinging his own lantern about and mimicking.

“Don't tell me there be yet more wagons arrived?” asked the voice.

“Six, lad—six, as I hope for mercy: and outside the gate at this moment.”

“There they must tarry, then, till our fellows take breath to unload 'em. But—six? How is it managed, think you? Has Dick Burbage called out the train-bands to help him? Why, hullo, Dick! What means——” The newcomer's eyes, round with wonder as they rested a moment on Burbage, grew rounder yet as they travelled past him to the countryman. “Father?” he stammered, incredulous.

“Good evening, Will! Give ye good evening, my son! Set down that lantern and embrace me, like a good boy: a good boy, albeit a man of fame. Didst not see me, then, in the theatre this afternoon? Yet was I to the fore there, methinks, and proud to be called John Shakespeare.”

“Nay, I was not there; having other fish to fry.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Shouldst have heard the applause, lad; it warmed your old father’s heart. Yet ’twas no more than the play deserved. A very neat, pretty drollery—upon my faith, no man’s son could have written a neater!”

“But what hath fetched you to London?”

“Business, business: a touch, too, maybe, of the old homesickness: but business first. Dick Quiney—— But pass me the lantern, my son, that I may take a look at thee. Ay, thou hast sobered, thou hast solidified: thy beard hath ta’en the right citizen’s cut—’twould ha’ been a cordial to thy poor mother to see thee wear so staid a beard. Rest her soul! There’s nothing like property for filling out a man’s frame, firming his eye, his frame, bearing, footstep. Talking of property, I have been none so idle a steward for thee. New Place I have made habitable—the house at least; patched up the roof, taken down and rebuilt the west chimney that was over-leaning the road, repaired the launders, enlarged the parlour-window, run out the kitchen passage to a new back-entrance. The garden I cropped with peas this summer, and have set lettuce and winter-kale between the young apple-trees, whereof the whole are doing well, and the mulberry likewise I look for to thrive. Well, as I was saying, Dick Quiney——”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“—Is in trouble again, you need not tell.”

“None so bad but it could be mended by the thirty pounds whereof I wrote. Mytton will be security with him, now that Bushell draws back. He offers better than those few acres at Shottery you dealt upon in January.”

“Land is land.”

“And ale is ale: you may take up a mortgage on the brewhouse. Hast ever heard, Mr. Burbage”—John Shakespeare swung about—“of a proverb we have down in our Warwickshire? It goes—

*Who buys land buys stones,
Who buys meat buys bones,
Who buys eggs buys shells,
But who buys ale buys nothing else.*

And that sets me in mind, Will, that these friends of yours have bidden me to supper: and their throats will be dry an we keep 'em gaping at our country discourse. Here come I with Thespis, riding on a wagon: but where tarries the vintage feast? Where be the spigots? Where be the roasted geese, capons, sucking-pigs? Where the hogs-puddings, the trifles, the custards, the frumenties? Where the minstrels? Where the dancing girls? I have in these three hours swallowed as many pecks of dust. I am for the bucket before the

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

manger and for good talk after both—high, brave translunary talk with wine in the veins of it—Hippocras with hippocrene: with music too—some little kickshaw whatnots of the theorbo or viol da gamba pleasantly thrown in for interludes. 'Tis a fog-pated land I come from, with a pestilent rheumy drip from the trees and the country scarce recovered from last year's dearth——”

“Dick Quiney should have made the better prices for that dearth,” put in his son, knitting his great brow thoughtfully. “With wheat at fifty shillings, and oats——”

“The malt, lad, the malt! His brewhouse swallowed malt at twenty-eight or nine which a short two years before had cost him twelve-and-threepence the quarter. A year of dearth, I say. It took poor Dick at unawares. But give him time: he will pull round. Sure, we be slow in the country, but you have some in this town that will beat us. How many years, lad, have I been battering the doors of Heralds' College for that grant of arms, promised ere my beard was grey and yours fully grown?”

“Malt at twenty-eight, you say?”

“Last year, lad—a year of dearth. Call it a good twenty in these bettering times, and wheat anything under forty-five shillings.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Well, we will talk it over.” His son seemed to come out of a brown study. “We will talk it over,” he repeated briskly, and added, “How? The chimney overleaning the road? ’Twas a stout enough chimney, as I remember, and might have lasted another twenty years. Where did you draw the bricks?”

Nashe glanced at his friend with a puzzled smile. Burbage—better used, no doubt, to the businesslike ways of authors—betrayed no surprise. The apprentice stared, scarcely believing his ears. Was this the talk of Shakespeare? Nay, rather the talk of Justice Shallow himself—“How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair?” “How a score of ewes now?”

A heavy tread approached from the gateway.

“Are we to bide here all night, and on Christmas morn, too?” a gruff voice demanded. “Unpack, and pay us our wage, or we tip the whole load of it into Thames.” Here the wagoner’s shin encountered in the darkness with a plank, and he cursed violently.

“Go you back to your horses, my friend,” answered Burbage. “The unloading shall begin anon. As for your wage, your master will tell you I settled it at the time I bargained for his wagons—ay, and paid. I hold his receipt.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“For tenpence a man — mowers’ wages,” growled the wagoner.

“I asked him his price and he fixed it. ’Tis the current rate, I understand, and a trifle over.”

“Depends on the job. I’ve been talkin’ with my mates, and we don’t like it. We’re decent labouring men, and shifting a lot of play-actors’ baggage don’t come in our day’s work. I’d as lief wash dirty linen for my part. Therefore,” the fellow wound up lucidly, “you’ll make it twelvecpence a head, master. We don’t take a groat less.”

“I see,” said Burbage blandly: “twopence for salving your conscience, hey? And so, being a decent man, you don’t stomach players?”

“No, nor the Bankside at this hour o’ night. I live clean, I tell you.”

“’Tis a godless neighbourhood and a violent.” Burbage drew a silver whistle from his doublet and eyed it. “Listen a moment, master wagoner, and tell me what you hear.”

“I hear music o’ sorts. No Christmas carols, I warrant.”

“Aught else?”

“Ay: a sound like a noise of dogs baying over yonder.”

“Right again: it comes from the kennels by the Bear-Pit. Have you a wish, my friend, to make

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

nearer acquaintance with these dogs? No? With the bears, then? Say the word, and inside of a minute I can whistle up your two-pennyworth."

The wagoner with a dropping jaw stared from one to another of the ring of faces in the lantern-light. They were quiet, determined. Only the apprentice stood with ears pricked, as it were, and shivered at the distant baying.

"No offence, Sir; I meant no offence, you'll understand," the wagoner stammered.

"Nay, call your mates, man!" spoke up William Shakespeare, sudden and sharp, and with a scornful ring in his voice which caused our apprentice to jump. "Call them in and let us hear you expound Master Burbage's proposal. I am curious to see how they treat you—having an opinion of my own on crowds and their leaders."

But the wagoner had swung about surlily on his heel.

"I'll not risk disputing it," he growled. "'Tis your own dung-hill, and I must e'en take your word that 'tis worse than e'er a man thought. But one thing I'll not take back. You're a muck of play-actors, and a man that touches ye should charge for his washing. Gr-r!" he spat—"ye're worse than Patty Ward's sow, and *she* was no lavender!"

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

IV

The Bankside was demure. But for the distant baying of dogs which kept him shivering, our apprentice had been disappointed in the wickedness of it.

He had looked to meet with roisterers, to pass amid a riot of taverns, to happen, belike, upon a street scuffle, to see swords drawn or perchance to come upon a body stretched across the roadway and hear the murderers' footsteps in the darkness, running. These were the pictures his imagination had drawn and shuddered at: for he was a youth of small courage.

But the Bankside was demure; demure as Chepe. The waterside lanes leading to Mistress Witwold's at the corner of Paris Gardens differed only from Chepe in this—that though the hour was past midnight, every other door stood open or at least ajar, showing a light through the fog. Through some of these doorways came the buzz and murmur of voices, the tinkling of stringed instrument. Others seemed to await their guests. But the lanes themselves were deserted.

From the overhanging upper storeys lights showed here and there through the chinks of

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

shutters or curtains. Once or twice in the shadows beneath, our apprentice saw, or thought he saw, darker shadows draw back and disappear: and gradually a feeling grew upon him that all these shadows, all these lidded upper windows, were watching, following him with curious eyes. Again, though the open doorways were bright as for a fête, a something seemed to subdue the voices within—a constraint, perhaps an expectancy—as though the inmates whispered together in the pauses of their talk and between the soft thrumming of strings. He remarked, too, that his companions had fallen silent.

Mother Witwold's door, when they reached it, stood open like the rest. Her house overhung a corner where from the main street a short alley ran down to Paris Garden stairs. Nashe, who had been leading along the narrow pavement, halted outside the threshold to extinguish his lantern; and at the same moment jerked his face upward. Aloft, in one of the houses across the way, a lattice had flown open with a crash of glass.

“Jesu! help!”

The cry ended in a strangling sob. The hands that had thrust the lattice open projected over the sill. By the faint foggy light of Mother Wit-

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

wold's doorway our apprentice saw them outstretched for a moment; saw them disappear, the wrists still rigid, as some one drew them back into the room. But what sent the horror crawling through the roots of his hair was the shape of these hands.

"You there!" called Nashe, snatching the second lantern from Burbage's hand and holding it aloft towards the dim house-front. "What's wrong within?"

A woman's hand came around the curtain and felt for the lattice stealthily, to close it. There was no other answer.

"What's wrong there?" demanded Nashe again.

"Go your ways!" The voice was a woman's, hoarse and angry, yet frightened withal. The curtain still hid her. "Haven't I trouble enough with these tetchy dwarfs, but you must add to it by waking the streets?"

"Dwarfs?" Nashe swung the lantern so that its rays fell on the house-door below: a closed door and stout, studded with iron nails. "Dwarfs?" he repeated.

"Let her be," said Burbage, taking his arm. "I know the woman. She keeps a brace of misbegotten monsters she picked up at Wapping off a ship's captain. He brought 'em home from

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

the Isle of Serendib, or Cathay, or some such outlandish coast, or so she swears his word was."

"Swears, doth she? Didst hear the poor thing cry out?" www.libtool.com.cn

"Ay, like any Christian; as, for aught I know, it may be. There's another tale that she found 'em down in Gloucestershire, at a country fair, and keeps 'em pickled in walnut juice. But monsters they be, whether of Gloucester or Cathay, for I have seen 'em; and so hath the Queen, who sent for them the other day to be brought to Westminster, and there took much delight in their oddity."

While the others hesitated, William Shakespeare turned on his heel and walked past them into Mother Witwold's lighted doorway.

His father glanced after him. "Well, to be sure, the poor thing cried out like a Christian," he said. "But dwarfs and monsters be kittle cattle to handle, I am told." As the lattice closed on their debate he linked his arm in the apprentice's, and they too passed into the doorway.

From it a narrow passage led straight to a narrow staircase; and at the stairs' foot the apprentice had another glimpse into the life of this Bankside. A door stood wide there upon an ill-lighted room, and close within the door sat

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

two men—foreigners by their black-avised faces—casting dice upon a drumhead. In a chair, beyond, a girl, low-bodiced, with naked gleaming shoulders, leaned ~~back half asleep,~~ and yet she did not seem to sleep, but to regard the gamesters with a lazy scorn from under her dropped lashes. A tambourine tied with bright ribbons rested in the lap of her striped petticoat, kept from sliding to the floor by the careless crook—you could see it was habitual—of her jewelled fingers. The two men looked up sharply, almost furtively, at the company mounting the stairs. The girl scarcely lifted her eyes. Scornful she looked, and sullen and infinitely weary, yet she was beautiful withal. The apprentice wondered while he climbed.

“Yes,” his patron was saying, “’tis the very mart and factory of pleasure. Ne’er a want hath London in that way but the Bankside can supply it, from immortal poetry down to—to——”

“—Down to misshapen children. Need’st try no lower, my master.”

“There be abuses, my son: and there be degrees of pleasure, the lowest of which (I grant you) be vile, sensual, devilish. Marry, I defend not such. But what I say is that a great city should have delights proportionate to her great-

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

ness; rich shows and pageants and processions by land and water; plays and masques and banquets with music; and the men who cater for these are citizens as worthy as the rest. Take away Bankside, and London would be the cleaner of much wickedness: yet by how much the duller of cheer, the poorer in all that colour, that movement which together be to cities the spirit of life! Where would be gone that glee of her that lifts a man's lungs and swells his port when his feet feel London stones? Is't of her money the country nurses think when to wondering children they fable of streets all paved with gold? Nay, lad: and this your decent, virtuous folk know well enough—your clergy, your aldermen—and use the poor players while abusing them. Doth the parish priest need a miracle-play for his church? Doth my Lord Mayor intend a show? To the Bankside they hie with money in their purses: and if his purse be long enough, my Lord Mayor shall have a fountain running with real wine, and Mass Thomas a Hell with flames of real cloth-in-grain, or at least a Lazarus with real sores. Doth the Court require a masque, the Queen a bull-baiting, the City a good roaring tragedy, full of blood and impugned innocence—Will! Will, I say! Tarry a moment!”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

They had reached the landing, and looked down a corridor at the end of which, where a lamp hung, Shakespeare waited with his hand on a door-latch. From behind the door came a buzz of many voices.

“Lad, lad, let us go in together! Though the world's applause weary thee, 'tis sweet to thine old father.”

As he pressed down the latch the great man turned for an instant with a quick smile, marvelously tender.

“He *can* smile, then?” thought the apprentice to himself. “And I was doubting that he kept it for his writing!”

Within the room, as it were with one shout, a great company leapt to its feet, cheering and lifting glasses. Shakespeare, pausing on the threshold, smiled again, but more reservedly, bowing to the homage as might a king.

v

Three hours the feast had lasted: and the apprentice had listened to many songs, many speeches, but scarcely to the promised talk of gods. The poets, maybe, reserved such talk for the Mermaid. Here they were outnumbered by the players and by such ladies as the Bankside

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

(which provided everything) furnished to grace the entertainment; and doubtless they subdued their discourse to the company. The Burbages, Dick and Cuthbert, John Heminge, Will Kempe—some half-a-dozen of the crew perhaps—might love good literature: but even these were pardonably more elate over the epilogue than over the play. For months they, the Lord Chamberlain's servants, had felt the eyes of London upon them: to-night they had triumphed, and to-morrow London would ring with appreciative laughter. It is not every day that your child of pleasure outwits your man of business at his own game: it is not once in a generation that he scores such a hit as had been scored to-day. The ladies, indeed, yawned without dissembling, while Master Jonson—an ungainly youth with a pimply face, a rasping accent, and a hard pedantic manner—proposed success to the new comedy and long life to its author; which he did at interminable length; spicing his discourse with quotations from Aristotle, Longinus, Quintilian, the *Ars Poetica*, Persius, and Seneca, authors less studied than the Aretine along Bankside. "He loved Will Shakespeare. . . . A comedy of his own (as the company might remember) owed not a little to his friend Will Shakespeare's acting. . . . Here

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

was a case in which love and esteem—yes, and worship—might hardly be dissociated. . . . In short, speaking as modestly as a young man might of his senior, Will Shakespeare was the age's ornament and, but for lack of an early gruelling in the classics, might easily have been an ornament for any age. Cuthbert Burbage—it is always your quiet man who first succumbs on these occasions—slid beneath the table with a vacuous laugh and lay in slumber. Dick Burbage sat and drummed his toes impatiently. Nashe puffed at a pipe of tobacco. Kempe, his elbows on the board, his chin resting on his palms, watched the orator with amused interest, mischief lurking in every crease of his wrinkled face. Will Shakespeare leaned back in his chair and scanned the rafters, smiling gently the while. His speech, when his turn came to respond, was brief, almost curt. He would pass by (he said) his young friend's learned encomiums, and come to that which lay nearer to their thoughts than either the new play or the new play's author. Let them fill and drink in silence to the demise of an old friend, the vanished theatre, the first ever built in London. Then, happening to glance at Heminge as he poured out the wine—"Tut, Jack!" he spoke up sharply: "keep that easy

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

rheum for the boards. Brush thine eyes, lad: we be all players here—or women—and know the trade.”

It hurt. www.libtool.com.cn If Heminge's eyes had begun to water sentimentally, they flinched now with real pain. This man loved Shakespeare with a dog's love. He blinked, and a drop fell and rested on the back of his hand as it fingered the base of his wine-glass. The apprentice saw and noted it.

“And another glass, lads, to the Phoenix that shall arise! A toast, and this time not in silence!” shouted John Shakespeare, springing up, flask in one hand and glass in the other. Meat or wine, jest or sally of man or woman, dull speech or brisk—all came alike to him. His doublet was unbuttoned; he had smoked three pipes, drunk a quart of sack, and never once yawned. He was enjoying himself to the top of his bent. “Music, I say! Music!” A thought seemed to strike him; his eyes filled with happy inspiration. Still gripping his flask, he rolled to the door, flung it open, and bawled down the stairway—

“Ahoy! Below, there!”

“Ahoy, then, with all my heart!” answered a voice, gay and youthful, pat on the summons. “What is't ye lack, my master?”

“Music, an thou canst give it. If not——”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

"My singing voice broke these four years past, I fear me."

"Your name, then, at least, young man, or ever you thrust yourself upon private company."

"William Herbert, at your service." A handsome lad—a boy, almost—stood in the doorway, having slipped past John Shakespeare's guard: a laughing, frank-faced boy, in a cloak slashed with orange-tawny satin. So much the apprentice noted before he heard a second voice, as jaunty and even more youthfully shrill, raised in protest upon the stairhead outside.

"And where the master goes," it demanded, "may not his page follow?"

John Shakespeare seemingly gave way to this second challenge as to the first. "Be these friends of thine, Will?" he called past them as a second youth appeared in the doorway, a pretty, dark-complexioned lad, cloaked in white, who stood a pace behind his companion's elbow and gazed into the supper-room with eyes at once mischievous and timid.

"Good-evening, gentles!" The taller lad comprehended the feasters and the disordered table in a roguish bow. "Good-evening, Will!" He singled out Shakespeare, and nodded.

"My Lord Herbert!"

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

The apprentice's eye, cast towards Shakespeare at the salutation given, marked a dark flush rise to the great man's temples as he answered the nod.

"I called thee 'Will,'" answered Herbert lightly.

"You called us 'gentles,'" Shakespeare replied, the dark flush yet lingering on either cheek. "A word signifying bait for gudgeons, bred in carrion."

"Yet I called thee Will," insisted Herbert more gently. "'Tis my name as well as thine, and we have lovingly exchanged it before now, or my memory cheats me."

"'Tis a name lightly exchanged in love." With a glance at the white-cloaked page Shakespeare turned on his heel.

"La, Will, where be thy manners?" cried one of the women. "Welcome, my young Lord; and welcome the boy beside thee for his pretty face! Step in, child, that I may pass thee round to be kissed."

The page laughed and stepped forward with his chin defiantly tilted. His eyes examined the women curiously and yet with a touch of fear.

"Nay, never flinch, lad! I'll do thee no harm," chuckled the one who had invited him. "Mass o' me, how I love modesty in these days of scandal!"

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Music? Who called for music?” a foreign voice demanded: and now in the doorway appeared three newcomers, two men and a woman—the same three of whom the apprentice had caught a glimpse within the room at the stairs’ foot. The spokesman, a heavily built fellow with a short bull-neck and small cunning eyes, carried a drum slung about his shoulders and beat a rub-a-dub on it by way of flourish. “Take thy tambourine and dance, Julitta—

*Julie, prends ton tambourin;
Toi, prends ta flute, Robin,”*

he hummed, tapping his drum again.

“So? So? What foreign gabble is this?” demanded John Shakespeare, following and laying a hand on his shoulder.

“A pretty little carol for Christmas, Signore, that we picked up on our way through Burgundy, where they sing it to a jargon I cannot emulate. But the tune is as it likes you—

*Au son ces instruments —
Turelurelu, patapatapan —
Nous dirons Noël gaîment!*

Goes it not trippingly, Signore? You will say so when you see my Julitta dance to it.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Eh—eh? Dance to a carol?” a woman protested. “’Tis inviting the earth to open and swallow us.”

“Why, where’s the harm on ’t?” John Shakespeare demanded. “A pretty little concomitant, and anciently proper to all religions, nor among the heathen only, but in England and all parts of Christendom—

*In manger wrapped it was —
So poorly happ’d my chance —
Between an ox and a silly poor ass
To call my true love to the dance!
Sing O, my love, my love, my love. . . .*

There’s precedent for ye, Ma’am—good English precedent. Zooks! I’m a devout man, I hope; but I bear a liberal mind and condemn no form of mirth, so it be honest. The earth swallow us? Ay, soon or late it will, not being squeamish. Meantime, dance, I say! Clear back the tables there, and let the girl show her paces!”

Young Herbert glanced at Burbage with lifted eyebrow, as if to demand, “Who is this madman?” Burbage laughed, throwing out both hands.

“But he is gigantic!” lisped the page, as with a wave of his two great arms John Shakespeare seemed to catch up the company and fling them

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

to work pell-mell, thrusting back tables, piling chairs, clearing the floor of its rushes. "He is a whirlwind of a man!"

"Come, Julitta!" www.libtool.com.cn called the man with the drum.
"Francisco, take thy pipe, man!—"

*Au son de ces instruments —
Turelurelu, patapatapan —*

As the music struck up, the girl, still with her scornful, impassive face, leapt like a panther from the doorway into the space cleared for her, and whirled down the room in a dance the like of which our apprentice had never seen nor dreamed of. And yet his gaze at first was not for her, but for the younger foreigner, the one with the pipe. For if ever horror took visible form, it stood and stared from the windows of that man's eyes. They were handsome eyes, too, large and dark and passionate: but just now they stared blindly as though a hot iron had seared them. Twice they had turned to the girl, who answered by not so much as a glance; and twice with a shudder upon the man with the drum, who caught the look and blinked wickedly. Worst of all was it when the music began, to see that horror fixed and staring over a pair of cheeks ludicrously puffing at a flageolet. A face for a gargoyle! The apprentice

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

shivered, and glanced from one to other of the company: but they, one and all, were watching the dancer.

It was a marvellous dance, truly. The girl, her tambourine lifted high, and clashing softly to the beat of the music, whirled down the length of the room, while above the pipe's falsetto and rumble of the drum the burly man lifted his voice and trolled—

*“Turelurelu, patapatapan —
Au son de ces instruments
Faisons la nique à Satan!”*

By the barricade of chairs and tables, under which lay Cuthbert Burbage in peaceful stupor, she checked her onward rush, whirling yet, but so lazily that she seemed for the moment to stand poised, her scarf outspread like the wings of a butterfly: and so, slowly, very slowly, she came floating back. Twice she repeated this, each time narrowing her circuit, until she reached the middle of the floor, and there began to spin on her toes as a top spins when (as children say) it goes to sleep. The tambourine no longer clashed. Balanced high on the point of her uplifted forefinger, it too began to spin, and span until its outline became a blur. Still, as the music rose shriller and wilder, she revolved more and more rapidly,

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

yet apparently with less and less of effort. Her scarf had become a mere filmy disc rotating around a whorl of gleaming flesh and glancing jewels.

A roar of delight from John Shakespeare broke the spell. The company echoed it with round upon round of hand-clapping. The music ceased suddenly, and the dancer, dipping low until her knees brushed the floor, stood erect again, dropped her arms, and turned carelessly to the nearest table.

“Bravo! bravissimo!” thundered John Shakespeare. “A cup of wine for her, there!”

The girl had snatched up a crust of bread and was gnawing it ravenously. He thrust his way through the guests and poured out wine for her. She took the glass with a steady hand, scarcely pausing in her meal to thank him.

“But who is your master of ceremonies?” demanded the page’s piping voice.

William Shakespeare heard it and turned. “He is my father,” said he quietly.

But John Shakespeare had heard also. Wheeling about, wine-flask in hand, he faced the lad with a large and mock-elaborate bow. “That, young Sir, must be my chief title to your notice. For the rest, I am a plain gentleman of Warwick-

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

shire, of impaired but (I thank God) bettering fortune; my name John Shakespeare; my coat, or, a bend sable, charged with a lance proper. One of these fine days I may bring it to Court for you to recognise: but, alas! says Skelton—

*Age is a page
For the Court full unmeet,
For age cannot rage
Nor buss her sweet sweet.*

I shall bide at home and kiss the Queen's hand, through my son, more like."

"Indeed," said the page, "I hear reports that her Majesty hath already a mind to send for him."

"Is that so, Will?" His father beamed, delighted.

"In some sort it is," answered Herbert, "and in some sort I am her messenger's forerunner. She will have a play of thee, Will."

"The Queen?" Shakespeare turned on him sharply. "This is a fool's trick you play on me, my Lord." Yet his face flushed in spite of himself.

"I tell thee, straight brow and true man, I heard the words fall from her very lips. 'He shall write us a play,' she said; 'and this Falstaff shall be the hero on't, with no foolish royalties to overlay and clog his mirth.'"

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“And, you see,” put in the page maliciously, “we have come express to the Boar’s Head to seek him out.”

“That,” Herbert added, “is our suit to-night.”

“Will, lad, thy fortune’s made!” John Shakespeare clapped a hand on his son’s shoulder. “I shall see thee Sir William yet afore I die!”

If amid the general laughter two lines of vexation wrote themselves for a moment on Shakespeare’s brow they died out swiftly. He stood back a pace, eyed his father awhile with grave and tender humour, and answered the pair of courtiers with a bow.

“Her Majesty’s gracious notion of a play,” said he, “must needs be her poor subject’s pattern. If then I come to Court in motley, you, Sirs, at least will be indulgent, knowing how much a suit may disguise.” The page, meeting his eye, laughed uneasily. “’Tis but a frolic——” he began.

“Ay, there’s the pity o’t,” interrupted a deep voice — Kempe’s.

The page laughed again, yet more nervously. “I should have said the Queen—God bless her!—desires but a frolic. And I had thought”—here he lifted his chin saucily and looked Kempe in the face—“that on Bankside they took a frolic less seriously.”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Why, no,” answered Kempe: “they have to take it seriously, and the cost too,—that being their business.”

“’Tis but a frolic, at any rate, that her Majesty proposes, with a trifling pageant or dance to conclude, in which certain of the Court may join.”

A harsh laugh capped this explanation. It came from the dancing-girl, who, seated at the disordered table, had been eating like a hungry beast. She laid down her knife, rested her chin on her clasped hands, and, munching slowly, stared at the page from under her sullen, scornful brows.

“Wouldst learn to dance, child?” she demanded.

“With thee for teacher,” the page answered modestly. “I have no skill, but a light foot only.”

“A light foot!” the woman mimicked and broke into a laugh horrible to hear. “Wouldst achieve such art as mine with a light foot? I tell thee that to dance as I dance thy feet must go deep as hell!” She pushed back her plate, and, rising, nodded to the musicians. “Play, you!” she commanded.

This time she used no wild whirl down the room to give her impetus. She stood in the cleared space of floor, her arms hanging limp, and at the first shrill note of the pipe began to revolve on

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

the points of her toes, her eyes, each time as they came full circle, meeting the gaze of the page, and slowly fascinating, freezing it. As slowly, deliberately, her hand went up, curved itself to the armpit of her bodice; and lo! as she straightened it aloft, a snake writhed itself around her upper arm, lifting its head to reach the shining bracelets, the jewelled fingers. A curving lift of the left arm, and on that too a snake began to coil and climb. Effortless, rigid as a revolving statue, she brought her finger-tips together overhead and dipped them to her bosom.

A shriek rang out, piercing high above the music.

“Catch her! She faints!” shouted Kempe, darting forward. But it was Shakespeare who caught the page's limp body as it dropped back on his arm. Bearing it to the window, he tore aside the curtain and thrust open a lattice to the dawn. The unconscious head drooped against his shoulder.

“My Lord”—he turned on Herbert as though the touch maddened him—“you are a young fool! God forgive me that I ever took you for better! Go, call a boat and take her out of this.”

“Nay, but she revives,” stammered Herbert, as the page's lips parted in a long, shuddering sigh.

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Go, fetch a boat, I say!—and make way there, all you by the door!”

VI
www.libtool.com.cn

“Tut! tut!—the wench will come to fast enough in the fresh air. A dare-devil jade, too, to be sparking it on Bankside at this hour! But it takes more than a woman, they say, to kill a mouse, and with serpents her sex hath an ancient feud. What’s her name, I wonder?”

The candles, burning low and guttering in the draught of the open window, showed a banquet-hall deserted, or all but deserted. A small crowd of the guests—our apprentice among them—had trooped downstairs after Shakespeare and his burden. Others, reminded by the grey dawn, had slipped away on their own account to hire a passage home from the sleepy watermen before Paris Garden Stairs.

“Can any one tell me her name, now?” repeated John Shakespeare, rolling to the table and pouring himself yet another glass of wine. But no one answered him. The snake-woman had folded back her pets within her bodice and resumed her meal as though nothing had happened. The burly drummer had chosen a chair beside her and fallen to on the remains of a pasty. Both were

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

eating voraciously. Francisco, the pipe-player, sat sidesaddle-wise on a form at a little distance and drank and watched them, still with the horror in his eyes. One or two women lingered, and searched the tables, pocketing crusts—searched with faces such as on battlefields, at dawn, going peering among the dead and wounded.

“But hullo!” John Shakespeare swung round, glass in hand, as the apprentice stood panting in the doorway. “Faith, you return before I had well missed you.”

The lad's eyes twinkled with mischief.

“An thou hasten not, master, I fear me thou may'st miss higher game; with our hosts—your son amongst 'em—even now departing by boat and, for aught I know, leaving thee to pay the shot.”

“Michael and all his angels preserve us! I had forgot——”

John Shakespeare clapped a hand on his empty pocket, and ran for the stairhead. “Will!” he bawled. “Will! My son Will!”

The apprentice laughed and stepped toward the window, tittuping slightly; for (to tell the truth) he had drunk more wine than agreed with him. Standing by the window, he laughed again vacuously, drew a long breath, and so spun round on his heels at the sound of a choking cry and a rush of

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

feet. With that he saw, as in a haze—his head being yet dizzy—the heavy man catch up his drum by its strap and, using it as a shield, with a backward sweep of the arm hurl off the youth Francisco, who had leapt on him knife in hand. Clutching the curtain, he heard the knife rip through the drum's parchment and saw the young man's face of hate as the swift parry flung him back staggering, upsetting a form, against the table's edge. He saw the glasses there leap and totter from the shock, heard their rims jar and ring together like a peal of bells.

The sound seemed to clear his brain. He could not guess what had provoked the brawl; but in one and the same instant he saw the drummer reach back an arm as if to draw the dancing woman on his knee; heard his jeering laugh as he slipped a hand down past her bare shoulder; saw her unmoved face, sullenly watching; saw Francisco, still clutching his knife, gather himself up for another spring. As he sprang the drummer's hand slid round from behind the woman's back, and it too grasped a knife. An overturned chair lay between the two, and the rail of it as Francisco leapt caught his foot, so that with a clutch he fell sideways against the table. Again the glasses jarred and rang, and yet again and more loudly as

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

the drummer's hand went up and drove the dagger through the neck, pinning it to the board. The youth's legs contracted in a horrible kick, contracted again and fell limp. There was a gush of blood across the cloth, a sound of breath escaping and choked in its escape: and as the killer wrenched out his knife for a second stroke, the body slid with a thud to the floor.

The apprentice had feasted, and feasted well; yet throughout the feast (he bethought himself of this later), no serving-man and but one serving-maid had entered the room. Wines and dishes had come at call to a hatch in the wall at the far end of the room. One serving-maid had done all the rest, moving behind the guests' chairs with a face and mien which reminded him of a tall angel he had seen once borne in a car of triumph at a City show. But now as he left his curtain, twittering, crazed with fear, spreading out both hands toward the stain on the tablecloth, a door beside the hatch opened noiselessly, and swift and prompt as though they had been watching, two men entered, flung a dark coverlet over the body, lifted and bore it off, closing the door behind them. They went as they had come, swiftly, without a word. He had seen it as plainly as he saw now the murderer sheathing his knife, the woman

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

sullenly watching him. The other women, too, had vanished—they that had been gleaning among the broken crusts. Had they decamped, scurrying, at the first hint of the brawl? He could not tell: they had been, and were not.

He stretched out both hands towards the man, the woman—would they, too, vanish?—and the damning stain? A cry worked in his throat, but would not come.

“Gone!” a voice called, hearty at once and disconsolate, from the doorway behind him. “Gone—given me the slip, as I am a Christian sinner. What? You three left alone here? But where is our friend the piper?”

The apprentice made a snatch at a flask of wine, and, turning, let its contents spill wildly over the bloodied tablecloth.

“Art drunk, lad—shamefully drunk,” said John Shakespeare, lurching forward. “They have given me the slip, I say, and ne’er a groat have I to redeem my promises.”

“They paid the score below—I saw them; and this thy son charged me to hand to thee.” The apprentice drew a full purse from his pocket and flung it on the table. “I—I played thee a trick, master: but let me forth into fresh air. This room dizzies me. . . .”

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“Go thy ways—go thy ways, child. For my part I was ever last at a feast to leave it, and would crack one more cup with these good folk. To your health, Madam!” He reached a hand for the wine-flask as the apprentice set it down and went forth, tottering yet.

VII

Dawn was breaking down the river; a grey dawn as yet, albeit above the mists rolling low upon the tide-way a clear sky promised gold to come—a golden Christmas Day. The mist, however, had a chill which searched the bones. The red-eyed waterman pulled as though his arms were numb. Tom Nashe coughed and huddled his cloak about him, as he turned for a last backward glance on Bankside, where a few lights yet gleamed, and the notes of a belated guitar tinkled on, dulled by the vapours, calling like a thin ghost above the deeper baying of the hounds.

“Take care of thyself, lad,” said Shakespeare kindly, stretching out a hand to help his friend draw the cloak closer.

“Behoved me think of that sooner, I doubt,” Nashe answered, glancing up with a wry, pathetic smile, yet gratefully. He dropped his eyes to the cloak and quoted—

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

*"Sometime it was of cloth-in-grain,
'Tis now but a sigh-clout, as you may see;
It will hold out neither wind nor rain —*

and — and — I thank thee, Will —

But I'll take my old cloak about me.

There's salt in the very warp of it, good Yarmouth salt. Will?"

"Ay, lad?"

"Is't true thou'rt become a landowner, down in thy native shire?"

"In a small way, Tom."

"A man of estate? with coat-of-arms and all?"

"Even that too, with your leave."

"I know—I know. *Nescio qua natale solum*—those others did not understand: but I understood. Yes, and now I understand that fifth act of thine, which puzzled me afore, and yet had not puzzled me; but I fancied—poor fool!—that the feeling was singular in me. 'Twas a vile life, Will." He jerked a thumb back at Bankside.

"Ay, 'tis vile."

"My cough translates it into the past tense; but—then, or now, or hereafter—'tis vile. Count them up, Will—the lads we have drunk with aforetime. There was Greene, now——"

Shakespeare bent his head for tally.

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“—I can see his poor corse staring up at the rafters: there on the shoemaker's bed, with a chaplet of laurel askew on the brow. The woman meant it kindly, poor thing! . . . She forgot to close his eyes, though. With my own fingers I closed 'em, and borrowed two penny pieces of her for weights. 'Twas the first dead flesh I had touched, and I feel it now. . . . But George Peele was worse, ten times worse. I forget if you saw him?”

Again Shakespeare bent his head.

“And poor Kit? You saw Kit, I know . . . with a hole below the eye, they told me, where the knife went through. And that was our Kit, our hope, pride, paragon, our Daphnis. Damnation, and this is art! Didst hear that blotch-faced youngster, that Scotchman, how he prated of it, laying down the law?”

“That Jonson, Tom, is a tall poet, or will be.”

“The devil care I! Tall poet or not, he is no Englishman and understands not the race. Art is not for us. We have dreamed dreams, thou and I: and thy dreams are coming to glory. But the last dream of a true Englishman is to own a few good English acres and die respected in a dear, if narrow, round. Dear Will, there is more in this than greed. There is the call of the land, which is home. For me—thou knowest—I had

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

ne'er the gift of saving. My bolt is shot, or almost: two years at farthest must see the end of me. But when thou rememberest, bethink thee that I understood the call. Wilt guess what I am writing, now at the last? A great book—a sound book—and all of the red-herring! Ay, the red-herring, staple of my own Yarmouth. Canst never, as an inland man, rise to the virtues of that fish nor to the merit of my handling. But I have read some pages of it to my neighbours there and I learn from their approving looks that I shall die respected. Yet I, too, forgot and dreamed of art. . . .”

* * * * *

On the Bankside at the foot of Paris Garden Stairs, deserted now of watermen, a youth sat with his teeth chattering.

Above, while he tried to clench his teeth, a window opened stealthily. There was a heavy splash on the tideway, and the window shut to, softly as it had opened. He watched. He was past fear. The body bobbed once to the surface, half a furlong below the spreading, fading circles thrown to the foot of Paris Garden Stairs. It did not rise again. The Bankside knew its business.

A heavy footfall came down the steps to the landing-stage.

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

“A glorious night!”

The apprentice watched the river.

“A glorious night! A night to remember! Tell me, lad, have I made good my promises, or have I not?”

“They rise thrice before sinking, I have always heard,” twittered the lad.

“What the devil art talking of? Here, take my cloak, if thou feelest the chill. The watermen here ply by shifts, and we shall hail a boat anon to take us over. Meanwhile, if thou hast eyes, boy, look on the river—see the masts there, below bridge, the sun touching them!—see the towers yonder, in the gold of it!

London, thou art the flower of cities all!

—Eh, lad?”

The sun's gold, drifted through the fog, touched the side of a small row-boat nearing the farther shore. Behind, and to right and left along Bankside, a few guitars yet tinkled. Across the tide came wafted the voices of London's Christmas bells.

www.libtool.com.cn

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

A STORY FROM A CHIMNEY-CORNER

A GOOD song, and thank 'ee, Sir, for singing it! Time was, you'd never miss hearing it in these parts, whether 'twas feast or harvest-supper or Saturday night at the public. A virtuous good song, too; and the merry fellow that made it won't need to cast about and excuse himself when the graves open and he turns out with his fiddle under his arm. My own mother taught it to me; the more by token that she came from Saltash, and "Ye sexes, give ear" was a terrible favourite with the Saltash females by reason of Sally Hancock and her turn-to with the press-gang. Hey? You don't tell me, after singing the song, that you never heard tell of Sally Hancock? Well, if —— I Here, take and fill my mug, somebody!

'Tis an instructive tale, too. . . . This Sally was a Saltash fishwoman, and you must have heard of *them*, at all events. There was Bess Rablin, too, and Mary Kitty Climo, and Thomasine Oliver, and Long Eliza that married Treleven

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

the hoveller, and Pengelly's wife Ann; these made up the crew Sally stroked in the great race. And besides these there was Nan Scantlebury — she took Bess Rablin's oar the second year, Bess being a bit too fond of lifting her elbow, which affected her health — and Phemy Sullivan, an Irishwoman, and Long Eliza's half-sister Charlotte Prowse, and Rebecca Tucker, and Susan Trebilcock, that everybody called "Apern," and a dozen more maybe: powerful women every one, and proud of it. The town called them Sally Hancock's Gang, she being their leader, though they worked separate, shrimping, cockling, digging for lug and long-lining, bawling fish through Plymouth streets, even a hovelling job at times — nothing came amiss to them, and no weather. For a trip to Plymouth they'd put on sea-boots belike, or grey stockings and clogs: but at home they went bare-legged, and if they wore anything 'pon their heads 'twould be a handkerchief, red or yellow, with a man's hat clapped a-top; coats too, and guernseys like men's, and petticoats a short few inches longer; for I'm telling of that back-along time when we fought Boney and while seafaring men still wore petticoats — in these parts at any rate. Well, that's how Sally and her mates looked on week-a-days, and that's

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

how they behaved: but you must understand that, though rough, they were respectable; the most of them Wesleyan Methodists; and on Sundays they'd put on bonnet and sit in chapel, and drink their tea afterwards and pick their neighbours to pieces just like ordinary Christians. Sal herself was a converted woman, and greatly exercised for years about her husband's condition, that kept a tailor's shop half-way down Fore Street and scoffed at the word of Grace; though he attended public worship, partly to please his customers and partly because his wife wouldn't let him off.

The way the fun started was this. In June month of the year 'five (that's the date my mother always gave) the Wesleyans up at the London Foundry sent a man down to preach a revival through Cornwall, starting with Saltash. He had never crossed the Tamar before, but had lived the most of his life near Wolverhampton — a bustious little man, with a round belly and a bald head and high sense of his own importance. He arrived on a Saturday night, and attended service next morning, but not to take part in it: he "wished to look round," he said. So the morning was spent in impressing everyone with his shiny black suit of West-of-England broad-

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

cloth and his beautiful neckcloth and bunch of seals. But in the evening he climbed the pulpit, and there Old Nick himself, that lies in wait for preachers, must have tempted the poor fellow to preach on Womanly Perfection, taking his text from St. Paul.

He talked a brave bit about subjection, and how a woman ought to submit herself to her husband, and keep her head covered in places of public worship. And from that he passed on to say that 'twas to this beautiful submissiveness women owed their amazing power for good, and he, for his part, was going through Cornwall to tackle the womenfolk and teach 'em this beautiful lesson, and he'd warrant he'd leave the whole county a sight nearer righteousness than he found it. With that he broke out into extempory prayer for our dear sisters, as he called them, dusted his knees, and gave out the hymn, all as pleased as Punch.

Sal walked home from service alongside of her husband, very thoughtful. Deep down in the bottom of his heart he was afraid of her, and she knew it, though she made it a rule to treat him kindly. But knowing him for a monkey-spirited little man, and spiteful as well as funny, you could never be sure when he wouldn't break out.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

To-night he no sooner gets inside his own door than says he with a dry sort of a chuckle—

“Powerful fine sermon, this evenin’. A man like that makes you *think*.”

“Ch’t!” says Sally, tossing her bonnet on to the easy-chair and groping about for the tinder-box.

“Sort of doctrine that’s badly needed in Salt-ash,” says he. “But I’d ha’ bet ’twould be wasted on you. Well, well, if you can’t understand logic, fit and fetch supper, that’s a good soul!”

“Ch’t!” said Sally again, paying no particular attention, but wondering what the dickens had become of the tinder-box. She couldn’t find it on the chimney-piece, so went off to fetch the kitchen one.

When she came back, there was my lord seated in the easy-chair — that was hers by custom — and puffing away at his pipe — a thing not allowed until after supper. You see, he had collared the tinder-box when he first came in, and had hidden it from her.

Sal lit the lamp, quiet-like. “I s’pose you know you’re sittin’ ’pon my best bonnet?” said she.

This took him aback. He jumped up, found

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

the bonnet underneath him sure enough, and tossed it on to the table. "Gew-gaws!" said he, settling himself down again and puffing. "Gew-gaws and frippery! That man'll do good in this country; he's badly wanted."

Sal patted the straw of her bonnet into something like shape and smoothed out the ribbons. "If it'll make you feel like a breadwinner," said she, "there's a loaf in the bread-pan. The cold meat and pickles are under lock and key, and we'll talk o' them later." She fitted the bonnet on and began to tie the strings.

"You don't tell me, Sarah, that you mean to go gadding out at this time of the evening?" cries he, a bit chapfallen, for he knew she carried the keys in an under-pocket beneath her skirt.

"And you don't suppose," answers she, "that I can spare the time to watch you play-actin' in my best chair? No, no, my little man! Sit there and amuse yourself: what *you* do don't make a ha'porth of odds. But there's others to be considered, and I'm going to put an end to this nonsense afore it spreads."

The time of the year, as I've told you, was near about midsummer, when a man can see to read print out-of-doors at nine o'clock. Service over, the preacher had set out for a stroll across the

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

hayfields towards Trematon, to calm himself with a look at the scenery and the war-ships in the Hamoaze and the line of prison-hulks below, where in those days they kept the French prisoners. He was strolling back, with his hands clasped behind him under his coat-tails, when on the knap of the hill, between him and the town, he caught sight of a bevy of women seated among the hay-pooks — staid middle-aged women, all in dark shawls and bonnets, chattering there in the dusk. As he came along they all rose up together and dropped him a curtsy.

“Good evenin’, preacher dear,” says Sally, acting spokeswoman; “and a very fine night for the time of year.”

I reckon that for a moment the preacher took a scare. Monstrous fine women they were to be sure, looming up over him in the dimmety light, and two or three of them tall as Grenadiers. But hearing himself forespoken so pleasantly, he came to a stand and peered at them through his gold-rimmed glasses.

“Ah, good evening, ladies!” says he. “You are, I presoom, members of the society that I’ve just had the privilege of addressin’?” And thereupon they dropped him another curtsy altogether. “Like me, I dare say you find the

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

scent of the new-mown hay refreshingly grateful. And what a scene! What a beautiful porch, so to speak, to the beauties of Cornwall! — beauties of which I have often heard tell.”

“Yes, Sir,” answers Sal demurely. “Did you ever hear tell, too, why Old Nick never came into Cornwall?”

“H’m—ha—some proverbial saying, no doubt? But—you will excuse me—I think we should avoid speaking lightly of the great Enemy of Mankind.”

“He was afraid,” pursued Sal, “of being put into a pie.” She paused at that, giving her words time to sink in. The preacher didn’t notice yet awhile that Long Eliza Treleaven and Thomasine Oliver had crept round a bit and planted themselves in the footpath behind him.

After a bit Sal let herself go in a comfortable smile, and says she, in a pretty, coaxing voice, “Sit yourself down, preacher, that’s a dear: sit yourself down, nice and close, and have a talk!”

The poor fellow fetched a start at this. He didn’t know, of course, that everyone’s “my dear” in Cornwall, and I’m bound to say I’ve seen foreigners taken aback by it—folks like commercial travellers, not given to shyness as a rule.

“You’ll excuse me, Madam.”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“No, I won’t: not if you don’t come and sit down quiet. Bless the man, I’m not going to eat ’ee — wouldn’t harm a hair of your dear little head, if you had any! What? You refuse?”

“How dare you, Madam!” The preacher drew himself up, mighty dignified. “How dare you address me in this fashion!”

“I’m addressin’ you for your good,” answered Sally. “We’ve been talkin’ over your sermon, me and my friends here — all very respectable women — and we’ve made up our minds that it won’t do. We can’t have it ’pon our conscience to let a gentleman with your views go kicking up Jack’s delight through the West. We owe something more to our sex. ‘Wrestlin’ with ’em — that was one of your expressions — ‘wrestlin’ with our dear Cornish sisters!’”

“In the spirit — a figure of speech,” explained the poor man, snappy-like.

Sal shook her head. “They know all about wrestlin’ down yonder. I tell you, ’twon’t do. You’re a well-meaning man, no doubt; but you’re terribly wrong on some points. You’d do an amazing amount of mischief if we let you run loose. But we couldn’t take no such responsibility — indeed we couldn’t: and the long and short of it is, you’ve got to go.”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

She spoke these last words very firmly. The preacher flung a glance round and saw he was in a trap.

www.libtool.com.cn
“Such shameless behaviour ——” he began.

“You’ve got to go back,” repeated Sally, nodding her head at him. “Take my advice and go quiet.”

“I can only suppose you to be intoxicated,” said he, and swung round upon the path where Thomasine Oliver stood guard. “Allow me to pass, Madam, if you please!”

But here the mischief put it into Long Eliza to give his hat a flip by the brim. It dropped over his nose and rolled away in the grass. “Oh, what a dear little bald head!” cried Long Eliza; “I declare I must kiss it or die!” She caught up a handful of hay as he stooped, and — well, well, Sir! Scandalous, as you say! Not a word beyond this would any of them tell: but I do believe the whole gang rolled the poor man in the hay and took a kiss off him — “making sweet hay,” as ’tis called. ’Twas only known that he paid the bill for his lodging a little after dawn next morning, took up his bag, and passed down Fore Street towards the quay. Maybe a boat was waiting for him there: at all events, he was never seen again — not on this side of Tamar.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

Sal went back, composed as you please, and let herself in by the front-door. In the parlour she found her man still seated in the easy-chair and smoking, but sulky-like, and with most of his monkey-temper leaked out of him.

“What have you been doin’, pray?” asks he.

Sal looked at him with a twinkle. “Kissin’,” says she, untying her bonnet: and with that down she dropped on a chair and laughed till her sides ached.

Her husband ate humble pie that night before ever he set fork in the cold meat: and for some days after, though she kept a close eye on him, he showed no further sign of wanting to be lord of creation. “Nothing like promptness,” thought Sally to herself. “If I hadn’t taken that nonsense in hand straight off, there’s no telling where it wouldn’t have spread.” By the end of the week following she had put all uneasiness out of her head.

Next Saturday — as her custom was on Saturdays — she traded in Plymouth, and didn’t reach home until an hour or more past nightfall, having waited on the Barbican for the evening fish-auction, to see how prices were ruling. ’Twas near upon ten o’clock before she’d moored her

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

boat, and as she went up the street past the Fish and Anchor she heard something that fetched her to a standstill.

She stood for a minute, listening; then walked in without more ado, set down her baskets in the passage, and pushed open the door of the bar-room. There was a whole crowd of men gathered inside, and the place thick with tobacco-smoke. And in the middle of this crew, with his back to the door, sat her husband piping out a song —

*Ye sexes, give ear to my fancy ;
In the praise of good women I sing,
It is not of Doll, Kate, or Nancy,
The mate of a clown nor a King —
With my fol-de-rol, tooral-i-lay!*

*Old Adam, when he was creyated,
Was lord of the Universe round ;
Yet his happiness was not complate
Until that a help-mate he'd found.*

*He had all things for food that was wanting,
Which give us content in this life ;
He had horses and foxes for hunting,
Which many love more than a wife, —
With my fol-de-rol, tooral-i-lay!*

He had sung so far and was waving his pipe-stem for the chorus when the company looked up and saw Sal straddling in the doorway with her

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

fists on her hips. The sight daunted them for a moment: but she held up a finger, signing them to keep the news to themselves, and leaned her shoulder against the door-post with her eyes steady on the back of her husband's scrag neck. His fate was upon him, poor varmint, and on he went, as gleeful as a bird in a bath —

*He'd a garden so planted by natur'
As man can't produce in this life ;
But yet the all-wise great Creaytor
Perceived that he wanted a wife.
With his fol-de-rol, tooral-i-lay!*

“You chaps might be a bit heartier with the chorus,” he put in. “A man would almost think you was afraid of your wives overhearin’ —

*Old Adam was laid in a slumber,
And there he lost part of his side ;
And when he awoke in great wonder
He beyeld his beyautiful bride.*

With my fol-de-rol, tooral — why, whatever's wrong with 'ee all? You're as melancholy as a passel of gib-cats.” [And with that he caught the eye of a man seated opposite, and slewed slowly round to the door.]

I tell you that even Sal was forced to smile, and the rest, as you may suppose, rolled to and

fro and laughed till they cried. But when the landlord called for order and they hushed themselves to hear more, the woman had put on a face that made her husband quake.

“Go ahead, Hancock!” cried one or two. “With transport he gazèd ——’ Sing away, man!”

“I will not,” said the tailor, very sulky. “This here’s no fit place for women: and a man has his feelin’s. I’m astonished at you, Sarah — I reely am. The wife of a respectable tradesman!” But he couldn’t look her straight in the face.

“Why, what’s wrong with the company?” she asks, looking around. “Old, young, and middle-aged, I seem to know them all for Saltash men: faults, too, they have to my knowledge: but it passes me what I need to be afeared of. And only a minute since you was singing that your happiness wouldn’t be completed until that a helpmate you’d found. Well, you’ve found her: so sing ahead and be happy.”

“I will not,” says he, still stubborn.

“Oh, yes you will, my little man,” says she in a queer voice, which made him look up and sink his eyes again.

“Well,” says he, making the best of it, “to please the missus, naybours, we’ll sing the whole

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

randigal through. And, after that, Sarah" — here he pretended to look at her like one in command — "you'll walk home with me straight."

"You may lay to that," Sal promised him: and so, but in no very firm voice, he pitched to the song again —

*With transport he gazèd upon her,
His happiness then was compleat ;
And he blessèd the marvellous forethought
That on him bestowed such a mate —*

"I reckon, friends, we'll leave out the chorus!"

They wouldn't hear of this, but ri-tooralled away with a will, Sal watching them the while from the doorway with her eyebrows drawn down, like one lost in thought.

*She was not took out of his head,
To reign or to triumph o'er man ;
She was not took out of his feet,
By man to be tramped upon.*

*But she was took out of his side,
His equal and partner to be :
Though they be yunited in one,
Still the man is the top of the tree !
With my fol-de-rol, tooral-i-lay !*

"Well, and what's wrong wi' that?" Hancock wound up, feeling for his courage again.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“Get along with ’ee, you ninth-part-of-a-man! *Me* took out of *your* side!”

“Be that as it may, the Fish and Anchor is no place for discussing of it,” the man answered, very dignified. “Enough said, my dear! We’ll be getting along home.” He stood up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

But Sally was not to be budged. “I knew how ’twould be,” she spoke up, facing the company. “I took that preacher-fellow on the ground hop, as I thought, and stopped his nonsense; but something whispered to me that ’twas a false hope. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and now the mischief’s done. There’s no peace for Saltash till you men learn your place again, and I’m resolved to teach it to ’ee. You want to know how? Well, to start with, by means of a board and a piece o’ chalk, same as they teach at school nowadays.”

She stepped a pace further into the room, shut home the door behind her, and cast her eye over the ale-scores on the back of it. There were a dozen marks, maybe, set down against her own man’s name; but for the moment she offered no remark on this.

“Mr. Oke,” says she, turning to the landlord, “I reckon you never go without a piece o’ chalk



LANDLORD OKE GAVE A FLOURISH WITH HIS CHALK AND WROTE

www.libtool.com.cn

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

in your pocket. Step this way, if you please, and draw a line for me round what these lords of creation owe ye for drink. Thank'ee. And now be good enough to fetch a chair and stand 'pon it; I want you to reach so high as you can — Ready? Now take your chalk and write, beginning near the top o' the door: 'I, Sarah Hancock ——'"

Landlord Oke gave a flourish with his chalk and wrote, Sally dictating, —

“‘I, Sarah Hancock—do hereby challenge all the men in Saltash Borough—that me and five other females of the said Borough—will row any six of them any distance from one to six statute miles—and will beat their heads off—pulling either single oars or double paddles or in ran-dan—the stakes to be six pound aside. And I do further promise, if beaten, to discharge all scores below.’

“Now the date, please—and hand me the chalk.”

She reached up and signed her name bold and free, being a fair scholar. “And now, my little fellow,” says she, turning to her husband, “put down that pipe and come'st along home. The man's at the top of the tree, is he? You'll wish you were, if I catch you at any more tricks!”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

Well, at first the mankind at the Fish and Anchor allowed that Sal couldn't be in earnest; this challenge of hers was all braggadoshy; and one or two went so far as to say 'twould serve her right if she was taken at her word. In fact, no one treated it seriously until four days later, at high-water, when the folks that happened to be idling 'pon the Quay heard a splash off Runnell's boat-building yard, and, behold! off Runnell's slip there floated a six-oared gig, bright as a pin with fresh paint. 'Twas an old condemned gig, that had lain in his shed ever since he bought it for a song off the *Indefatigable* man-o'-war, though now she looked almost too smart to be the same boat. Sally had paid him to put in a couple of new strakes and plane out a brand-new set of oars in place of the old ashen ones, and had painted a new name beneath the old one on the sternboard, so that now she was the *Indefatigable Woman* for all the world to see. And that very evening Sally and five of her mates paddled her past the Quay on a trial spin, under the eyes of the whole town.

There was a deal of laughing up at the Fish and Anchor that night, the most of the customers still treating the affair as a joke. But Landlord Oke took a more serious view.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“’Tis all very well for you fellows to grin,” says he, “but I’ve been trying to make up in my mind the crew that’s going to beat these females, and, by George! I don’t find it so easy. There’s the boat, too.”

“French-built, and leaks like a five-barred gate,” said somebody. “The Admiralty condemned her five year’ ago.”

“A leak can be patched, and the Admiralty’s condemning goes for nothing in a case like this. I tell you that boat has handsome lines — handsome as you’d wish to see. You may lay to it that what Sal Hancock doesn’t know about a boat isn’t worth knowing.”

“All the same, I’ll warrant she never means to row a race in that condemned old tub. She’ve dragged it out just for practice, and painted it up to make a show. When the time comes — if ever it do — she’ll fit and borrow a new boat off one of the war-ships. We can do the same.”

“Granted that you can, there’s the question of the crew. Sal has her thwarts manned — or womanned, as you choose to put it — and maybe a dozen reserves to pick from in case of accident. She means business, I tell you. There’s Regatta not five weeks away, and pretty fools we shall look if she sends round the crier on Regatta Day

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

'O-yessing' to all the world that Saltash men can't raise a boat's crew to match a passel of females, and two of 'em" — he meant Mary Kitty Climo and Ann Pengelly — "mothers of long families."

They discussed it long and they discussed it close, and this way and that way, until at last Landlord Oke had roughed-out a crew. There was no trouble about a stroke. That thwart went *nem. con.* to a fellow called Seth Ede, that worked the ferry and had won prizes in his day all up and down the coast: indeed, the very Plymouth men had been afraid of him for two or three seasons before he gave up racing, which was only four years ago. Some doubted that old Roper Retallack, who farmed the ferry that year, would spare Seth on Regatta-day: but Oke undertook to arrange this. Thwart No. 4 went with no more dispute to a whackin' big waterman by the name of Tremenjous Hosken, very useful for his weight, though a trifle thick in the waist. As for strength, he could break a pint mug with one hand, creaming it between his fingers. Then there was Jago the Preventive man, light but wiry, and a very tricky wrestler: "a proper angle-twitch of a man," said one of the company; "stank* 'pon both ends of 'en, he'll

* Stank = tread.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

rise up in the middle and laugh at 'ee." So they picked Jago for boat-oar. For No. 5, after a little dispute, they settled on Tippet Harry, a boat-builder working in Runnell's yard, by reason that he'd often pulled behind Ede in the double-sculling, and might be trusted to set good time to the bow-side. Nos. 2 and 3 were not so easily settled, and they discussed and put aside half a score before offering one of the places to a long-legged youngster whose name I can't properly give you: he was always called Freckly-Faced Joe, and worked as a saddler's apprentice. In the end he rowed 2: but No. 3 they left vacant for the time, while they looked around for likely candidates.

Landlord Oke made no mistake when he promised that Sally meant business. Two days later she popped her head in at his bar-parlour—'twas in the slack hours of the afternoon, and he happened to be sitting there all by himself, tipping a sheaf of churchwarden clays with sealing-wax—and says she—

“What's the matter with your menkind?”

“Restin,’” says Oke with a grin. “I don't own 'em, missus; but, from what I can hear, they're restin' and recoverin' their strength.”

“I've brought you the stakes from our side,”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

says Sally, and down she slaps a five-pound note and a sovereign upon the table.

“Take ’em up, missus — take ’em up. I don’t feel equal to the responsibility. This here’s a public challenge, hey?”

“The publicker the better.”

“Then we’ll go to the Mayor about it and ask his Worship to hold the stakes.” Oke was chuckling to himself all this while, the reason being that he’d managed to bespeak the loan of a six-oared galley belonging to the Water-Guard, and, boat for boat, he made no doubt she could show her heels to the *Indefatigable Woman*. He unlocked his strong-box, took out and pocketed a bag of money, and reached his hat off its peg. “I suppose ’twouldn’t do to offer you my arm?” says he.

“Folks would talk, Mr. Oke — thanking you all the same.”

So out they went, and down the street side by side, and knocked at the Mayor’s door. The Mayor was taking a nap in his back-parlour with a handkerchief over his face. He had left business soon after burying his wife, who had kept him hard at work at the cheesemongering, and now he could sleep when he chose. But he woke up very politely to attend to his visitors’ business.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“Yes, for sure, I’ll hold the stakes,” said he: “and I’ll see it put in big print on the Regatta-bill. It ought to attract a lot of visitors. But lor’ bless you, Mr. Oke! — if you win, it’ll do *me* no good. She” — meaning his wife — “has gone to a land where I’ll never be able to crow over her.”

“Your Worship makes sure, I see, that we women are going to beat?” put in Sal.

“Tut-tut!” says the Mayor. “They’ve booked Seth Ede for stroke.” And with that he goes very red in the gills and turns to Landlord Oke. “But perhaps I oughtn’t to have mentioned that?” says he.

“Well,” says Sal, “you’ve a-let the cat out of the bag, and I see that all you men in the town are in league. But a challenge is a challenge, and I mustn’t go back on it.” Indeed, in her secret heart she was cheerful, knowing the worst, and considering it none so bad: and after higgling a bit, just to deceive him, she took pretty well all the conditions of the race as Oke laid ’em down. A tearing long course it was to be, too, and pretty close on five miles: start from nearabouts where the training-ship lays now, down to a mark-boat somewheres off Torpoint, back, and finish off Saltash Quay.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“My dears,” she said to her mates later on, “I don’t mind telling you I was all of a twitter, first-along, wondering what card that man Oke was holding back — he looked so sly and so sure of hisself. But if he’ve no better card to play than Seth Ede, we can sleep easy.”

“Seth Ede’s a powerful strong oar,” Bess Rablin objected.

“*Was*, you mean. He’ve a-drunk too much beer these four years past to last over a five-mile course; let be that never was his distance. And here’s another thing: they’ve picked Tremenjous Hosken for one th’art.”

“And he’s as strong as a bullock.”

“I dessay: but Seth Ede pulls thirty-eight or thirty-nine to the minute all the time he’s racing — never a stroke under. I’ve watched him a score o’ times. If you envy Hosken his inside after two miles o’ *that*, you must be like Pomery’s pig — in love with pain. They’ve hired or borrowed the Preventive boat, I’m told; and it’s the best they could do. She’s new, and she looks pretty. She’ll drag aft if they put their light weights in the bows: still, she’s a good boat. I’m not afeared of her, though. From all I can hear, the *Woman* was known for speed in her time, all through the fleet. You can *feel* she’s fast,

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

and *see* it, if you've half an eye: and the way she travels between the strokes is a treat. The Mounseers can build boats. But oh, my dears, you'll have to pull and stay the course, or in Saltash the women take second place for ever!"

"Shan't be worse off than other women, even if that happens," said Rebecca Tucker, that was but a year married and more than half in love with her man. Sally had been in two minds about promoting Rebecca to the bow-oar in place of Ann Pengelly, that had been clipping the stroke short in practice: but after that speech she never gave the woman another thought.

Next evening the men brought out their opposition boat — she was called the *Nonpareil* — and tried a spin in her. They had found a man for No. 3 oar — another of the Water-Guard, by name Mick Guppy and by nation Irish, which Sal swore to be unfair. She didn't lodge any complaint, however: and when her mates called out that 'twas taking a mean advantage, all she'd say was: "Saltash is Saltash, my dears; and I won't go to maintain that a Saltash crew is any-ways improved by a chap from Dundalk."

So no protest was entered. I needn't tell you that, by this time, news of the great race had spread to Plymouth, and north away to Callington

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

and all the country round. Crowds came out every evening to watch the two boats at their practising; and sometimes, as they passed one another, Seth Ede, who had the reputation for a wag, would call out to Sal and offer her the odds by way of chaff. Sal never answered. The woman was in deadly earnest, and moreover, I daresay, a bit timmersome, now that the whole Borough had its eyes on her, and defeat meant disgrace.

She never showed a sign of any doubt, though; and when the great day came, she surpassed herself by the way she dressed. I daresay you've noticed that when women take up a man's job they're inclined to overdo it; and when Sal came down that day with a round tarpaulin-hat stuck on the back of her head, and her hair plaited in a queue like a Jack Tar's, her spiteful little husband fairly danced.

"'Tis onwomanly," said he. "Go upstairs and take it off!"

"Ch't," said she, "if you're so much upset by a tarpaulin-hat, you've had a narra escape; for 'tis nothing to the costume I'd a mind to wear — and I'd a mind to make you measure the whole crew for it."

And as it was, I'm told, half the sightseers that

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

poured into Saltash that day in their hundreds couldn't tell the women's crew from the men's by their looks or their dress. And these be the names and weights, more or less —

The *Indefatigable Woman*: Bow, Ann Pengelly, something under eleven stone; No. 2, Thomasine Oliver, ditto; No. 3, Mary Kitty Climo, eleven and a half; No. 4, Long Eliza, thirteen and over, a woman very heavy in the bone; No. 5, Bess Rablin, twelve stone, most of it in the ribs and shoulders; Stroke, Sarah Hancock, twelve stone four; Coxswain, Ann Pengelly's fourth daughter Wilhelmina, weight about six stone. The *Indefatigable Woman* carried a small distaff in the bows, and her crew wore blue jerseys and yellow handkerchiefs.

The *Nonpareil*: Bow, T. Jago, ten stone and a little over; No. 2, Freckly-faced Joe, twelve stone; No. 3, M. Guppy, twelve stone and a half; No. 4, Tremenjous Hosken, eighteen stone ten; No. 5, Tippet Harry, twelve stone eight; Stroke, Seth Ede, eleven six. And I don't know who the boy was that steered. The *Nonpareil* carried a red, white, and blue flag, and her crew wore striped jerseys, white and blue.

They were started by pistol; and Seth Ede, jumping off with a stroke of forty to the minute,

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

went ahead at once. In less than twenty strokes he was clear, the *Nonpareil* lifting forward in great heaves that made the spectators tell each other that though 'twas no race they had seen something for their money. They didn't see how sweetly the other boat held her way between the strokes, nor note that Sally had started at a quiet thirty-four, the whole crew reaching well out and keeping their blades covered to the finish — coming down to the stroke steadily, too, though a stiffish breeze was with them as well as the tide.

I suppose the longest lead held by the *Nonpareil* during the race was a good forty yards. She must have won this within four minutes of starting, and for half a mile or so she kept it. Having so much in hand, Ede slowed down — for flesh and blood couldn't keep up such a rate of striking over the whole course — and at once he found out his mistake. The big man Hosken, who had been pulling with his arms only, and pulling like a giant, didn't understand swinging out; tried it, and was late on stroke every time. This flurried Ede, who was always inclined to hurry the pace, and he dropped slower yet — dropped to thirty-five, maybe, a rate at which he did himself no justice, bucketting forward fast,

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

and waiting over the beginning till he'd missed it. In discontent with himself he quickened again; but now the oars behind him were like a peal of bells. By sheer strength they forced the boat along somehow, and with the tide under her she travelled. But the *Indefatigable Woman* by this time was creeping up.

They say that Sally rowed that race at thirty-four from the start to within fifty yards of the finish; rowed it minute after minute without once quickening or once dropping a stroke. Folks along shore timed her with their watches. If that's the truth, 'twas a marvellous feat, and the woman accounted for it afterwards by declaring that all the way she scarcely thought for one second of the other boat, but set her stroke to a kind of tune in her head, saying the same verse over and over —

But she was took out of his side,

His equal and partner to be :

Though they be yunited in one,

Still the man is the top of the tree !

With my fol-de-rol, tooral-i-lay — We'll see about that !

The *Indefatigable Woman* turned the mark not more than four lengths astern. They had wind and tide against them now, and with her crew swinging out slow and steady, pulling the stroke

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

clean through with a hard finish, she went up hand-over-fist. The blades of the *Nonpareil* were knocking up water like a moorhen. Tremulous Hosken had fallen to groaning between the strokes, and I believe that from the mark-boat homeward he was no better than a passenger — an eighteen-stone passenger, mind you. The only man to keep it lively was little Jago at bow, and Seth Ede — to do him justice — pulled a grand race for pluck. He might have spared himself, though. Another hundred yards settled it: the *Indefatigable Woman* made her overlap and went by like a snake, and the Irishman pulled in his oar and said —

“Well, Heaven bless the leddies, anyway!”

Seth Ede turned round and swore at him vicious-like, and he fell to rowing again: but the whole thing had become a procession. “Eyes in the boat!” commanded Sal, pulling her crew together as they caught sight of their rivals for the first time and, for a stroke or two, let the time get ragged. She couldn’t help a lift in her voice, though, any more than she could help winding up with a flourish as they drew level with Saltash town, a good hundred yards ahead, and heard the band playing and the voices cheering. “Look out for the quicken!” — and up went a great roar

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

as the women behind her picked the quicken up and rattled past the Quay and the winning-gun at forty to the minute!

They had just strength enough left to toss oars: and then they leaned forward with their heads between their arms, panting and gasping out, "Well rowed, Sal!" "Oh — oh — well rowed all!" and letting the delight run out of them in little sobs of laughter. The crowd ashore, too, was laughing and shouting itself hoarse. I'm sorry to say a few of them jeered at the *Nonpareil* as she crawled home: but, on the whole, the men of Saltash took their beating handsome.

This don't include Sal's husband, though. Landlord Oke was one of the first to shake her by the hand as she landed, and the Mayor turned over the stakes to her there and then with a neat little speech. But Tailor Hancock went back home with all kinds of ugliness and uncharitableness working in his little heart. He cursed Regatta Day for an interruption to trade, and Saltash for a town given up to idleness and folly. A man's business in this world was to toil for his living in the sweat of his brow; and so, half-an-hour later, he told his wife.

The crowd had brought her along to her house-door: and there she left 'em with a word or two

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

of thanks, and went in very quiet. Her victory had uplifted her, of course; but she knew that her man would be sore in his feelings, and she meant to let him down gently. She'd have done it, too, if he'd met her in the ordinary way: but when, after searching the house, she looked into the little back workshop and spied him seated on the bench there, cross-legged and solemn as an idol, stitching away at a waistcoat, she couldn't hold back a grin.

"Why, whatever's the matter with you?" she asked.

"Work," says he, in a hollow voice. "Work is the matter. I can't see a house — and one that used to be a happy home — go to rack and ruin without some effort to prevent it."

"I wouldn't begin on Regatta Day, if I was you," says Sal cheerfully. "Has old Smithers been inquiring again about that waistcoat?"

"He have not."

"Then he's a patient man: for to my knowledge this is the third week you've been putting him off with excuses."

"I thank the Lord," says her husband piously, "that more work gets put on me than I can keep pace with. And well it is, when a man's wife takes to waging and betting and pulling in low

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

boat-races to the disgrace of her sex. *Someone* must keep the roof over our heads: but the end may come sooner than you expect," says he, and winds up with a tolerable imitation of a hacking cough.

"I took three pairs of soles and a brill in the trammel this very morning; and if you've put a dozen stitches in that old waistcoat, 'tis as much as ever! I can see in your eye that you know all about the race; and I can tell from the state of your back that you watched it from the Quay, and turned into the Sailor's Return for a drink. Hockaday got taken in over that blue-wash for his walls: it comes off as soon as you rub against it."

"I'll trouble you not to spy upon my actions, Madam," says he.

"Man alive, *I* don't mind your taking a glass now and then in reason — specially on Regatta Day! And as for the Sailor's Return, 'tis a respectable house. I hope so, anyhow, for we've ordered supper there to-night."

"Supper! You've ordered supper at the Sailor's Return?"

Sal nodded. "Just to celebrate the occasion. We thought, first-along, of the Green Dragon: but the Dragon's too grand a place for ease, and

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

Bess allowed 'twould look like showing off. She voted for cosiness: so the Sailor's Return it is, with roast ducks and a boiled leg of mutton and plain gin-and-water." www.libtool.com.cn

"Settin' yourselves up to be men, I s'pose?" he sneered.

"Not a bit of it," answered Sal. "There'll be no speeches."

She went off to the kitchen, put on the kettle, and made him a dish of tea. In an ordinary way she'd have paid no heed to his tantrums: but just now she felt very kindly disposed t'wards everybody, and really wished to chat over the race with him — treating it as a joke now that her credit was saved, and never offering to crow over him. But the more she fenced about to be agreeable the more he stitched and sulked.

"Well, I can't miss *all* the fun," said she at last: and so, having laid supper for him, and put the jug where he could find it and draw his cider, she clapped on her hat and strolled out.

He heard her shut-to the front door, and still he went on stitching. When the dusk began to fall he lit a candle, fetched himself a jugful of cider, and went back to his work. For all the notice Sal was ever likely to take of his perversity, he might just as well have stepped out into the

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

streets and enjoyed himself: but he was wrought up into that mood in which a man will hurt himself for the sake of having a grievance. All the while he stitched he kept thinking, "Look at me here, galling my fingers to the bone, and that careless fly-by-night wife o' mine carousin' and gallivantin' down at the Sailor's Return! Maybe she'll be sorry for it when I'm dead and gone; but at present if there's an injured, misunderstood poor mortal in Saltash Town, I'm that man." So he went on, until by-and-by, above the noise of the drum and cymbals outside the penny theatre, and the hurdy-gurdies, and the showmen bawling down by the waterside, he heard voices yelling and a rush of folks running down the street past his door. He knew they had been baiting a bull in a field at the head of the town, and, the thought coming into his head that the animal must have broken loose, he hopped off his bench, ran fore to the front door, and peeked his head out cautious-like.

What does he see coming down the street in the dusk but half-a-dozen sailor-men with an officer in charge! Of course he knew the meaning of it at once. 'Twas a press-gang off one of the ships in Hamoaze or the Sound, that was choosing Regatta Night to raid the streets and

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

had landed at the back of the town and climbed over the hill to take the crowds by surprise. They'd made but a poor fist of this, by reason of the officer letting his gang get out of hand at the start; and by their gait 'twas pretty plain they had collared a plenty of liquor up the street. But while Hancock peeped out, taking stock of them, a nasty monkey-notion crept into his head, and took hold of all his spiteful little nature; and says he, pushing the door a bit wider as the small officer — he was little taller than a midshipman — came swearing by —

“Beg your pardon, Sir!”

“You'd best take in your head and close the door upon it,” snaps the little officer. “These fools o' mine have got their shirts out, and are liable to make mistakes to-night.”

“What, *me?* — a poor tailor with a hackin' cough!” But to himself: “So much the better,” he says, and up he speaks again. “Beggin' your pardon humbly, commander; but I might put you in the way of the prettiest haul. There's a gang of chaps enjoyin' theirselves down at the Sailor's Return, off the Quay, and not a 'protection' among them. Fine lusty fellows, too! They might give your men a bit of trouble to start with ——”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“Why are you telling me this?” the officer interrupts, suspicious-like.

“That’s my affair,” says Hancock boldly, seeing that he nibbled. “Put it down to love o’ my country, if you like; and take my advice or leave it, just as you please. I’m not asking for money, so you won’t be any the poorer.”

“Off the Quay, did you say? Has the house a quay-door?”

“It has: but you needn’t to trouble about that. They can’t escape that way, I promise you, having no boat alongside.”

The little officer turned and whispered for a while with two of the soberest of his gang: and presently these whispered to two more, and the four of them marched away up the hill.

“‘*HANCOCK — TAILOR,*’” reads out the officer aloud, stepping back into the roadway and peering up at the shop-front. “Very well, my man, you’ll hear from us again ——”

“I’m not askin’ for any reward, Sir.”

“So you’ve said: and I was about to say that, if this turns out to be a trick, you’ll hear from us again, and in a way you’ll be sorry for. And now, once more, take your ugly head inside. ’Tis my duty to act on information, but I don’t love informers.”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

For the moment the threat made the tailor uncomfortable: but he felt pretty sure the sailors, when they discovered the trick, wouldn't be able to do him much harm. The laugh of the whole town would be against them: and on Regatta Night the press — unpopular enough at the best of times — would gulp down the joke and make the best of it. He went back to his bench; but on second thoughts not to his work. 'Twould be on the safe side, anyway, to be not at home for an hour or two, in case the sailors came back to cry quits: playing the lonely martyr, too, wasn't much fun with this mischief working inside of him and swelling his lungs like barm.* He took a bite of bread and a sup of cider, blew out the candle, let himself forth into the street after a glance to make sure that all was clear, and headed for the Fish and Anchor.

He found the bar-room crowded, but not with the usual Regatta Night throng of all-sorts. The drinkers assembled were either burgesses like himself or waterside men with protection-papers in their pockets: for news of the press-gang had run through the town like wildfire, and the company had given over discussing the race of the day and taken up with this new subject.

* Barm = yeast.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

Among the protected men his eye lit on Treleven the hoveller, husband to Long Eliza, and Caius Pengelly, husband to Ann, that had pulled bow in the race. He winked to them mightily cunning. The pair of 'em seemed dreadfully cast down, and he knew a word to put them in heart again.

“Terrible blow for us, mates, this woman’s mutiny!” says he, dropping into a chair careless-like, pulling out a short pipe, and speaking high to draw the company’s attention.

“Oh, stow it!” says Caius Pengelly, very sour. “We’d found suthin’ else to talk about; and if the women have the laugh of us to-day, who’s responsible, after all? Why, you — *you*, with your darned silly song about Adam and Eve. If you hadn’t provoked your wife, this here wouldn’t ha’ happened.”

“Indeed?” says the monkey-fellow, crossing his legs and puffing. “So you’ve found something better to talk about? What’s that, I’d like to know?”

“Why, there’s a press-gang out,” says Treleven. “But there! a fellow with your shaped legs don’t take no interest in press-gangs, I reckon.”

“Ah, to be sure,” says the little man — but he

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

wincing and uncrossed his legs all the same, feeling sorry he'd made 'em so conspicuous — “ah, to be sure, a press-gang! I met 'em; but, as it happens, that's no change of subject.”

“Us don't feel in no mood to stomach your fun to-night, Hancock; and so I warn 'ee,” put in Pengelly, who had been drinking more than usual and spoke thick. “If you've a meaning up your sleeve, you'd best shake it out.”

Hancock chuckled. “You fellows have no invention,” he said; “no resource at all, as I may call it. You stake on this race, and, when the women beat you, you lie down and squeal. Well, you may thank me that I'm built different: I bide my time, but when the clock strikes I strike with it. I never did approve of women dressing man-fashion: but what's the use of making a row in the house? ‘The time is bound to come,’ said I to myself; and come it has. If you want a good story cut short, I met the press-gang just now and turned 'em on to raid the Sailor's Return: and if by to-morrow the women down there have any crow over us, then I'm a Dutchman, that's all!”

“Bejimbers, Hancock,” says Treleaven, standing up and looking uneasy, “you carry it far, I must say!”

“Far? A jolly good joke, *I* should call it,”

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

answers Hancock, making bold to cross his legs again.

And with that there comes a voice crying pillaloo in the passage outside; and, without so much as a knock, a woman runs in with a face like a sheet — Sam Hockaday's wife, from the Sailor's Return.

“Oh, Mr. Oke — Mr. Oke, whatever is to be done! The press has collared Sally Hancock and all her gang! Some they've kilt, and wounded others, and all they've a-bound and carried off and shipped at the quay-door. Oh, Mr. Oke, our house is ruined for ever!”

The men gazed at her with their mouths open. Hancock found his legs somehow; but they shook under him, and all of a sudden he felt himself turning white and sick.

“You don't mean to tell me ——” he began.

But Pengelly rounded on him and took him by the ear so that he squeaked. “Where's my wife, you miserable joker, you?” demanded Pengelly.

“They c-can't be in earnest!”

“You'll find that I am,” said Pengelly, feeling in his breeches-pocket, and drawing out a clasp-knife almost a foot long. “What's the name of the ship?”

“I — I don't know! I never inquired! Oh,

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

please let me go, Mr. Pengelly! Han't I got my feelings, same as yourself?"

"There's a score of vessels atween this and Cawsand," put in Treleven, catching his breath like a man hit in the wind, "and half-a-dozen of 'em ready to weigh anchor any moment. There's naught for it but to take a boat and give chase."

Someone suggested that Sal's own boat, the *Indefatigable Woman*, would be lying off Runnell's Yard; and down to the waterside they all ran, Pengelly gripping the tailor by the arm. They found the gig moored there on a frape, dragged her to shore, and tumbled in. Half-a-dozen men seized and shipped the oars: the tailor crouched himself in the stern-sheets. Voices from shore sang out all manner of different advice: but 'twas clear that no one knew which way the press-boat had taken, nor to what ship she belonged.

To Hancock 'twas all like a sick dream. He hated the water; he had on his thinnest clothes; the night began to strike damp and chilly, with a lop of tide running up from Hamoaze and the promise of worse below. Pengelly, who had elected himself captain, swore to hail every ship he came across: and he did — though from the first he met with no encouragement. "Ship, ahoy!" he shouted, coming down with a rush upon

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

the stern-windows of the first and calling to all to hold water. "Ahoy! Ship!"

A marine poked his head over the taffrail. "Ship it is," said he. "And what may be the matter with you?"

"Be you the ship that has walked off with half-a-dozen women from Saltash?"

The marine went straight off and called the officer of the watch, "Boat-load of drunk chaps under our stern, Sir," says he, saluting. "Want to know if we've carried off half-a-dozen women from Saltash."

"Empty a bucket of slops on 'em," said the officer of the watch, "and tell 'em, with my compliments, that we haven't."

The marine saluted, hunted up a slop-bucket, and poured it over with the message. "If you want to know more, try the guard-ship," said he.

"That's all very well, but where in thunder *be* the guard-ship?" said poor Pengelly, scratching his head.

Everyone knew, but everyone differed by something between a quarter and half a mile. They tried ship after ship, getting laughter from some and abuse from others. And now, to make matters worse, the wind chopped and blew up from the sou'-west, with a squall of rain and a

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

wobble of sea that tried Hancock's stomach sorely. At one time they went so far astray in the dark as to hail one of the prison-hulks, and only sheered off when the sentry challenged and brought his musket down upon the bulwarks with a rattle. A little later, off Torpoint, they fell in with the water-police, who took them for a party rowing home to Plymouth from the Regatta, and threatened 'em with the lock-up if they didn't proceed quiet. Next they fell foul of the guard-ship, and their palaver fetched the Admiral himself out upon the little balcony in his nightshirt. When he'd done talking they were a hundred yards off, and glad of it.

Well, Sir, they tried ship after ship, the blessed night through, till hope was nigh dead in them, and their bodies ached with weariness and hunger. Long before they reached Devil's Point the tumble had upset Hancock's stomach completely. He had lost his oar; somehow it slipped off between the thole-pins, and in his weakness he forgot to cry out that 'twas gone. It drifted away in the dark — the night all round was black as your hat, the squalls hiding the stars — and he dropped off his thwart upon the bottom-boards. "I'm a dying man," he groaned, "and I don't care. I don't care how soon it comes!

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

'Tis all over with me, and I shall never see my dear Sally no more!"

So they tossed till day broke and showed Drake's Island ahead of them, and the whole Sound running with a tidy send of sea from the south'ard, grey and forlorn. Some were for turning back, but Pengelly wouldn't hear of it. "We must make Cawsand Bay," says he, "if it costs us our lives. Maybe we'll find half-a-dozen ships anchored there and ready for sea."

So away for Cawsand they pulled, hour after hour, Hancock all the while wanting to die, and wondering at the number of times an empty man could answer up to the call of the sea.

The squalls had eased soon after daybreak, and the sky cleared and let through the sunshine as they opened the bay and spied two sloops-of-war and a frigate riding at anchor there. Pulling near with the little strength left in them, they could see that the frigate was weighing for sea. She had one anchor lifted and the other chain shortened in: her top-sails and topgallant sails were cast off, ready to cant her at the right moment for hauling in. An officer stood ready by the crew manning the capstan, and right aft two more officers were pacing back and forth with their hands clasped under their coat-tails.

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“Lord!” groaned Pengelly, “if my poor Ann’s aboard of she, we’ll never catch her!” He sprang up in the stern-sheets and hailed with all his might.

Small enough chance had his voice of reaching her, the wind being dead contrary: and yet for the moment it looked as if the two officers aft had heard; for they both stepped to the ship’s side, and one put up a telescope and handed it to the other. And still the crew of the gig, staring over their shoulders while they pulled weakly, could see the men by the capstan standing motionless and waiting for orders.

“Seems a’most as if they were expectin’ somebody,” says Pengelly with a sudden hopefulness: and with that Treleven, that was pulling stroke, casts his eyes over his right shoulder and gives a gasp.

“Good Lord, look!” says he. “The tender!”

And sure enough, out of the thick weather rolling up away over Bovisand they spied now a Service cutter bearing across close-hauled, leaning under her big tops’l and knocking up the water like ginger-beer with the stress of it. When first sighted she couldn’t have been much more than a mile distant, and, pull as they did with the remains of their strength, she crossed their bows

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

a good half-mile ahead, taking in tops'1 as she fetched near the frigate.

"Use your eyes — oh, use your eyes!" called out Pengelly: but no soul could they see on her besides two or three of the crew forward and a little officer standing aft beside the helmsman. Pengelly ran forward, leaping the thwarts, and fetched the tailor a rousing kick. "Sit up!" he ordered, "and tell us if that's the orficer you spoke to last night!"

The poor creature hoisted himself upon his thwart, looking as yellow as a bad egg. "I — I think that's the man," said he, straining his eyes, and dropped his head overside.

"Pull for your lives, boys," shouted Pengelly. And they did pull, to the last man. They pulled so that they reached the frigate just as the tender, having run up in the wind and fallen alongside, began uncovering hatches.

Two officers were leaning overside and watching — and a couple of the tender's crew were reaching down their arms into the hold. They were lifting somebody through the hatchway, and the body they lifted clung for a moment to the hatchway coaming, to steady itself.

"Sally!" screamed a voice from the gig.

The little officer in the stern of the tender cast

a glance back at the sound and knew the tailor at once. He must have owned sharp sight, that man.

“Oh, you’ve come for your money, have you?” says he. And, looking up at the two officers overhead, he salutes, saying: “We’ve made a tidy haul, Sir — thanks to that man.”

“I don’t want your money. I want my wife!” yelled Hancock.

“And I mine!” yelled Pengelly.

“And I mine!” yelled Treleaven.

By this time the gig had fallen alongside the tender, and the women in the tender’s hold were coming up to daylight, one by one. Sal herself stood watching the jail-delivery; and first of all she blinked a bit, after the darkness below, and next she let out a laugh, and then she reached up a hand and began unplaiting her pigtail.

“Be you the Captain of this here ship?” asks she, looking up and addressing herself to one of the officers leaning overside.

“Yes, my man; this here’s the *Ranger* frigate, and I’m her Captain. I’m sorry for you — it goes against my grain to impress men in this fashion: but the law’s the law, and we’re ready for sea, and if you’ve any complaints to make I hope you’ll cut’em short.”

www.libtool.com.cn



THE LITTLE OFFICER HAD TURNED WHITE AS A SHEET

YE SEXES, GIVE EAR!

“I don’t know,” says Sal, “that I’ve any complaints to make, except that I was born a woman. That I went on to marry that pea-green tailor yonder is my own fault, and we’ll say no more about it.”

By this time all the women on the tender was following Sal’s example and unshredding their back-hair. By this time, too, every man aboard the frigate was gathered at the bulwarks, looking down in wonderment. There beneath ’em stood a joke too terrible to be grasped in one moment.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Rogers,” says the Captain in a voice cold as a knife, “but you appear to have made a mistake.”

The little officer had turned white as a sheet: but he managed to get in his say before the great laugh came. “I have, Sir, to my sorrow,” says he, turning viciously on Hancock; “a mistake to be cast up against me through my career. But I reckon,” he adds, “I leave the punishment for it in good hands.” He glanced at Sally.

“You may lay to that, young man!” says she heartily. “You may lay to that every night when you says your prayers.”

www.libtool.com.cn

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

I

A PHILOSOPHICAL man will go far before he discover a pastime more grateful or better soothing to his mind than painting in water-colours. I have heard angling preached up for a better; and when I answered on behalf of water-colours that it does not matter how ill you do it, was replied to that the same holds with angling if cheerfully practised. Well, then, at angling I make a cast and hitch my line over a bough, or it drops into some thicket, and thereat how can a man keep tranquil? No, no: I had liefer stain paper any day of the week.

On Saturday afternoon, the 10th of August, 1644 — a very fair hot day — while I sat in the pleasant shady church of Boconnoc, near by Lord Mohun's house in Cornwall, copying down the writings on the monuments and the scutcheons in the windows in their right colours, it came into

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

my mind to consider much that had happened to me in two years: how that fate had made a soldier of me, a plain Essex squire; how that, not content, it had promoted me to command a troop in his Majesty's regiment of horse; how that I, who had often desired to visit Cornwall for the sake of its ancient monuments, but had never thought (being by habit lethargic) to make so far a journey, was not only arrived there, but had leisure to follow my studies amid the fret and drilling of a great army.

Yet it was all very simple. On the 1st of August we had marched with his Majesty across the passes of the Tamar, the Earl of Essex giving ground before us and daily withdrawing his forces closer around Fowey; where, having a good harbour, he could easily fetch his victuals in from the sea. I will not tell how little by little we prevented him, and at last, surprising a fort by the harbour's entry, cut him off from aid of his shipping. All this was to come. Meanwhile, though pent in a few miles of ground, he had a fair back-door for his needs. The campaign was brought to a lock, and for almost two weeks we pushed matters half-heartedly; I believe, because the King had hopes of bringing the enemy to terms. Many letters came and went by trumpet;

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

but in our camp on the moors over Boconnoc we did little from day to day save meet and picquer with small bodies of the rebel horse.

My duties giving me leisure, I turned to recreation; and Lord! how good it seemed to be antiquary again after two years of soldiering! That afternoon I played with my box of paints as a child who comes home for his first holidays, and takes down his familiar toys from the shelf. "Let others," said I, forgetting all the distractions of our poor realm of England, "let others have the making of history so I may keep the enjoying of it!" They were famous scutcheons, too, that I sat a-copying, the Mohuns having been Earls of Somerset, Lords of Dunster, and a great family in their day. Mohun, indeed, had come with the Conqueror —

*Le viel William de Moion
Ont avec li maint compaignon,*

said the rhyme, as I remembered: and, behold! a fair monument against the north wall of the chancel (where I began) carried the royal coat of England and France with a label, impaling the ground *or* and engrailed cross *sable* of the Mohuns — this for a Philippa of their house that married with Edward, Duke of York, slain at Agincourt:

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

and, beside it, Courtenay's three torteaux and FitzWilliam's three bendlets, Bevill and Brewer, Strange and Redvers, a coat *vert* with three bucks' heads having their antlers depressed (which I took for Hayre), and another coat to set an antiquary thinking, for it bore *azure* a bend *or*, with a label of three points *gules*. "Scrope or Grosvenor," said I to myself, looking up from my work towards the East windows, where the same scutcheon was repeated. "I wonder which claims you in these parts."

The shield that bore this famous device had it quartered on the sinister side with Courtenay and Redvers; and impaling these on the dexter side were, quarterly: (1) A space patched with clear glass (originally Mohun, no doubt); (2) *Vert* three stags' heads *or* (?Hayre); (3) *azure* three bendlets *or* (FitzWilliam); (4) a device which again puzzled me. It seemed to be an arm habited in a maunch, or sleeve, *ermine*, holding in the hand a golden flower.

Now while I painted, an old man had been moving about the far end of the church, whom I took for the sexton. I had passed him in the churchyard outside, when he was scything down the grass upon a grave; and had noted no more of his back than that he wore the clothes of a

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

hind with a scrap of sacking over his shoulders — nor perhaps would have noted so much as this, had not his clothing seemed over-warm for the time of year. www.libtool.com.cn

But now, while I stood conning the coats in the East window, he drew towards me and spoke, stretching forward a hand timidly, almost touching my elbow.

“Sir,” said he, and his voice and face bore instant witness together of gentle birth, “I am gladly at your service if anything there perplex you.” With that he nodded towards the coats-of-arms.

In a trice I had recovered myself. “Then you, too, have a taste for such trifles?” answered I. “We are well met, Sir.”

He shook his head, avoiding my look. You might have called his a noble face, but more than anything else it was patient. “I belong to these parts,” said he; “and would ask a stranger to use my small knowledge: but, for myself, all such things may pass with me into oblivion, and I say ‘Amen.’”

Said I then, “Maybe you can tell me of that coat in the fourth quarter dexter — the hand grasping a gold fleur-de-lys.”

“Willingly,” said he. “That is another device

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

of the Mohuns, who in later times changed it for the sable cross engrailed. At the first they bore a man's hand in a sleeve: the flower it grasps came to them in this way: There was a certain Reginald Mohun, Lord of Dunster, who gave himself entirely to good works and founded a great abbey at Newenham, on the Somerset border. That was in Henry the Third's time — I think in twelve hundred and forty-six or, maybe, fifty. Having seen his abbey consecrated, he passed to the Court of Rome, which in those days was held at Lyons, to have his charters confirmed, and he happened there in Lent, when the Pope's custom was, on a day after hearing *Laetare Jerusalem*, to give a rose or flower of gold to the most honourable man then to be found at his court. They made inquiry that year and found the most honourable to be this Reginald Mohun, of whom the Pope asked what rank he bore in England. Mohun answered, 'a plain Knight bachelor.' 'Fair son,' said the Pope, 'hardly can I give you then this flower, which has never been given to one below a King or a Duke, or, at least, an Earl; therefore we will that you shall be Earl of Este' — which, as you know, is Somerset. Mohun answered, 'Holy Father, I have not wherewithal to maintain that title.' So the Pope

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

gave him two hundred marks a year out of the Peter's pence; and so the Mohuns added golden flowers to their arms."

www.libtool.com.cn

"I thank you, Sir," said I. "But whose is this other noble coat of *azure* with the bend *or*? Did Grosvenor ever wed in these parts? Or Scrope?"

"Neither," said he. "That coat is mine."

"Yours?" I cried, surprised out of good manners. "But this, Sir, is the very coat over which Scrope and Grosvenor contended."

"Any are welcome to it now," he answered. "But it is Carminowe, and I am Carminowe."

"I ought to have known of a third claimant," said I, musing. "I have indeed heard of Carminowe: but I had thought the family to be long since perished."

He drew back a little and scanned me. "*Finis rerum*," said he quietly. "It comes to all; but sometimes it lingers, and — as with me — lingers overlong. I believe, Sir, that you are a Captain in his Majesty's Troop, and will have seen your share of fighting and of life in camp. Your present occupation proves you to be a contemplative man. Will you answer if I put to you a question or two?"

"Willingly," said I.

"You are unmarried?"

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

“I am.”

“And you volunteered for the King's service in a hot-fit of loyalty; or maybe in a hot-fit of indignation at the perils threatening him, or against the insolence of Parliament? You had come to an age when with cooling judgment these fits grow rare, yet have not quite given over their patient to the calm of middle life. — You will tell me if I guess amiss?”

“But on the contrary, Sir,” said I; “you have read me correctly. 'Twas in a passion of loyalty that I took up arms.”

“And in the quest of it,” he went on, “you fancied that all the currents of your nature had been swept into a fresh channel; that you were a new man; that this upheaving strife altered the face of all things, and you along with it.”

“Why, and so it has!” cried I.

“Nay, but think awhile! You have marched and countermarched for — how long? — two years? — two years of that period of life when honest thoughtful men turn to making account with themselves, try to learn why they were sent into the world and what to do, observe the hopes and ambitions of their fellows, prove their own limits, and so set up their rest against old age and death. You rode from home under a sudden

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

persuasion that your business in the world, and the business of all these thousands of different men, was to defend his Majesty. How long this persuasion held you I will not guess; yet I do not doubt that, as the days went by, you observed all these particles of an army returning to their true natures — the young gentlemen of your troop picquering in bravado, or in mere love of a skirmish, because their blood is hot; coarser fellows lusting to break heads for the sake of plunder; craftier knaves, who know that war is insanely wasteful, robbing their own side at less risk; calculators such as Wilmot, Grenville, Goring, playing for high stakes under the fence of warfare, which of itself interests them not a jot. As for you, Sir — I took note of your horse just now at the churchyard gate. You see well to his grooming.”

“I groom him always with my own hand,” said I.

“To be sure — a man of method, strict and punctual in all soldierly duties! But the savour has gone out of them. Where the treasure is, there will the heart lie also.” He nodded toward my drawings.

Now there lurked a nettle of truth in his words, and it stung me.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

"And where may your treasure lie, Sir?" I asked pretty sharply.

"Come," said he, and led the way out into the churchyard. The sun was fast declining, and the light fell in warm beams against the grave-stones and over the belted trees that ringed the prospect. He waved a hand.

"From the high land above us, Sir, you may look almost to two seas; and between these two seas all was once Carminowe's. Two hundred years before the Normans came, Carminowe was a great man; and for four hundred years after."

"A wide treasure," said I.

"You will not find my heart hid beneath a single turf of it, but here only," said he, and pointed; and I looked down upon a green grave.

"I think that I understand, Sir," said I, as gently as might be. "He was your son."

He bent his head. Yet anon shook it, patiently dissenting. "He was my son; the child of my old age. But, to understand, you must first be father to such an one, and outlive him."

Now I was casting about for a word or two of comfort, albeit knowing how idle they needs must be, when I heard a galloping on the drive and my name shouted lustily; and there came

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

riding down to the gate from northward our Colonel Digby, waving a paper in his hand.

“Wyvern!” he called, as he reined up. “I have a favour to ask, and have ridden to ask it in person. Read you this letter; but first mount and ride with me to the ridge.”

So I untethered my horse, mounted and rode with him to the ridge.

“Tell me what you see yonder.”

I stood up in my stirrups, shading my eyes. “I see,” said I, “a troop of horse on the third rise. To all appearance the riders are dressed in white.”

“They are in their shirts, the dogs! Now read their challenge: for they attend on our answer.”

“Tush!” said I, having glanced over the paper in my hand. ‘Twas a foolish challenge, signed by one Straughan, Colonel of Horse in the Parliament forces, and dared us to a combat of cavalry, one hundred upon each side — in shirt and breeches, each man carrying but one pistol besides his sword. “Are we boys, that we should heed such braggart nonsense?”

I heard a chuckle beside me, and looked down to see that old Carminowe had run and caught up with us. He lifted the palm of his hand under which he scanned the foe, and his eyes met mine mockingly.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

“They have wind,” said Digby, “of the Earl’s letter.” (That morning a trumpet had returned with an answer to his Majesty’s latest propositions; and it ran that Essex had no authority from Parliament to treat, nor could do so without breach of trust.) “And that wind has overblown their vanity.”

“Then, with submission, Colonel,” I said, “I would send them no answer, but let them cool in their shirts.”

“And I agree,” he answered. “But, as luck will have it, his Majesty has dictated an answer, and that answer is already on its way.”

“To what effect did his Majesty answer?”

“To the same as a certain King of Israel who said, ‘Let the young men arise and play before us.’ There was no need to drum for volunteers, neither.”

“Nay,” I grunted, “we had never yet a lack of hot-headed fools!” I had no care to meet the gaze of old Carminowe, but I knew that it was upon me: for he stood close by my stirrup. I knew moreover that it was saying, “You, a staid man, mixt up in this folly! And this King who forwards it for sport — is this he whom your life’s business was to defend?”

Now — as the army would understand it —

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

our Colonel's seeking me in person, when so many would have striven for the chance to shine under his Majesty's eyes, was a high compliment; and the higher since certain of the hottest young bloods had (as I heard later) stipulated for my company. Yet for the moment I was angered, reading old Carminowe's thought and knowing it to be true. I had no natural taste for this bravery of mere fighting: and that I had arrived to be a man sought out for fighting was but a proof how emptily the mass of men exalts it above civil pursuits, seeing that my credit rested wholly on certain habits of steadiness and caution that in any other business I should have applied as cheerfully. I felt no desire at all to shine for his Majesty's light approbation, albeit, two years ago, I had enlisted in a fervour to die for his crown; and feeling my uneasiness under old Carminowe's gaze, I cursed him silently for having read me better than hitherto I had read myself.

But Digby would understand nothing of this. He was a good fighter and a good fellow, bred and trained in military vanities.

So I answered him curtly that, if this folly were afoot and now inevitable, I would come. I spoke too sourly perhaps, and my words, as I could see, wounded him.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

“My dear Wyvern,” said he, “I thought of you at once, and rode for you expressly. Other men are biting their mustachios at the bare chance of it. The King himself will be looking on.”

“You were always my friend,” said I, as we spurred forward together.

I wish to waste no words over that foolish combat. We were a hundred a side, drawn up in our shirt-sleeves on two opposing slopes, and we encountered in the hollow between. Digby, who led us, had given the word to hold our pistol-fire for close quarters, and I on the left had wasted an harangue on my troopers to the same effect. But, once the trumpets had sounded “charge,” the whole affair became but a wild paper-chase. At forty yards' distance some young fools on the extreme right began popping off their pistols, and in half a dozen strides this infection had run like a wildfire along one line. With ordinary seasoned men of my own troop I had done far better; but these were the picked fools of an army, and the main of them under twenty years old. It is always short work between two bodies of horse meeting in full shock: one swerves and flies, or else goes under; the other presses on: there can be

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

no other way. For me, I managed to unsaddle a man and break through the enemy's right with three troopers after me. Wheeling then, we saw the body of our friends in full flight; and a dozen of our foes, wheeling at the same instant, bore down on us nimbly. We spurred to meet them in second shock: but, as we encountered, one clever round-pate, who had reserved his fire, sent a bullet through my charger's shoulder-pin. I had at that instant a thrust to deliver under the arm of another fellow, and the poor brute's fall took me at unawares. I was flung heavily and stunned; and, the game being over, no doubt his Majesty rode moodily off to supper. Like other Kings, he was trained to sport; but I doubt if he ever arrived at enjoying it.

II

The main body of the Parliament horse and two regiments at least of their foot were quartered at Lestithiel, in the valley under Boconnoc — a neat tidy town, but not commodious for so great a mob. It stands by an ancient bridge of eight arches, where the tidal water running up from Fowey spends the last of its strength; and there is a Hall and Exchequer where the Dukes of

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

Cornwall had been used to receive their Stannary accounts, with a small prison beside for debtors and offenders under the laws of Stannary.

This prison being crowded already with prisoners taken by the rebels, the Provost Marshal clapped me, with nine others made captive in the above skirmish, in the parish church of St. Bartholomew; and there set a guard over us, using us more gently (I suppose) for that we had come to him in more ceremonious fashion than by the ordinary hazard of war. The rebel cavalry had turned the church into a stable, and defiled it past description. Also I heard a tale of their having led a horse to the font and christened him Charles — a double insult to God and to their King; but will say in fairness that they practised no such blasphemy during my sojourn there, nor seemed the men to do it, but went about their grooming and feeding of their horses soberly enough, making no more of the church than if it had indeed been a stable. Over us they kept strict watch, but fed us as well as they themselves fared, and showed us no incivility; nay, at my request one found pen, ink, and paper for me that I might pass the time away by copying the scutcheons in the windows, the glass of which they had spared.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

Among us ten unfortunates were two young gentlemen of Cornwall, Humphrey Grylls and John Trecarrel (but as "Jack" saluted by everyone). They both had hurts: Grylls a shot through the flesh of an arm, with two broken ribs to boot; Trecarrel a slight glancing wound across the left lower ribs. For myself, I had taken no harm beyond the bruise of my tumble, though my head swam for days after and I suffered from frequent fits of nausea. The other seven were common troopers, decent fellows; and one carried in his breeches' pocket a pack of cards, which kept us well amused until a Roundhead sergeant, discovering our play, reported it to the Provost-Marshal, who took the cards away.

In this church of Lestithiel, then, I dwelt from the day of my capture (August 10) until the last of the month, and on the whole very cheerfully; for we saw that the rebels intended us no injury, and from some of them we had news of Sir Jacob Astley's seizing the forts at the entry of Fowey Haven and so cutting off Essex from his supplies by sea; wherefore we told ourselves that the Earl must either surrender or make a desperate push to cut a way through his Majesty's posts, and that, whichever he might choose, our liberty would not be long delayed.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

Also, and besides my copying of the scutcheons, I pleased myself with composing of a chronogramma which I here present to the reader. I thought it might be ingenious at the time: and so it is, and I spent four days upon it —

VIVat reX, CoMes esseXIVs DIssIpatVr.

or, in English, “Long live the King, the Earl of Essex is put to the rout.” You will see that, by taking out from the Latin all the letters that stand for Roman numerals — and no other — you get the Annus Domini 1644: in this way —

<i>MDC</i> together make sixteen hundred	}	<i>the total 1644.</i>
and		
<i>XXVVVV</i> , forty		
and		
<i>IIII</i> , four		

I have shown it to many in private, and all agree that no better chronogramma was made during the late troubles: but, to be sure, I had leisure for it.

To leave these toys — on the last day but one of August, and a little before nine in the evening, there came into the church (that was lit by a few lanterns only) two foot-soldiers bearing a ladder between them and a rope, which presently they set down in a corner by the belfry and departed.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

They being scarce gone, by-and-by there entered two other soldiers with a prisoner, whom they unbound — for his arms had been trussed behind him — and bade make what cheer he might until the morrow. Now, whether he had spied us or not as they brought him in I cannot say; but, being loosed, he moved at first down the aisle uncertainly as a man might who found even the dull light too strong for his eyes — then with a quick tottering step towards us, that were gathered around a lantern and taking our supper near the belfry: and as he drew toward us I knew him for old Carminowe.

“Why, what harm can they have found in *you*?” asked I, taking his hand (as fellows will in misfortune) and giving him a seat beside us. At this distance of time I will own that this speech of mine seems not over-delicate; yet these were the words I used, and, be sure, I meant them well.

He put my question aside. “You had ill-luck,” he said. “I watched you from the high ground, and my heart went with you; that is to say, with *you*, Sir — and with *you*.” Here he bowed to Grylls and Jack Trecarrel, and went on as if explaining his performance lucidly. “My son, Sirs, had he lived, would have been about your age. He died at eighteen and a few months:

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

but I think of him year by year as alive and growing, and so I seem to share in his hopes and his high mettle."

My companions — as well they might — stared at him, and from him to me; thinking, no doubt, that here was some madman.

"Excuse me," said I, and presented him formally. "This gentleman and I are, in a fashion, acquaintances. He is a countryman of yours, by name Carminowe."

"Carminowe?" Young Grylls looked at him musingly. "I have read the name on a hundred old parchments at home."

"The estates, Sir," said Carminowe, "have passed into many hands, but into none worthier than that of Grylls."

"Faith, that's handsomely said!" answered Grylls, perceiving now that, in spite of the old man's dress, he had to do with a gentleman. "And, as for the estates, our greed (which, a generation or two back, was a scandal) has not swallowed them all, I hope? — though, for that matter, if these crop-ears prevail, 'tis little enough that any of us will inherit."

"They will not prevail at this bout," said the old man. "At Fowey, they tell me, the Earl has but six days' provisions and is planning to slip

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

away by sea. Between this and the coast the soldiers have eaten all bare; in a day or two they must break through or surrender, and I think, gentlemen, I can promise that you will be soon enlarged."

"You speak with assurance, Sir," said I, handing him a crust and filling a pannikin for him from our common pail of water.

"And yet," said he, with a faint smile, "I am no combatant: no, nor even a spy — though tomorrow morning they are to hang me for one."

He spoke the words quietly and fell to munching his crust. The three of us — and the troopers too — stared at him amazed: and for explanation, his jaws being occupied, he pointed a thin finger at the ladder and rope.

"But surely," I began, "since you are no spy, someone can speak for you ——"

"Lord, Sirs!" he took me up; "what does it matter? I had yet left to me a small estate in St. Teath parish, which they have twice pillaged. My son they slew on outpost duty, before the first Braddock fight." He turned to me again. "What says the Mohun motto, Sir? *Generis revocamus honores*, is it not? Well, there is no chance of that for the Carminowes. Let the Mohuns paint up their ancestral hand clutching

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

the Pope's golden flower: I have held a fairer in mine, and seen it wither. I have lived through the bitterness of death; I have seen the end of things. www.libtool.com.cn The last Carminowe goes down the blind way of fate — goes out in obloquy to-morrow, hanged for a spy by mistake. I have finished my quarrel with the gods: they are strong, and I make no complaint that they choose to wind up with a jest. I do assure you, Sirs, that I neither fear death nor disdain any way of it."

But here Jack Trecarrel, that had been staring gloomily at the wall opposite, suddenly rubbed his eyes and sat up with a laugh.

"By the Lord, Master Carminowe! and if that be how you take it, you may yet turn the jest against the gods."

We stared at him all, trying to read his meaning.

"Nay," he went on, "I have a slow wit, and you must give me time. The notion in my head may be worth much or little. Only you must tell me, Master Carminowe, on what ground you promised us that our liberty was nigh at hand: for something will depend on that."

"'Tis that fortunate knowledge unfortunately brings me here," answered the old man with a grave smile. "You know the narrow road that passes for a space along the left bank above the

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

bridge, and so strikes away to the north-east over the downs? It has deep hedges, you will remember, and at the bend stands a mean cottage. For days we have heard talk that the enemy would try to break away by this road; and a week ago Goring moved down a body of horse to the fields hard by and posted a strong picket in and about the cottage, to counter this design. Well, then, I, to-night, taking my ramble after sunset (as my custom is, and known to our sentries), came down to this cottage, supposing myself to be well within our lines. To my concern no one challenged me, and, creeping a little closer, I found the place empty. But while I stood, puzzling this out, a man called softly from a little way down the lane, where between the hedges all was dark to my eyesight, whom I approached without fear, supposing him to be one of our sergeants in command of a picquet, and that maybe he had a message for me to take back to Goring. 'Give the password, friend, and tell us, What time did he say?' this man demanded of me. I, taken aback by these words, stood still: and, with that, I saw beyond the hedge the faint light of the stars shining on many scores of morions and breastplates. 'Twas a whole troop of horse drawn up and standing silent in the field below.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

At once I knew that these must be rebels; that the pass had been sold by some traitor; and that I had tumbled by mistake into the part of his messenger. Heaven knows if, using my wit and naming an hour boldly, I might yet have escaped and carried back warning to camp. I think not: for they would have pressed me for the password. As it was, being dumbfounded, I broke away and tried to run: but the fellow was after me in a trice, and my old legs carried me but a dozen yards before he had me down and flung on my back. You can guess, Sirs, what remains to tell. They marched me down here; and to-morrow — supposing me to know what would implicate, no doubt, several men of standing in both armies — they will close my mouth for ever. For 'tis certain the King's interests have been betrayed, and the rogues will break through to-night, no one hindering. They have a river-fog, too, to help them. Now, whether or not the infantry will make a dash for it after the horse I cannot tell you: but to-morrow his Majesty will march down into Lestithiel and you will be free."

"Then a few hours would suffice to save you, Master Carminowe?" said Trecarrel, still pondering.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders. "They will get my business done early," said he. "I pray you, feel no more concern about it." He turned to me and asked if I had amused myself with sketching the monuments of this church as well as of Boconnoc. The windows being dark against the lantern-light, we could see no more than the outlines of their blazonries: but he seemed to know them by heart. I told him how that among them I had found his own coat twice depicted — *azure*, a bend *or*, but this time without the three-pointed label of difference.

He nodded. "And that is right," said he; "we have no business with the label." He went on to tell that in Edward the Third's time, in the English camp before Paris, Carminowe of Cornwall had challenged Sir Richard Scrope with wrongfully bearing his arms; and that six knights appointed to decide the controversy had found Carminowe to be descended of a lineage armed *azure*, a bend *or*, since the time of King Arthur. This led us into converse on the Scrope and Grosvenor dispute. "'Tis curious," said he after a while, "that we may be the last men in England to sit awake talking over these old tales. For when the rebels have dispossessed his Majesty — as they surely will — and have destroyed the

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

fountain of honour, who would light his pipe with such-like straws?"

But I would not allow the King's cause to be hopeless, and showed him my chronogramma, not without complacency.

He took the paper in hand, and was holding it close to the lantern, to con it, when at that instant Jack Trecarrel started up on his straw pallet into a sitting posture, and nudged Grylls — who, with the rest of our comrades, lay in a sound sleep; but, feeling his elbow jogged, he opened his eyes.

Having wakened Grylls, Trecarrel motioned to us both to do as he did without questioning, and began very cautiously to pull off his boots. While he did this a new thought seemed to strike him, for he puckered his brows awhile, and leaning towards me whispered across the back of Carminowe (who still bent forward, studying my scrap of paper), "Rouse the men on your side — softly as you can! They may all be useful." He turned to Grylls and whispered (as I suppose) the same order: for Grylls at once touched the shoulder of the trooper lying next him, and put finger to lip as the fellow stirred in his sleep and blinked up at him.

I on my part, having pulled off my boots

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

obediently, began to rouse the men nigh me with similar caution; so that presently we had the whole ring awake and staring, their eyes asking what we intended. www.libtool.com.cn “Heaven help me if *I* know!”

I muttered to myself, but endeavoured to answer the looks bent upon me by looking extremely wise.

“Most ingenious!” said Carminowe aloud, who all this while had been working out my riddle, observant of none of these preparations. He turned to me. “May I ask, Sir ——”

“Hist!” commanded Trecarrel, laying a hand on his arm and peering into the space of darkness between us and the chancel, where three stable-lanterns shone foggily — one tilted on the cushion of the pulpit-desk, the other two set side by side on the altar itself. In the choir-stalls and on the floor between (where the altar-step, with a coat laid upon it, served for their pillow) maybe a score of rebels lay snoring. These did not belong to our regular guard, and indeed by night I never discovered that we had a guard: but some four hundred soldiers bivouacked, as a rule, in the churchyard outside, with sentries posted; which from the first had been a dead-wall to all our projects of breaking prison.

After peering for half a minute or so, Trecarrel raised himself to a kind of crouching posture,

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

Grylls, at the same time, imitating him. They beckoned to a couple of our troopers to follow them; and, backing out of the lantern's rays, in a trice all four made a sudden dart across for the shadow of the belfry arch.

Then in a trice I understood what was forward; and, pointing to Carminowe's feet, signalled to him to slip off his shoes. The tower of Lestithiel church rises to a spire, and its belfry chamber stood then on a raised floor, approached, not as in most belfries by a winding stair, but through a trapway by a ladder reaching up from the ground. During our captivity this ladder had been removed and perhaps cast down outside in the grass of the churchyard. But now I followed Trecarrel's guess that the same had been found and carelessly brought back for Carminowe's hanging on the morrow. I knelt and unlaced the old man's shoes. He suffered this, eying me as if to ask what it meant, but making no protest.

One by one our comrades slipped away into the shadow under the belfry. I heard the ladder raised softly and then a light scraping as its upper end touched the stonework aloft. It seemed to me, too, that I heard a footstep mounting the rungs; but of this I could not be sure. Our enemies in the chancel snored on.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

Five minutes passed; again I heard a light footfall, and Trecarrel came stealing back to us.

“Blow out the light,” he commanded — and, as he crouched to whisper this, I saw his face running bright with sweat. “And give me the candle — the bolt of the trap is stiff.”

He took the candle from me, and after waiting a moment, to be sure that none of those in the chancel had taken alarm at this blowing out of the light, we stole across all three to the ladder's foot. Trecarrel mounted again. I heard him rub the tallow on the bolt — or seemed, at least, to hear it; and by-and-by the trap opened with a creak. Still the sleepers took no alarm.

I pushed Carminowe forward, and believe that he was among the first to mount. One by one the others followed, Grylls carrying with him the coil of rope. I, as senior in command, took last turn. This adventure was not mine, nor could I see the end of it; but I supposed that in the uncommon military operation of retreating up a steeple the commanding officer's place must be the extreme rear.

My foot was on the lowest rung when some fool above, who had taken the coil of rope off Grylls' shoulders, let it slip through the hatchway. It struck the ladder, and came glancing

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

down with a rush fit to wake the dead; and almost on the instant two or three of the men in the chancel had sprung to their feet and were snatching down the lanterns there. Now I had leapt aside nimbly — and luckily too, or the blow of it had either brained or, at the least, stunned me: and as it thudded on to the pavement I made a clutch at the rope and sprang for the ladder with a shout that woke the whole church and echoed back on me with a roar.

“Hoist!” I yelled, clambering as high as I might, and anchoring myself with an arm crook through a rung.

“‘Hoist’ it is!” sung down Trecarrel’s voice cheerfully. “Hold tight below — and you, lads, up with him! One, two, three — heave, my hearties!”

’Twas the only way: for already half a score of the rebel rogues were bearing down the nave towards me at a run. But, I thank Heaven, they had started in too great a hurry to remember their muskets. They reached the belfry arch to find the foot of my stairway lifted a good six feet above their heads. One or two leaped high and made a clutch for it, but missed; and as they fell back, staring and raising their lanterns, I was borne aloft and removed from them through the trapway like any stage god.

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

My comrades lifting me off the ladder, I found myself on a floor of stout oak, and in the midst of an octagonal chamber filled with a pale, foggy light — as I supposed, of the declining moon. Directly overhead, in a cavernous darkness, hung the great bells like monstrous black spiders, with their ropes like filaments let down and swaying: for a stiff and chilly breeze blew every way through the chamber, which had a high open window in each of its eight sides.

For these windows the most of us scrambled at once, foreseeing what must happen. Indeed, the baffled rogues below lost no time over their next move; but running for their muskets, began firing up at the hatch and at the floor under our feet — the boards of which, by the favour of Heaven, were of oak and marvellous solid; also the heavy beams took many of their shot; but none the less they made us skip.

This volley, fired suddenly within, at once, as you may guess, alarmed all the bivouacs in the churchyard. Crowds poured into the church, and word passing that all the eleven prisoners were escaped into the belfry under the spire, other crowds ran back into the street and began firing briskly at the windows. But this helped them nothing, the angle being too steep, and the

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

bullets — or so many of them as found entrance — striking upwards over our heads. By-and-by a few cleverer marksmen climbed to the upper rooms of certain houses around the church, and thence peppered us hotly: yet with no more effect than the others, for by this time I had discovered, by sounding with my heel, where the stout beams ran beneath us. Slipping down from our window-sconces and choosing these beams to stand upon, we were entirely safe from the musketeers outside, and reasonably protected from those below.

“Now the one thing to pray for,” whispered Trecarrel to me in a pause of the firing, “is that Lestithiel town contains no second ladder so tall as ours: and I believe it cannot.”

“There is another thing to pray for,” said I; “which is, that the dawn may come quickly.”

He stared at me. “My good Sir, are you crazed?” he demanded. “Day has broke already! What light on earth do you suppose this to be all about us?”

“I took it for the moon,” I confessed somewhat shamefacedly.

He burst into a laugh. “You and your friend then must have sped the time rarely with your Scropes and your Grosvenors, your fesses and bends, your counter-paleys and what-not. I can

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

tell you the night dragged by tediously enough for me, that had to lie and listen to your discouraging!"

"But hullo!" said I, "they seem to have ceased firing below. And whose voice is that calling?"

'Twas the voice of the Provost-Marshal summoning us to parley. He had been roused up in haste, and by the tone of his voice was in a towering passion of temper.

"At your service, Sir!" I called out in answer, approaching the trap. "But if you want a parley it must be an honourable one, and no shooting up or catching me at disadvantage."

"My men will not fire again until I give the word."

"Very well, then: what do you require of us?"

"I require you to give up to me, and instantly, the prisoner whom we took last night. This done, I may consent to overlook your escapade."

"For what purpose do you want him?"

"That, Sir, is my affair, I should hope. 'Tis enough that I require his surrender."

"Indeed no, Sir: 'tis nothing like enough. The gentleman you speak of happens to be a friend of mine; and you have formed an opinion of him as incorrect as it is injurious. If I consent to release him to you, it will only be on your

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

engaging yourself most solemnly to do him no harm."

'Tis wonderful what an advantage height gives a man in an argument. The Provost-Marshal, dancing with rage on the floor far below and cricking back his neck to get sight of me, cut one of the absurdest figures in the world.

"I'll hang you all!" he threatened, lifting and shaking his fist. "I'll hang every mother's son of you!"

But here I felt a hand laid on my shoulder, and looked up to see Trecarrel standing over me and smiling, and the belfry full of a sudden with rosy morning light.

"Wyvern," said he, "don't be keeping all the fun to yourself! Let me have a turn with the man, and go you to the window — the north-east window yonder, and tell me an I speak not the truth to him."

I gave over the parley to him and moved to the window, as he directed.

"'Tis too late, my master!" Trecarrel called cheerfully down the trap. "You have thirty minutes at the most to reduce us, and 'twill take you all that time to pack up and clear. Already a body of the King's foot are coming over the hill straight for the bridge, and your one ragged regi-



"'TIS TOO LATE, MY MASTER!" TRECARREL CALLED CHEERFULLY
DOWN THE TRAP

www.libtool.com.cn

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

ment there is making haste to quit. Do I not speak the truth, Captain Wyvern?" He flung this question to me over his shoulder.

"The Lord be praised, you do!" I cried. "And see — another and stronger body making down to cross the ford to the southward!" By this time all the troopers around me were shouting and pointing and some of them capering for joy; and sure the morning sun has rarely looked on blesseder sight than these gallant troops made as they descended glittering to the river.

"Softly — softly!" Trecarrel rebuked us. "With so much noise I cannot hear what Master Provost-Marshall is threatening. Indeed, Sir," he called down, "your game is up. Go your ways now, and may they lead you to the proper end of all rebels!"

I did not hear the Provost-Marshall's answer: and for a minute or so — since the firing did not start afresh but all remained quiet — I supposed that he had taken our advice and given up the game. But turning for a look down into the church to assure myself, I saw Trecarrel rise to his feet with a face deadly white.

"The villains!" he gasped out, pointing to the hatchway. "They are bringing powder — there — right under us!"

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

And, while he pointed, the Provost-Marshal's voice came up to us, cold and sneering. "I'll give you this last chance, my gentlemen," he called. "Will you hand over my prisoner, or must I blow you all into air? You have half a minute to decide."

"Let us go down, gentlemen," said Carminowe, stepping forward. "I thank you sincerely: but in truth, as I have told you, I do not value life."

In an instant Trecarrel had recovered his composure. "With your leave, Captain," he said, addressing me, "'twas I that set this game going, and I for one am willing to play it out."

I glanced from him to Grylls, who stood against the wall with his arms folded. He wasted no words, but answered me with a gloomy nod. Now I turned to the troopers, from whom—as men of mean station—I confess that I looked for no such folly of magnanimity as to lay down their lives for an old man, who, besides, was begging us to yield him up. Judge my amazement then when a red-bearded fellow called Wilkes spoke up with a big oath, growling that "surrender" was no word for his stomach. "Suppose we belonged to your own troop, Captain—what would you look for us to answer?"

"In general," I told him, "I should look for

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

my troop to follow where I dared to lead. But this is a different matter ——”

A man by Wilkes' side cut me short. “Wounds alive, Sir! You don't command the only men in the army! Didn't his Majesty pick and choose us for special service? Very well, then; tell the old devil to fire and be damned to him!”

I ran my eyes over their faces. “I thank you all, friends,” said I: “and because of your answer I, for one, shall die — if God wills it — in good hope for England.”

“Time is up,” the Provost-Marshal's voice announced from below. “Do you submit, Sir?”

“No!” I shouted, and all shouted together with me; nor did one or two forbear to add to their defiance words of the grossest insult.

I motioned to them to copy me and lay themselves down at full length above the strongest beams: and, so lying, I commended my soul to God. This waiting upon the slow-match was the worst of all. “Will it never come?” groaned one man, clenching his hands.

But it came at last, with a jarring lift of the earth and a great wind that took us — flat-laid as we were — and tossed us like straws in a heap against the wall. Then the foundations of the world opened with a roar, beating all sensation

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

out of us — so that, had we died then, all taste of dying was gone from us. Answering the roar, as the walls rocked with it, the heavens seemed to split and open, letting through a downrush of slates and stones and mortar: and overhead a great bell clanged once. But in my memory the explosion and the answering downrush stand separated by a dark gulf, in which time was blotted out. I had covered my face with my cloak, and saw no flame at all. Yet when my eyes opened they rested first upon a great rent in the belfry flooring, through which one of the heavy beams, broken midway, thrust up two jagged ends. I saw this through a cloud of smoke, dust, and lime. Beside me my comrades lay under a thick coating of limewash and cobwebs. A couple of them had been flung across my legs, and one or two were groaning. On the far side of the chamber the man Wilkes had scrambled to his feet unhurt, and was leaning with his elbow against the wall. I found my voice, and, while the walls yet rocked, called to Grylls and Trecarrel. To my amazement their two voices answered me: and to my greater amazement one by one the heap of men disengaged themselves, and, shaking off the dust and lime from them, rose to their feet — the whole of them, save for a cut or two and a

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

few bruises, unharmed. Old Carminowe, in particular, had not taken a scratch.

But while I stared at them, and while my shaken wits little by little took assurance that the tower stood yet and we were yet alive, in my ears rang the note of that bell which had sounded once overhead. I stared up with a new and horrible apprehension, mercifully till this moment delayed. I had not thought of the bells. The wind of the explosion had whirled two or three of their ropes aloft and flung them over the beams: but the concussion, which had shaken cartloads of cobwebs down upon us, had seemingly left the cage itself uninjured. My eyes sought to pierce the gloom up there in the bells' dark throats. It seemed to me that one of the clappers was swaying. I thought of all that mass of metal slipping, falling; and called on the men in a panic to fetch and lower the ladder.

Trecarrel or Grylls — I forgot which — besought me to delay: the enemy might yet be lying in wait for us outside the church. I, possessed with this new terror of the bells, scarcely heard them, and insisted upon lowering the ladder with all speed. It had fallen forward from the wall against which we had rested it, and now lay right across our heads. Fast as they could the men

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

obeyed us, lowering it through the hatchway and thence guiding its descent by the rope knotted about an upper rung. As I had been last to mount, so I was first to slip down; as I reached the foot and steadied it for the others I heard Wilkes at the window overhead calling out that our troops had won the bridge.

And now comes in the strangest thing in all my story. We, that had lived in comradeship for three weeks, and had come through this extreme peril together, parted at the ladder's foot and ran our several ways without a word said! I took one glance around the church. A good third of the roof had been blown away and one of the tower-piers was evidently tottering. Two columns of the arcade along the south aisle lay prone. I need not say that scarce a pane remained in the windows: but I can remember marvelling that so much of the glass had fallen inwards and lay strewn over the whole flooring, even in the nave, and I remember it all the better through having to pick my way to the door with shoeless feet. In the porch I overtook and ran past old Carminowe. He did not halt to thank me, nor did I pause to receive his thanks.

Yet I saw him once again. From the church I ran to meet our troops, now re-forming at the

CAPTAIN WYVERN'S ADVENTURES

bridge-end to clear the town. Half an hour later, as we drove the retreating rebels beyond the suburbs and out into the dusty lanes towards Fowey, almost by the last cottage we passed a corpse huddled under the hedgerow to the left of our march. It was the body of Carminowe, killed by a chance shot of the men from whom we had lately saved him. But with what purpose he had pursued them and invited it, I cannot tell.

www.libtool.com.cn

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

A REPORTED TALE

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK runs up between overhanging woods from the southern shore of Helford River, which flows down through an earthly paradise and meets the sea midway between Falmouth and the dreadful Manacles — a river of gradual golden sunsets such as Wilson painted; broad-bosomed, holding here and there a village as in an arm maternally crook'd, but with a brooding face of solitude. Off the main flood lie creeks where the oaks dip their branches in the high tides, where the stars are glassed all night long without a ripple, and where you may spend whole days with no company but herons and sandpipers —

Helford River, Helford River,

Blessèd may you be!

We sailed up Helford River

By Durgan from the sea. . . .

And about three-quarters of a mile above the ferry-crossing (where is the best anchorage) you will find the entrance of the creek they call French-

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

man's, with a cob-built ruin beside it, and perhaps, if you come upon it in the morning sunlight, ten or a dozen herons aligned like statues on the dismantled walls.

Now, why they call it Frenchman's Creek no one is supposed to know, but this story will explain. And the story I heard on the spot from an old verderer, who had it from his grandfather, who bore no unimportant part in it — as will be seen. Maybe you will find it out of keeping with its scenery. In my own words you certainly would: and so I propose to relate it just as the verderer told it to me.

I

First of all you'll let me say that a bad temper is an affliction, whoever owns it, and shortening to life. I don't know what your opinion may be: but my grandfather was parish constable in these parts for forty-seven years, and you'll find it on his headstone in Manaccan churchyard that he never had a cross word for man, woman, or child. He took no credit for it: it ran in the family, and to this day we're all terribly mild to handle.

Well, if ever a man was born bad in his temper,

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

'twas Captain Bligh, that came from St. Tudy parish, and got himself known to all the world over that dismal business aboard the *Bounty*. Yes, Sir, that's the man — “Breadfruit Bligh,” as they called him. They made an Admiral of him in the end, but they never cured his cussedness: and my grandfather, that followed his history (and good reason for why) from the day he first set foot in this parish, used to rub his hands over every fresh item of news. “Darn it!” he'd say, “here's that old Turk broke loose again. Lord, if he ain't a warrior!” Seemed as if he took a delight in the man, and kept a sort of tenderness for him till the day of his death.

Bless you, though folks have forgotten it, that little affair of the *Bounty* was only the beginning of Bligh. He was a left'nant when it happened, and the King promoted him post-captain straight away. Later on, no doubt because of his experiences in mutinies, he was sent down to handle the big one at the Nore. “Now, then, you dogs!” — that's how he began with the men's delegates — “his Majesty will be graciously pleased to hear your grievances: and afterwards I'll be graciously pleased to hang the lot of you and rope-end every fifth man in the Fleet. That's plain sailing, I hope!” says he. The delegates

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

made a rush at him, triced him up hand and foot, and in two two's would have heaved him to the fishes with an eighteen-pound shot for ballast if his boat's crew hadn't swarmed on board by the chains and carried him off. After this he commanded a ship at Camperdown, and another at Copenhagen, and being a good fighter as well as a man of science, was chosen for Governor of New South Wales. He hadn't been forty-eight hours in the colony, I'm told, before the music began, and it ended with his being clapped into irons by the military and stuck in prison for two years to cool his heels. At last they took him out, put him on board a ship of war and played farewell to him on a brass band: and, by George, Sir, if he didn't fight with the captain of the ship all the way home, making claim that as senior in the service he ought to command her! By this time, as you may guess, there was nothing to be done with the fellow but make him an Admiral; and so they did, and as Admiral of the Blue he died in the year 'seventeen, only a couple of weeks ahead of my poor grandfather, that would have set it down to the finger of Providence if he'd only lived to hear the news.

Well, now, the time that Bligh came down to Helford was a few months before he sailed for

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

Australia, and that will be a hundred years ago next summer: and I guess the reason of his coming was that the folks at the Admiralty couldn't stand him in London, the weather just then being sultry. So they pulled out a map and said, "This Helford looks a nice cool far-away place; let the man go down and take soundings and chart the place"; for Bligh, you must know, had been a pupil of Captain Cook's, and at work of this kind there was no man cleverer in the Navy.

To do him justice, Bligh never complained of work. So off he packed and started from London by coach in the early days of June; and with him there travelled down a friend of his, a retired naval officer by the name of Sharl, that was bound for Falmouth to take passage in the Lisbon packet; but whether on business or a pleasure trip is more than I can tell you.

So far as I know, nothing went wrong with them until they came to Torpoint Ferry: and there, on the Cornish side of the water, stood the Highflyer coach, the inside of it crammed full of parcels belonging to our Vicar's wife, Mrs. Polwhele, that always visited Plymouth once a year for a week's shopping. Having all these parcels to bring home, Mrs. Polwhele had crossed over by a waterman's boat two hours before,

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

packed the coach as full as it would hold, and stepped into the Ferry Inn for a dish of tea. "And glad I am to be across the river in good time," she told the landlady; "for by the look of the sky there's a thunderstorm coming."

Sure enough there was, and it broke over the Hamoaze with a bang just as Captain Bligh and his friend put across in the ferry-boat. The lightning whizzed and the rain came down like the floods of Deva, and in five minutes' time the streets and gutters of Torpoint were pouring on to the quay like so many shutes, and turning all the inshore water to the colour of pea-soup. Another twenty minutes and 'twas over; blue sky above and the birds singing, and the roof and trees all a-twinkle in the sun; and out steps Mrs. Polwhele very gingerly in the landlady's pattens, to find the Highflyer ready to start, the guard un-lashing the tarpaulin that he'd drawn over the outside luggage, the horses steaming and anxious to be off, and on the box-seat a couple of gentlemen wet to the skin, and one of them looking as ugly as a chained dog in a street fight. This was Bligh, of course. His friend, Mr. Charl, sat alongside, talking low and trying to coax him back to a good temper: but Mrs. Polwhele missed taking notice of this. She hadn't seen the gentlemen

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

arrive, by reason that, being timid of thunder, at the very first peal she'd run upstairs, and crawled under one of the bed-ties: and there she bided until the chambermaid brought word that the sky was clear and the coach waiting.

If ever you've had to do with timmersome folks I daresay you've noted how talkative they get as soon as danger's over. Mrs. Polwhele took a glance at the inside of the coach to make sure that her belongings were safe, and then, turning to the ladder that the Boots was holding for her to mount, up she trips to her outside place behind the box-seat, all in a fluff and commotion, and chattering so fast that the words hitched in each other like beer in a narrow-necked bottle.

"Give you good morning, gentlemen!" said Mrs. Polwhele, "and I do hope and trust I haven't kept you waiting; but thunder makes me *that* nervous! 'Twas always the same with me from a girl; and la! what a storm while it lasted! I declare the first drops looked to me a'most so big as crown-pieces. Most unfortunate it should come on when you were crossing — most unfortunate, I vow! There's nothing so unpleasant as sitting in damp clothes, especially if you're not accustomed to it. My husband, now — if he puts on a shirt that hasn't been double-aired I

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

always know what's going to happen: it'll be lumbago next day to a certainty. But maybe, as travellers, you're not so susceptible. I find hotel-keepers so careless with their damp sheets! May I ask, gentlemen, if you've come from far? You'll be bound for Falmouth, as I guess: and so am I. You'll find much on the way to admire. But perhaps this is not your first visit to Cornwall?"

In this fashion she was rattling away, good soul — settling her wraps about her and scarcely drawing breath — when Bligh slewed himself around in his seat, and for answer treated her to a long stare.

Now, Bligh wasn't a beauty at the best of times, and he carried a scar on his cheek that didn't improve matters by turning white when his face was red, and red when his face was white. They say the King stepped up to him at Court once and asked him how he came by it and in what action. Bligh had to tell the truth — that he'd got it in the orchard at home: he and his father were trying to catch a horse there: the old man flung a hatchet to turn the horse and hit his boy in the face, marking him for life. Hastiness, you see, in the family.

Well, the sight of his face, glowering back on her over his shoulder, was enough to dry up the

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

speech in Mrs. Polwhele or any woman. But Bligh, it seems, couldn't be content with this. After withering the poor soul for ten seconds or so, he takes his eyes off her, turns to his friend again in a lazy, insolent way, and begins to talk loud to him in French.

'Twas a terrible unmannerly thing to do for a fellow supposed to be a gentleman. I've naught to say against modern languages: but when I see it on the newspaper nowadays that naval officers ought to give what's called "increased attention" to French and German, I hope that they'll use it better than Bligh, that's all! Why, Sir, my eldest daughter threw up a situation as parlour-maid in London because her master and mistress pitched to parleyvooving whenever they wanted to talk secrets at table. "If you please, Ma'am," she told the lady, "you're mistaking me for the governess, and I never could abide compliments." She gave a month's warning then and there, and I commend the girl's spirit.

But the awkward thing for Bligh, as it turned out, was that Mrs. Polwhele didn't understand his insolence. Being a woman that wouldn't hurt a fly if she could help it, and coming from a parish where every man, her husband included, took pleasure in treating her respectfully, she

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

never dreamed that an affront was meant. From the moment she heard Bligh's lingo, she firmly believed that here were two Frenchies on the coach; and first she went white to the lips and shivered all over, and then she caught at the seat to steady herself, and then she flung back a look at Jim the Guard, to make sure he had his blunderbuss handy. She couldn't speak to Sammy Hosking, the coachman, or touch him by the arm without reaching across Bligh: and by this time the horses were at the top of the hill and settling into a gallop. She thought of the many times she'd sat up in bed at home in a fright that the Frenchmen had landed and were marching up to burn Manaccan Vicarage: and how often she had warned her husband against abusing Boney from the pulpit — 'twas dangerous, she always maintained, for a man living so nigh the sea-shore. The very shawl beside her was scarlet, same as the women-folk wore about the fields in those days in hopes that the invaders, if any came, would mistake them for red-coats. And here she was, perched up behind two of her country's enemies — one of them as ugly as Old Nick or Boney himself — and bowling down towards her peaceful home at anything from sixteen to eighteen miles an hour.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

I daresay, too, the thunderstorm had given her nerves a shaking; at any rate, Jim the Guard came crawling over the coach-roof after a while, and, said he, "Why, Mrs. Polwhele, whatever is the matter? I han't heard you speak six words since we started."

And with that, just as he settled himself down for a comfortable chat with her, after his custom, the poor lady points to the two strangers, flings up both hands, and tumbles upon him in a fit of hysterics.

"Stop the hosses!" yells Jim; but already Sammy Hosking was pulling up for dear life at the sound of her screams.

"What in thunder's wrong with the female?" asks Bligh.

"Female yourself," answers up Sammy in a pretty passion. "Mrs. Polwhele's a lady, and I reckon your cussed rudeness upset her. I say nothing of your face, for that you can't help."

Bligh started up in a fury, but Mr. Sharl pulled him down on the seat, and then Jim the Guard took a turn.

"Pitch a lady's luggage into the road, would you?" for this, you must know, was the reason of Bligh's sulkiness at starting. He had come up soaking from Torpoint Ferry, walked straight to

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

the coach, and pulled the door open to jump inside, when down on his head came rolling a couple of Dutch cheeses that Mrs. Polwhele had crammed on the top of her belongings. This raised his temper, and he began to drag parcel after parcel out and fling them in the mud, shouting that no passenger had a right to fill up the inside of a coach in that fashion. Thereupon Jim sent an ostler running to the landlady that owned the Highflyer, and she told Bligh that he hadn't booked his seat yet: that the inside was reserved for Mrs. Polwhele: and that he could either take an outside place and behave himself, or be left behind to learn manners. For a while he showed fight: but Mr. Sharl managed to talk sense into him, and the parcels were stowed again and the door shut but a minute before Mrs. Polwhele came downstairs and took her seat as innocent as a lamb.

“Pitch a lady's luggage into the road, would you?” struck in Jim the Guard, making himself heard above the pillaloo. “Carry on as if the coach belonged to ye, hey? Come down and take your coat off, like a man, and don't sit there making fool faces at me!”

“My friend is not making faces,” began Mr. Sharl, very gentle-like, trying to keep the peace.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

“Call yourself his friend!” Jim snapped him up. “Get off, the pair of you. Friend indeed! Go and buy him a veil.”

But 'twas easily seen that Mrs. Polwhele couldn't be carried further. So Sammy Hosking pulled up at a farmhouse a mile beyond St. Germans: and there she was unloaded, with her traps, and put straight to bed: and a farm-boy sent back to Torpoint to fetch a chaise for her as soon as she recovered. And the Highflyer — that had been delayed three-quarters of an hour — rattled off at a gallop, with all on board in the worst of tempers.

When they reached Falmouth — which was not till after ten o'clock at night — and drew up at the Crown and Anchor, the first man to hail them was old Parson Polwhele, standing there under the lamp in the entry and taking snuff to keep himself awake.

“Well, my love,” says he, stepping forward to help his wife down and give her a kiss. “And how have you enjoyed the journey?”

But instead of his wife 'twas a bull-necked-looking man that swung himself off the coach-roof, knocking the Parson aside, and bounced into the inn without so much as a “beg your pardon.”

Parson Polwhele was taken aback for the

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

moment by reason that he'd pretty nigh kissed the fellow by accident; and before he could recover, Jim the Guard leans out over the darkness, and, says he, speaking down: "Very sorry, Parson, but your missus was taken ill t'other side of St. Germans, and we've been forced to leave her 'pon the road."

Now, the Parson doted on his wife, as well he might. He was a very learned man, you must know, and wrote a thundering great history of Cornwall: but outside of book-learning his head rambled terribly, and Mrs. Polwhele managed him in all the little business of life. "'Tis like looking after a museum," she used to declare. "I don't understand the contents, I'm thankful to say; but, please God, I can keep 'em dusted." A better-suited couple you couldn't find, nor a more affectionate; and whenever Mrs. Polwhele tripped it to Plymouth, the Parson would be at Falmouth to welcome her back, and they'd sleep the night at the Crown and Anchor and drive home to Manaccan next morning.

"Taken ill?" cries the Parson. "Oh, my poor Mary — my poor, dear Mary!"

"'Tisn' so bad as all that," says Jim, as soothing as he could; but he thought it best to tell nothing about the rumpus.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

"If 'tis on the wings of an eagle, I must fly to her!" cries the Parson, and he hurried indoors and called out for a chaise and pair.

He had some trouble in persuading a post-boy to turn out at such an hour, but before midnight the poor man was launched and rattling away eastward, chafing at the hills and singing out that he'd pay for speed, whatever it cost. And at Grampound in the grey of the morning he almost ran slap into a chaise and pair proceeding westward, and likewise as if its postilion wanted to break his neck.

Parson Polwhele stood up in his vehicle and looked out ahead. The two chaises had narrowly missed doubling each other into a cocked hat; in fact, the boys had pulled up within a dozen yards of smash, and there stood the horses face to face and steaming.

"Why, 'tis my Mary!" cries the Parson, and takes a leap out of the chaise.

"Oh, Richard! Richard!" sobs Mrs. Polwhele. "But you can't possibly come in here, my love," she went on, drying her eyes.

"Why not, my angel?"

"Because of the parcels, dearest. And Heaven only knows what's underneath me at this moment, but it feels like a flat-iron. Besides," says she,

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

like the prudent woman she was, "we've paid for two chaises. But 'twas good of you to come in search of me, and I'll say what I've said a thousand times, what I've often said, that I've the best husband in the world."

The Parson grumbled a bit; but, indeed, the woman was piled about with packages up to the neck. So, very sad-like, he went back to his own chaise — that was now slewed about for Falmouth — and off the procession started at an easy trot, the good man bouncing up in his seat from time to time to blow back a kiss.

But after awhile he shouted to the post-boy to pull up again.

"What's the matter, love?" sings out Mrs. Polwhele, overtaking him and coming to a stand likewise.

"Why, it occurs to me, my angel, that *you* might get into *my* chaise, if you're not too tightly wedged."

"There's no saying what will happen when I once begin to move," said Mrs. Polwhele: "but I'll risk it. For I don't mind telling you that one of my legs went to sleep somewhere near St. Austell, and 'tis dreadfully uncomfortable."

So out she was fetched and climbed in beside her husband.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

“But what was it that upset you?” he asked, as they started again.

Mrs. Polwhele laid her cheek to his shoulder and sobbed aloud; and so by degrees let out her story.

www.libtool.com.cn

“But, my love, the thing’s impossible,” cried Parson Polwhele. “There’s no Frenchman in Cornwall at this moment, unless maybe ’tis the Guernsey merchant* or some poor wretch of a prisoner escaped from the hulks in the Hamoaze.”

“Then, that’s what these men were, you may be sure,” said Mrs. Polwhele.

“Tut-tut-tut! You’ve just told me that they came across the ferry, like any ordinary passengers.”

“Did I? Then I told more than I know; for I never saw them cross.”

“A couple of escaped prisoners wouldn’t travel by coach in broad daylight, and talk French in everyone’s hearing.”

“We live in the midst of mysteries,” said Mrs. Polwhele. “There’s my parcels, now — I packed ’em in the Highflyer most careful, and I’m sure Jim the Guard would be equally careful in handing them out — you know the sort of man he is: and yet I find a good dozen of them plastered in

* Euphemistic for “smugglers’ agent.”

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

mud, and my new Moldavia cap, that I gave twenty-three shillings for only last Tuesday, pounded to a jelly, quite as if someone had flung it on the road and danced on it!"

The poor soul burst out into fresh tears, and there against her husband's shoulder cried herself fairly asleep, being tired out with travelling all night. By-and-by the Parson, that wanted a nap just as badly, dozed off beside her: and in this fashion they were brought back through Falmouth streets and into the yard of the Crown and Anchor, where Mrs. Polwhele woke up with a scream, crying out: "Prisoners or no prisoners, those men were up to no good: and I'll say it if I live to be a hundred!"

That same afternoon they transhipped the parcels into a cart, and drove ahead themselves in a light gig, and so came down, a little before sunset, to the Passage Inn yonder. There, of course, they had to unload again and wait for the ferry to bring them across to their own parish. It surprised the Parson a bit to find the ferry-boat lying ready by the shore and my grandfather standing there head to head with old Arch'laus Spry, that was constable of Mawnan parish.

"Hullo, Calvin!" the Parson sings out. "This

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

looks bad — Mawnan and Manaccan putting their heads together. I hope there's nothing gone wrong since I've been away?"

"Aw, Parson dear," says my grandfather, "I'm glad you've come — yea, glad sure 'nuff. We've a-been enjoying a terrible time!"

"Then something *has* gone wrong?" says the Parson.

"As for that," my grandfather answers, "I only wish I could say yes or no: for 'twould be a relief even to know the worst." He beckoned very mysterious-like and led the Parson a couple of hundred yards up the foreshore, with Arch'laus Spry following. And there they came to a halt, all three, before a rock that someone had been daubing with whitewash. On the top of the cliff, right above, was planted a stick with a little white flag.

"Now, Sir, as a Justice of the Peace, what d'ee think of it?"

Parson Polwhele stared from the rock to the stick and couldn't say. So he turns to Arch'laus Spry and asks: "Any person taken ill in your parish?"

"No, Sir."

"You're sure Billy Johns hasn't been drinking again?" Billy Johns was the landlord of the

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

Passage Inn, a very ordinary man by rule, but given to breaking loose among his own liquors. "He seemed all right yesterday when I hired the trap off him; but he does the most unaccountable things when he's taken bad."

"He never did anything so far out of nature as this here; and I can mind him in six outbreaks," answered my grandfather. "Besides, 'tis not Billy Johns nor anyone like him."

"Then you know who did it?"

"I do and I don't, Sir. But take a look round, if you please."

The Parson looked up and down and across the river; and, sure enough, whichever way he turned, his eyes fell on splashes of whitewash and little flags fluttering. They seemed to stretch right away from Porthnavas down to the river's mouth; and though he couldn't see it from where he stood, even Mawnan church-tower had been given a lick of the brush.

"But," said the Parson, fairly puzzled, "all this can only have happened in broad daylight, and you must have caught the fellow at it, whoever he is."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say I caught him," answered my grandfather, modest-like; "but I came upon him a little above Bosahan in the act

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

of setting up one of his flags, and I asked him, in the King's name, what he meant by it."

"And what did he answer?"

My grandfather looked over his shoulder. "I couldn't, Sir, not for a pocketful of crowns, and your good lady, so to speak, within hearing."

"Nonsense, man! She's not within a hundred yards."

"Well, then, Sir, he up and hoped the devil would fly away with me, and from that he went on to say ——" But here my grandfather came to a dead halt. "No, Sir, I can't; and as a minister of the Gospel, you'll never insist on it. He made such horrible statements that I had to go straight home and read over my old mother's marriage lines. It fairly dazed me to hear him talk so confident, and she in her grave, poor soul!"

"You ought to have demanded his name."

"I did, Sir; naturally I did. And he told me to go to the naughty place for it."

"Well, but what like is he?"

"Oh, as to that, Sir, a man of ordinary shape, like yourself, in a plain blue coat and a wig shorter than ordinary; nothing about him to prepare you for the language he lets fly."

"And," put in Arch'laus Spry, "he's taken lodgings down to Durgan with the Widow Pol-

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

kinghorne, and eaten his dinner — a fowl and a jug of cider with it. After dinner he hired Robin's boat and went for a row. I thought it my duty, as he was pushing off, to sidle up in a friendly way. I said to him, 'The weather, Sir, looks nice and settled': that is what I said, neither more nor less, but using those very words. What d'ee think he answered? He said, 'That's capital, my man: now go along and annoy somebody else.' Wasn't that a disconnected way of talking? If you ask my opinion, putting two and two together, I say he's most likely some poor wandering loonatic."

The evening was dusking down by this time, and Parson Polwhele, though a good bit puzzled, called to mind that his wife would be getting anxious to cross the ferry and reach home before dark: so he determined that nothing could be done before morning, when he promised Arch'laus Spry to look into the matter. My grandfather he took across in the boat with him, to look after the parcels and help them up to the Vicarage: and on the way they talked about a grave that my grandfather had been digging — he being sexton and parish clerk, as well as constable and the Parson's right-hand man, as you might call it, in all public matters.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

While they discoursed, Mrs. Polwhele was taking a look about her to make sure the country hadn't altered while she was away at Plymouth. And by-and-by she cries out—

“Why, my love, whatever are these dabs o' white stuck up and down the foreshore?”

The Parson takes a look at my grandfather before answering: “My angel, to tell you the truth, that's more than we know.”

“Richard, you're concealing something from me,” said Mrs. Polwhele. “If the French have landed and I'm going home to be burnt in my bed, it shall be with my eyes open.”

“My dear Mary,” the Parson argued, “you've a-got the French on your brain. If the French landed they wouldn't begin by sticking dabs of whitewash all over the parish; now, would they?”

“How in the world should I know what a lot of Papists would do or not do?” she answered. “'Tis no more foolish to my mind that eating frogs or kissing a man's toe.”

Well, say what the Parson would, the notion had fixed itself in the poor lady's head. Three times that night she woke in the bed with her curl-papers crackling for very fright; and the fourth time 'twas at the sound of a real dido below stairs. Some person was down by the back-

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

door knocking and rattling upon it with all his might.

The sun had been up for maybe an hour — the time of year, as I told you, being near about mid-summer — and the Parson, that never wanted for pluck, jumped out and into his breeches in a twinkling, while his wife pulled the counterpane over her head. Down along the passage he skipped to a little window opening over the back porch.

“Who’s there!” he called, and out from the porch stepped my grandfather, that had risen early and gone to the churchyard to finish digging the grave before breakfast. “Why, what on the earth is wrong with ye? I made sure the French had landed, at the least.”

“Couldn’t be much worse if they had,” said my grandfather. “Some person ’ve a-stole my shovel, pick, and biddicks.”

“Nonsense!” said the Parson.

“The corpse won’t find it nonsense, Sir, if I don’t get ’em back in time. I left ’em lying, all three, at the bottom of the grave overnight.”

“And now they’re missing?”

“Not a trace of ’em to be seen.”

“Someone has been playing you a practical joke, Calvin. Here, stop a moment ——” The

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

Parson ran back to his room, fetched a key, and flung it out into the yard. "That 'll unlock the tool-shed in the garden. Get what you want, and we'll talk about the theft after breakfast. How soon will the grave be ready?"

"I can't say sooner than ten o'clock after what has happened."

"Say ten o'clock, then. This is Saturday, and I've my sermon to prepare after breakfast. At ten o'clock I'll join you in the churchyard."

II

My grandfather went off to unlock the tool-shed, and the Parson back to comfort Mrs. Polwhele — which was no easy matter. "There's something wrong with the parish since I've been away, and that you can't deny," she declared. "It don't feel like home any longer, and my poor flesh is shivering like a jelly, and my hand almost too hot to make the butter." She kept up this lidden all through breakfast, and the meal was no sooner cleared away than she slipped on a shawl and stepped across to the churchyard to discuss the robbery.

The Parson drew a chair to the window, lit his pipe, and pulled out his pocket-Bible to choose a

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

text for his next day's sermon. But he couldn't fix his thoughts. Try how he would, they kept harking back to his travels in the post-chaise, and his wife's story, and those unaccountable flags and splashes of whitewash. His pipe went out, and he was getting up to find a light for it, when just at that moment the garden-gate rattled, and, looking down the path towards the sound, his eyes fell on a square-cut, fierce-looking man in blue, standing there with a dirty bag in one hand and a sheaf of tools over his right shoulder.

The man caught sight of the Parson at the window, and set down his tools inside the gate — shovel and pick and biddicks.

“Good-mornin’! I may come inside, I suppose?” says he, in a gruff tone of voice. He came up the path and the Parson unlatched the window, which was one of the long sort reaching down to the ground.

“My name's Bligh,” said the visitor, gruff as before. “You're the Parson, eh? Bit of an antiquarian, I'm given to understand? These things ought to be in your line, then, and I hope they are not broken: I carried them as careful as I could.” He opened the bag and emptied it out upon the table — an old earthenware pot, a

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

rusted iron ring, four or five burnt bones, and a handful or so of ashes. "Human, you see," said he, picking up one of the bones and holding it under the Parson's nose. "One of your ancient Romans, no doubt."

"Ancient Romans? Ancient Romans?" stammered Parson Polwhele. "Pray, Sir, where did you get these — these articles?"

"By digging for them, Sir; in a mound just outside that old Roman camp of yours."

"Roman camp? There's no Roman camp within thirty miles of us as the crow flies: and I doubt if there's one within fifty!"

"Shows how much you know about it. That's what I complain about in you parsons: never glimpse a thing that's under your noses. Now, I come along, making no pretence to be an antiquarian, and the first thing I see out on your headland yonder, is a Roman camp, with a great mound beside it ——"

"No such thing, Sir!" the Parson couldn't help interrupting.

Bligh stared at him for a moment, like a man hurt in his feelings but keeping hold on his Christian compassion. "Look here," he said; "you mayn't know it, but I'm a bad man to contradict. This here Roman camp, as I was sayin' ——"

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

“If you mean Little Dinnis Camp, Sir, 'tis as round as my hat.”

“Damme, if you interrupt again ——”

“But I will. Here, in my own parlour, I tell you that Little Dinnis is as round as my hat!”

“All right; don't lose your temper, shouting out what I never denied. Round or square, it don't matter a ha'porth to me. This here round Roman camp ——”

“But I tell you, once more, there's no such thing!” cried the Parson, stamping his foot. “The Romans never made a round camp in their lives. Little Dinnis is British; the encampment's British; the mound, as you call it, is a British barrow; and as for you ——”

“As for me,” thunders Bligh, “I'm British too, and don't you forget it. Confound you, Sir! What the devil do I care for your pettifogging bones? I'm a British sailor, Sir; I come to your God-forsaken parish on a Government job, and I happen on a whole shopful of ancient remains. In pure kindness — pure kindness, mark you — I interrupt my work to dig 'em up; and this is all the thanks I get!”

“Thanks!” fairly yelled the Parson. “You ought to be horsewhipped, rather, for disturbing an ancient tomb that's been the apple of my eye

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

ever since I was inducted to this parish!" Then, as Bligh drew back, staring: "My poor barrow!" he went on; "my poor, ransacked barrow! But there may be something to save yet—" and he fairly ran for the door, leaving Bligh at a standstill.

For awhile the man stood there like a fellow in a trance, opening and shutting his mouth, with his eyes set on the doorway where the Parson had disappeared. Then, his temper overmastering him, with a sweep of his arm he sent the whole bag of tricks flying on to the floor, kicked them to right and left through the garden, slammed the gate, pitched across the road, and flung through the churchyard towards the river like a whirlwind.

Now, while this was happening, Mrs. Polwhele had picked her way across the churchyard, and after chatting a bit with my grandfather over the theft of his tools, had stepped into the church to see that the place, and specially the table and communion-rails and the parsonage pew, was neat and dusted, this being her regular custom after a trip to Plymouth. And no sooner was she within the porch than who should come dandering along the road but Arch'laus Spry. The road, as you know, goes downhill after passing the parsonage gate, and holds on round the

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

churtyard wall like a sunk way, the soil inside being piled up to the wall's coping. But, my grandfather being still behindhand with his job, his head and shoulders showed over the grave's edge. So Arch'laus Spry caught sight of him.

"Why, you're the very man I was looking for," says Arch'laus, stopping.

"Death halts for no man," answers my grandfather, shovelling away.

"That furrin' fellow is somewheres in this neighbourhood at this very moment," says Arch'laus, wagging his head. "I saw his boat moored down by the Passage as I landed. And I've a-got something to report. He was up and off by three o'clock this morning, and knocked up the Widow Polkinghorne, trying to borrow a pick and shovel."

"Pick and shovel!" My grandfather stopped working and slapped his thigh. "Then he's the man that 've walked off with mine: and a biddicks too."

"He said nothing of a biddicks, but he's quite capable of it."

"Surely in the midst of life we are in death," said my grandfather. "I was al'ays inclined to believe that text, and now I'm sure of it. Let's go and see the Parson."

He tossed his shovel on to the loose earth above

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

the grave and was just about to scramble out after it when the churchyard gate shook on its hinges and across the path and by the church porch went Bligh, as I've said, like a whirlwind. Arch'laus Spry, that had pulled his chin up level with the coping, ducked at the sight of him, and even my grandfather clucked down a little in the grave as he passed.

"The very man!" said Spry, under his breath.

"The wicked flee, whom no man pursueth," said my grandfather, looking after the man; but Bligh turned his head neither to the right hand nor to the left.

"Oh — oh — oh!" squealed a voice inside the church.

"Whatever was *that*," cries Arch'laus Spry, giving a jump. They both stared at the porch.

"Oh — oh — oh!" squealed the voice again.

"It certainly comes from inside," said Arch'laus Spry.

"It's Mrs. Polwhele!" said my grandfather; "and by the noise of it she's having hysterics."

And with that he scrambled up and ran; and Spry heaved himself over the wall and followed. And there, in the south aisle, they found Mrs. Polwhele lying back in a pew and kicking like a stallion in a loose-box.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

My grandfather took her by the shoulders, while Spry ran for the jug of holy water that stood by the font. As it happened, 'twas empty: but the sight of it fetched her to, and she raised herself up with a shiver.

“The Frenchman!” she cries out, pointing. “The Frenchman — on the coach! O Lord, deliver us!”

For a moment, as you'll guess, my grandfather was puzzled: but he stared where the poor lady pointed, and after a bit he began to understand. I daresay you've seen our church, Sir, and if so, you must have taken note of a monstrous fine fig-tree growing out of the south wall — “the marvel of Manaccan,” we used to call it. When they restored the church the other day nobody had the heart to destroy the tree, for all the damage it did to the building — having come there the Lord knows how, and grown there since the Lord knows when. So they took and patched up the wall around it, and there it thrives. But in the times I'm telling of, it had split the wall so that from inside you could look straight through the crack into the churchyard; and 'twas to this crack that Mrs. Polwhele's finger pointed.

“Eh?” said my grandfather. “The furriner*”

*In Cornwall a “foreigner” is anyone from east of the Tamar.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

that went by just now, was it he that frightened ye, Ma'am?"

Mrs. Polwhele nodded.

"But what put it into your head that he's a Frenchman?"

"Because French is his language. With these very ears I heard him talk it! He joined the coach at Torpoint, and when I spoke him fair in honest English not a word could he answer me. Oh, Calvin, Calvin! what have I done — a poor weak woman — to be mixed up in these plots and invasions?"

But my grandfather couldn't stop to answer that question, for a terrible light was breaking in upon him. "A Frenchman?" he called out. "And for these twenty-four hours he's been marking out the river and taking soundings!" He glared at Arch'laus Spry, and Arch'laus dropped the brazen ewer upon the pavement and smote his forehead. "The Devil," says he, "is among us, having great wrath!"

"And for aught we know," says my grandfather, speaking in a slow and fearsome whisper, "the French ships may be hanging off the coast while we'm talking here!"

"You don't mean to tell us," cried Mrs. Polwhele, sitting up stiff in the pew, "that this man

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

has been mapping out the river under your very noses!"

"He has, Ma'am. Oh, I see it all! What likelier place could they choose on the whole coast? And from here to Falmouth what is it but a step?"

"Let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains," said Arch'laus Spry solemn-like.

"And me just home from Plymouth with a fine new roasting-jack!" chimed in Mrs. Polwhele. "As though the day of wrath weren't bad enough without *that* waste o' money! Run, Calvin — run and tell the Vicar this instant — no, no, don't leave me behind! Take me home, that's a good man: else I shall faint at my own shadow!"

Well, they hurried off to the Vicarage: but, of course, there was no Parson to be found, for by this time he was half-way towards Little Dinnis, and running like a madman under the hot sun to see what damage had befallen his dearly-loved camp. The servants hadn't seen him leave the house; ne'er a word could they tell of him except that Martha, the cook, when she cleared away the breakfast things, had left him seated in his chair and smoking.

"But what's the meaning of this?" cried out Mrs. Polwhele, pointing to the tablecloth that

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

Bligh had pulled all awry in his temper. "And the window open too!"

"And — hulloa!" says my grandfather, staring across the patch of turf outside. "Surely here's signs of a violent struggle. Human, by the look of it," says he, picking up a thigh-bone and holding it out towards Mrs. Polwhele.

She began to shake like a leaf. "Oh, Calvin!" she gasps out. "Oh, Calvin, not in this short time — it couldn't be!"

"Charred, too," says my grandfather, inspecting it: and with that they turned at a cry from Martha the cook, that was down on hands and knees upon the carpet.

"Ashes! See here, mistress — ashes all over your best carpet!"

The two women stared at the fireplace: but, of course, that told them nothing, being empty, as usual at the time of year, with only a few shavings stuck about it by way of ornament. Martha, the first to pick up her wits, dashed out into the front hall.

"Gone without his hat, too!" she fairly screamed, running her eye along the row of pegs.

Mrs. Polwhele clasped her hands. "In the midst of life we are in death," said Arch'laus Spry: "that's my opinion if you ask it."

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

“Gone! Gone without his hat, like the snuff of a candle!” Mrs. Polwhele dropped into a chair and rocked herself and moaned.

My grandfather banged his fist on the table. He never could abide the sight of a woman in trouble.

“Missus,” says he, “if the Parson’s anywhere alive, we’ll find ’en: and if that Frenchman be Old Nick himself, he shall rue the day he ever set foot in Manaccan parish! Come’st along, Arch’laus ——”

He took Spry by the arm and marched him out and down the garden path. There, by the gate, what should his eyes light upon but his own stolen tools! But by this time all power of astonishment was dried up within him. He just raised his eyes aloft, as much as to say, “Let the sky open and rain miracles!” and then and there he saw, coming down the road, the funeral that both he and the Parson had clean forgotten.

The corpse was an old man called ’Pollas Hockaday; and Sam Trehwella, a fish-curer that had married Hockaday’s eldest daughter, walked next behind the coffin as chief mourner. My grandfather waited by the gate for the procession to come by, and with that Trehwella caught sight of him, and, says he, taking down the handkerchief from his nose —

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

“Well, you’re a pretty fellow, I must say! What in thunder d’ee mean by not tolling the minute-bell?”

“Take ’en back,” answers my grandfather, pointing to the coffin. “Take ’en back, ’co!”

“Eh?” says Trewhella. “Answer my question, I tell ’ee. You’ve hurt my feelings and the feelings of everyone connected with the deceased: and if this weren’t not-azackly the place for it, I’d up and give you a dashed good hiding,” says he.

“Aw, take ’en back,” my grandfather goes on. “Take ’en back, my dears, and put ’en somewhere, cool and temporary! The grave’s not digged, and the Parson’s kidnapped, and the French be upon us, and down by the river ther’s a furrin spy taking soundings at this moment! In the name of King George,” said he, remembering that he was constable, “I command you all except the females to come along and collar ’en!”

While this was going on, Sir, Bligh had found his boat — which he’d left by the shore — and was pulling up the river to work off his rage. Ne’er a thought had he, as he flounced through the churchyard, of the train of powder he dribbled behind him: but all the way he blew off steam,

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

cursing Parson Polwhele and the whole cloth from Land's End to Johnny Groats, and glowering at the very gates by the road as though he wanted to ~~kick 'em to relieve~~ his feelings. But when he reached his boat and began rowing, by little and little the exercise tamed him. With his flags and whitewash he'd marked out most of the lines he wanted for soundings: but there were two creeks he hadn't yet found time to explore — Porthnavas, on the opposite side, and the very creek by which we're sitting. So, as he came abreast of this one, he determined to have a look at it; and after rowing a hundred yards or so, lay on his oars, lit his pipe, and let his boat drift up with the tide.

The creek was just the same lonesome place that it is to-day, the only difference being that the pallace* at the entrance had a roof on it then, and was rented by Sam Trewhella — the same that followed old Hockaday's coffin, as I've told you. But above the pallace the woods grew close to the water's edge, and lined both shores with never a clearing till you reached the end, where the cottage stands now and the stream comes down beside it: in those days there wasn't any cottage, only a piece of swampy ground. I don't

* Fish-store.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

know that Bligh saw much in the scenery, but it may have helped to soothe his mind: for by-and-by he settled himself on the bottom-boards, lit another pipe, pulled his hat over his nose, and lay there blinking at the sky, while the boat drifted up, hitching sometimes in a bough and sometimes floating broadside-on to the current, until she reached this bit of marsh and took the mud very gently.

After a while, finding she didn't move, Bligh lifted his head for a look about him and found that he'd come to the end of the creek. He put out a hand and felt the water, that was almost luke-warm with running over the mud. The trees shut him in; not a living soul was in sight; and by the quietness he might have been a hundred miles from anywhere. So what does my gentleman do but strip himself for a comfortable bathe.

He folded his clothes very neatly in the stern-sheets, waded out across the shallows as naked as a babe, and took to the water with so much delight that after a minute or so he must needs lie on his back and kick. He splashed away, one leg after the other, with his face turned towards the shore, and was just on the point of rolling over for another swim, when, as he lifted a leg for one last kick, his eyes fell on the boat. And

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

there on the top of his clothes, in the stern of her, sat my grandfather sucking a pipe.

Bligh let down his legs and stood up, touching bottom, ~~but neck-deep in water.~~

“Hi, you there!” he sings out.

“Wee, wee, parleyvou!” my grandfather answers, making use of pretty well all the French he knew.

“Confound you, Sir, for an impident dirty dog! What in the name of jiminy” — I can't give you, Sir, the exact words, for my grandfather could never be got to repeat 'em — “What in the name of jiminy d'ee mean by sitting on my clothes!”

“Wee, wee,” my grandfather took him up, calm as you please. “You shocked me dreadful yesterday with your blasphemious talk: but now, seeing 'tis French, I don't mind so much. Take your time: but when you come out you go to prison. Wee, wee — preeson,” says my grandfather.

“Are you drunk?” yells Bligh. “Get off my clothes this instant, you hobnailed son of a something-or-other!” And he began striding for shore.

“In the name of his Majesty King George the Third I charge you to come along quiet,” says my grandfather, picking up a stretcher.

Bligh, being naked and unarmed, casts a look



www.libtool.com.cn

“IN THE NAME OF H. M. KING GEORGE III. I CHARGE YOU TO COME ALONG QUIET.”

www.libtool.com.cn

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

round for some way to help himself. He was a plucky fellow enough in a fight, as I've said: but I leave you to guess what he felt like when to right and left of him the bushes parted, and forth stepped half-a-dozen men in black suits with black silk weepers a foot and a half wide tied in great bunches round their hats. These were Sam Trehwella, of course, and the rest of the funeral-party, that had left the coffin in a nice shady spot inside the Vicarage garden-gate, and come along to assist the law. They had brought along pretty nearly all the menkind of the parish beside: but these, being in their work-a-day clothes, didn't appear, and for a reason you'll learn by-and-by. All that Bligh saw was this dismal company of mourners backed by a rabble of school-children, the little ones lining the shore and staring at him fearsomely with their fingers in their mouths.

For the moment Bligh must have thought himself dreaming. But there they stood, the men in black and the crowd of children, and my grandfather with the stretcher ready, and the green woods so quiet all round. And there he stood up to the ribs in water, and the tide and his temper rising.

“Look here, you something-or-other yokels,”

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

he called out, "if this is one of your village jokes, I promise you shall smart for it. Leave the spot this moment, fetch that idiot out of the boat, and take away the children. I want to dress, and it isn't decent!"

"Mounseer," answers my grandfather, "I dare say you've a-done it for your country; but we've a-caught you, and now you must go to prison — wee, wee, to preeson," he says, lipping it in a Frenchified way so as to make himself understood.

Bligh began to foam. "The longer you keep up this farce, my fine fellows, the worse you'll smart for it! There's a magistrate in this parish, as I happen to know."

"There *was*," said my grandfather; "but we've strong reasons to believe he's been made away with."

"The only thing we could find of 'en," put in Arch'laus Spry, "was a shin-bone and a pint of ashes. I don't know if the others noticed it, but to my notion there was a sniff of brimstone about the premises; and I've always been remarkable for my sense of smell."

"You won't deny," my grandfather went on, "that you've been making a map of this here river; for here it is in your tail-coat pocket."

"You insolent ruffian, put that down at once!

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

I tell you that I'm a British officer and a gentleman!"

"*And a Papist,*" went on my grandfather, holding up a ribbon with a bullet threaded to it. ("Twas the bullet Bligh used to weigh out allowances with on his voyage in the open boat after the mutineers had turned him adrift from the *Bounty*, and he wore it ever after.) "See here, friends: did you ever know an honest Protestant to wear such a thing about him inside his clothes?"

"Whether you're a joker or a numskull is more than I can fathom," says Bligh; "but for the last time I warn you I'm a British officer, and you'll go to jail for this as sure as eggs."

"The question is, Will you surrender and come along quiet?"

"No, I won't," says Bligh, sulky as a bear; "not if I stay here all night!"

With that my grandfather gave a wink to Sam Trewhella, and Sam Trewhella gave a whistle, and round the point came Trewhella's sean-boat that the village lads had fetched out and launched from his store at the mouth of the creek. Four men pulled her with all their might; in the stern stood Trewhella's foreman, Jim Bunt, with his two-hundred-fathom net: and along the shore came running the rest of the lads to see the fun.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

“Heva, heva!” yelled Sam Trewhella, waving his hat with the black streamers.

The sean-boat swooped up to Bligh with a rush, and then, just as he faced upon it with his fists up, to die fighting, it swerved off on a curve round him, and Jim Bunt began shooting the sean hand over hand like lightning. Then the poor man understood, and having no mind to be rolled up and afterwards tucked in a sean-net, he let out an oath, ducked his head, and broke for the shore like a bull. But 'twas no manner of use. As soon as he touched land a dozen jumped for him and pulled him down. They handled him as gentle as they could, for he fought with fists, legs, and teeth, and his language was awful: but my grandfather in his foresight had brought along a couple of wainropes, and within ten minutes they had my gentleman trussed, heaved him into the boat, covered him over, and were rowing him off and down the creek to land him at Helford quay.

By this 'twas past noon; and at one o'clock, or a little before, Parson Polwhele come striding along home from Little Dinnis. He had tied a handkerchief about his head to keep off the sun; his hands and knees were coated with earth; and he sweated like a furze-bush in a mist, for the

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

footpath led through cornfields and the heat was something terrible. Moreover, he had just called the funeral to mind; and this and the damage he'd left at Little Dinnis fairly hurried him into a fever.

But worse was in store. As he drew near the Parsonage, he spied a man running towards him: and behind the man the most dreadful noises were sounding from the house. The Parson came to a halt and swayed where he stood.

"Oh, Calvin! Calvin!" he cried — for the man running was my grandfather — "don't try to break it gently, but let me know the worst!"

"Oh, blessed day! Oh, fearful and yet blessed day!" cries my grandfather, almost catching him in both arms. "So you're not dead! So you're not dead, the Lord be praised, but only hurt!"

"Hurt?" says the Parson. "Not a bit of it — or only in my feelings. Oh, 'tis the handkerchief you're looking at? I put that up against sun-stroke. But whatever do these dreadful sounds mean? Tell me the worst, Calvin, I implore you!"

"Oh, as for that," says my grandfather cheerfully, "the Frenchman's the worst by a long way — not but what your good lady made noise enough when she thought you'd been made away with: and afterwards, when she went upstairs and,

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

taking a glance out of window, spied a long black coffin laid out under the lilac bushes, I'm told you could hear her a mile away. But she've been weakening this half-hour: her nature couldn't keep it up: whereas the longer we keep that Frenchman, the louder he seems to bellow."

"Heaven defend us, Calvin!" — the Parson's eyes fairly rolled in his head — "are you gone clean crazed? Frenchman! What Frenchman?"

"The same that frightened Mrs. Polwhele, Sir, upon the coach. We caught him drawing maps of the river, and very nigh tucked him in Sam Trewhella's sean: and now he's in your toolshed right and tight, and here's the key, Sir, making so bold, that you gave me this morning. But I didn't like to take him into the house, with your good lady tumbling out of one fit into another. Hark to 'en, now! Would you ever believe one man could make such a noise."

"Fits! My poor, dear, tender Mary having fits!" The Parson broke away for the house and dashed upstairs three steps at a time: and when she caught sight of him, Mrs. Polwhele let out a louder squeal than ever. But the next moment she was hanging round his neck, and laughing and sobbing by turns. And how long they'd have clung to one another there's no know-

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

ing, if it hadn't been for the language pouring from the tool-shed.

"My dear," said the Parson, holding himself up and listening, "I don't think that can possibly be a Frenchman. He's too fluent."

Mrs. Polwhele listened too, but after a while she was forced to cover her face with both hands. "Oh, Richard, I've often heard 'em described as gay, but — but they can't surely be so gay as all that!"

The Parson eased her into an armchair and went downstairs to the courtyard, and there, as you may suppose, he found the parish gathered.

"Stand back all of you," he ordered. "I've a notion that some mistake has been committed: but you had best hold yourselves ready in case the prisoner tries to escape."

"But, Parson dear, you're never going to unlock that door!" cried my grandfather.

"If you'll stand by me, Calvin," says the Parson, plucky as ginger, and up he steps to the very door, all the parish holding its breath.

He tapped once — no answer: twice — and no more answer than before. There was a small trap open in the roof and through this the language kept pouring with never a stop, only now and then a roar like a bull's. But at the third knock it

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

died down to a sort of rumbling, and presently came a shout, "Who's there?"

"A clergyman and justice of the peace," answers the Parson.

"I'll have your skin for this!"

"But you'll excuse me ——"

"I'll have your skin for this, and your blood in a bottle! I'm a British officer and a gentleman, and I'll have you stuffed and put in a glass case, so sure as my name's Bligh!"

"Bligh?" says the Parson, opening the door.

"Any relation to the Blighs of St. Tudy? Oh, no — it can't be!" he stammered, taken all aback to see the man stark naked on the threshold. "Why — why, you're the gentleman that called this morning!" he went on, the light breaking in upon him: "excuse me, I recognise you by — by the slight scar on your face."

Well, Sir, there was nothing for Bligh to do — the whole parish staring at him — but to slip back into the shed and put on the clothes my grandfather handed in at the door: and while he was dressing the whole truth came out. I won't say that he took the Parson's explanations in a nice spirit: for he vowed to have the law on every one concerned. But that night he walked back to

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

Falmouth and took the London coach. As for Helford River, 'twasn't charted that year nor for a score of years after. And now you know how this creek came by its name; and I'll say again, as I began, that a bad temper is an affliction, whoever owns it.

www.libtool.com.cn

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

AN EXTRACT FROM THE MEMOIRS OF GABRIEL
FOOT, HIGHWAYMAN

I SIT down to this chapter of my Memoirs with an unwonted relish, because it exhibits me as an instrument in the hands of Providence. Doubtless, in our business, we perform that function oftener than the law recognises, but seldom so directly, so unequivocally, as in the adventure I shall now relate. And I say this, not because it left me with a title to one of the neatest little estates in the West of England, but because I, the one man necessary to the situation, dropped upon it (so to speak) with my hands in my pockets. I had never before happened within thirty miles of Tregarrick town: I walked in at one end purposing only to walk out at the other: and, but for a child's practical joke, I had done so and forgotten the place. It was touch and go, in short: the sort of thing to set you speculating on the possible extent of man's missed opportunities.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

I had stepped ashore, after a voyage from Hull (undertaken from expedience and not for health), upon the Market Strand at Falmouth, with one shilling and fourpence in my pocket. I have been in lower water, but never with such a job before me; and I started to tramp it back to London with little more than a dog's determination to get there somehow. The third afternoon found me in Tregarrick, wet through, sullen, and moderately hungry. The time of year was October: all day it had been raining and blowing chilly from the north-west; and traffic had deserted the unlovely Fore Street when, as the town-clock chimed a quarter to five, I passed the windows and open archway of the Red Hart Hotel. A gust from the archway brought me up staggering and clutching my hat: I faced round to it, and, in so doing, caught a momentary glimpse, above the wire blind in a lower window, of a bald-headed man within standing with his back to the street; and at the same instant heard a coin drop on the pavement behind me.

A richer man would have halted, turned and scanned the pavement as I did. But a richer man would probably have taken longer to assure himself that nothing had been lost from his pocket, and would certainly have taken longer to suspect

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

that the coin might have been tossed to him in charity. I flung a glance up at the window overhead, and spied a penny dangling over the sill by a string.

www.libtool.com.cn

At once I recognised the secular jest; and stepped across the roadway to get a look at the performer. As I did so, an elderly man in an Inverness cape and rusty hat and suit emerged briskly from the archway of the inn, glanced up at the weather, and passed along the pavement beneath the window.

Thereupon, I saw the trick played to perfection. A curly-headed youngster popped into view, leaned out, rang the coin down at the very heels of the pedestrian, and whisked it as nimbly up. The man whipped round and, seeing nothing, pulled out a pair of spectacles and began to adjust them. I heard the youngster chuckle overhead as he stooped and a deflected gust from the archway, skimming his hat into the gutter, revealed the same bald head I had observed above the wire blind.

Just then, three other faces appeared; one above the same blind and two at the upper window behind the child. And a moment later I had spun right-about on my heel and was apparently in deep study of a damp placard upon a hoarding opposite.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

The two faces at the upper window were interesting, had there been time to consider them; and one — that of a lady, obviously the child's mother — struck me as uncommonly beautiful, though pale and desperately sad. Beside her stood a man, as obviously the father; a handsome gentleman, with the flushed face and glassy stare of a drunkard. He stood there chuckling at the trick, and even the lady was smiling indulgently until she leaned out and caught a glimpse of the victim: whereupon, with a sudden terrified snatch, she drew the boy back from the window, and out of sight.

It was then, as I looked at the bald-headed man, seeking some explanation of her terror, that I caught sight of the face staring over the wire blind in the lower window, and lost not a second in presenting my back to it.

It belonged to an old acquaintance of mine. "Acquaintance," I say, because Robert Leggat and I had never been able to stomach each other. There was perhaps a trifle too much of the gentleman about both of us — enough, at any rate, to suggest rivalry, though we hunted different game. "Buck" Leggat was by gifts and election a sedentary scoundrel, with a tongue and a presence fatally plausible among women and clergymen,

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

and a neat adaptable pen. Whence he came, or of what upbringing, I could never discover. I had heard some hint of an Oxford education, but he never alluded to that University in my company. Flash notes had brought him to the Old Bailey, and then his elegant deportment and a nice point of circumstantial evidence had saved his neck. This was about four years ago, and I had supposed him to be somewhere in the Plantations when his bad handsome face confounded me across Tregarrick Fore Street. He wore a clergyman's bands, too.

By good luck he had not recognised me, but was occupied with the bald-headed man who still groped on the pavement. The placard which I appeared to be studying announced the Sale by Auction of a considerable country estate, and my eyes roamed among such words as "farms," "tenements," "messuages," "acres," while I cast up the possible profit of my discovery. Here was I, pretty hungry, with barely the coin for a night's lodging. Here was Leggat, escaped convict, lording it in the coffee-room of a hotel, masquerading as a parson; therefore up to some game — a bold one — by the look of it a paying one. Decidedly I ought, with a little prudence, to handle a percentage.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

I edged away from the hoarding to the shop-front on my left — a watchmaker's; and so, still presenting my back to the Red Hart, past a saddler's, a tailor's, the entrance of the County Hall, and the Town Clerk's office. Here, out of view from Leggat's window, I turned, stepped across the street into the hotel archway, and walked boldly into the coffee-room which opened out of it on the left.

Leggat had disappeared. The room in fact was empty.

I rang the bell, and after some minutes it was answered by a waitress, a decent girl, though somewhat towzled.

"There was a clergyman here a moment since," said I.

"That will be Mr. Addison. Do you wish to see him?" She eyed me with no great favour, and indeed my clothes ill agreed with the respectable dinginess of the coffee-room.

"So Addison's the name!" thought I, "and a pretty good one too. I wonder if Leggat has the face to claim descent from the essayist. He's capable of it." I pulled out my only shilling. "Well, yes, I want to have a talk with him: but I'll sit down and wait till he comes, and meanwhile you might bring me a glass of rum hot,

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

with one slice of lemon. Mr. Addison is staying the night here, I suppose?"

"I don't know," she answered. "Anyhow, he won't be riding home to Welland till late. But hadn't you better come to the bar for your rum?"

"Well," said I, "if it's all the same to you, I'll stay where I am. To tell the truth, my dear, I've come to see Mr. Addison about putting up my banns: and that's a delicate matter, eh!"

Upon this she began to eye me more favourably, as I expected. There's an *esprit de corps* among women — or an *esprit de sexe*, if you will — which softens them towards the marrying man. Surrender to one, surrender to all. "But you don't belong to Welland parish," said she.

"Quite right. It takes two to make a wedding, and the young woman belongs to Welland."

"Who is she?"

"Aha!" I winked at her knowingly.

"I come from Welland parish myself," she went on, her curiosity fairly piqued.

"Then if you happen to be going home to church next Sunday keep your ears open after the second lesson."

She tossed her chin and went off on her errand, but returning in three minutes with the grog, must needs have another try. "I reckon it's

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Susie Martin," she declared, and nodded at me with conviction in her eye.

"Well, now, supposing it's Susie — and, mind you, I'm not admitting it — you won't forbid the banns, I hope?"

"La, no! And I'll wager Mr. Addison won't, either," she tittered.

Plainly, here was an answer worth pondering. "You seem to be pretty full in the bar, to-night?" I observed, casually, to gain time; and, indeed, a hubbub of voices from across the archway smote on our ears through the double baize doors.

"The auctioneer is standing treat."

"Oh! — ah, yes — the auctioneer, to be sure," I murmured.

"The sale won't begin in the Long Room before six: he has half-an-hour for wetting their whistles. Seeming to me, you'll be lucky if you get Mr. Addison to attend to *your* business before it's over. But, perhaps," she added archly, "you'll like to have a word with Susie, to fill up the time? Shall I send her word that you are here? I dare say she'll find a chance to slip down to you; that is, if her mistress attends the auction."

"But will she?" I asked, doing my best to look wise.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

She nodded sagely. "I shouldn't wonder. She'll want to look after the squire; he's more than half drunk already."

"It's plain you're a clever girl," I said; "but we'll let Susie wait for a while. And my business can wait on Mr. Addison. If his is an auction, mine is notoriously a lottery."

"There's one thing to console you," she answered smartly and (in the light of later knowledge I am bound to add) wittily; "you aren't drawing a blank." And with this shaft she left me.

Now the girl's talk was nothing short of heathen Greek to me, as doubtless it is to the reader, and I sat for ten minutes at least digesting it with the aid of my grog. Here was Leggat, my quarry, identified with a Mr. Addison, incumbent or curate of a country parish within riding distance of Tregarrick. He was here to attend an auction. My thoughts flew to the bill I had been pretending to study half-an-hour before; but unfortunately I had given it no particular attention, and could only remember now that it advertised an estate of good acreage. The name "Welland," indeed, struck me as familiar, but I could not refer it to the bill, and must pull up for the moment and try a cast upon a fresh scent — Susie Martin. Mr. Addison, *alias* Leggat, is not likely to forbid her

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

banns, whoever she may be; in other words, won't be sorry to see her married. And Susie is a servant — of a mistress who will probably be attending this auction — to look after a drunken husband, who presumably, therefore, is also concerned in the auction. I recalled the two faces at the upper window, the one tipsy and the other sad, and felt pretty sure of having fixed Susie's employers. I recalled the lady's start of terror as she had caught sight of the bald-headed man below, and that I had first seen the bald head behind the window out of which Leggat had looked a minute later. If the bald-headed man had been talking with Leggat, this might connect her terror with Leggat. And both she and Leggat were to attend the auction. But what was this auction? And who the dickens was the bald-headed man?

The tangle — as the reader will admit — was a complicated one. But so far fortune had served me fairly; and considering the adventure as a game, in my knowledge of Leggat and his ignorance of my being anywhere in the neighborhood, I still held the two best trumps. In speculating on the possible strength of these two cards a new opening occurred to me. I had come with the purpose of forcing Leggat to buy me off or admit me into his game. But might there not be more

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

profit, as there would certainly be less risk, in taking a hand against him? I had no fancy for him as a partner. I knew him for an unhealthy villain, with an instinct for preying on the weak, a born enemy of widows and orphans. If only I could discover what the stakes were, and what cards the other side held! Well, but I could have a try for this, even. I could, for instance, apply to the squire for a job, and this might throw me in the way of Susie Martin.

I stepped to the baize door, and passed out upon the archway. Six yards to the right, the Boots, with his back to me, was fixing a ladder to climb it and light the great lantern over the entrance. To my left a broad staircase ran up into the darkness. I tip-toed towards it, gained the stairs, and mounted them swiftly, but without noise, guiding myself by the handrail.

The stairs ran up to the first floor in two flights, with a bend about half-way. At the top of the second flight I found myself facing a pitch-dark corridor. The rooms facing the street must (I knew) be on my right; but as I groped along, my palm found the recess of a doorway on my left, and pressed open the door which stood just ajar. I drew back and listened: then, hearing no sound, poked my head cautiously within.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

The room was dark, but the glow of a dying fire at the farther end gave me some idea of its dimensions. A faint reflection of this glow fell upon the polished surface of something which I guessed to be a mahogany table-leg, and, after a second or two, I perceived, or thought I perceived, two heavily-curtained windows, reaching almost to the top of the wall opposite.

I was reconnoitring so, in the recess of the doorway, when I heard a low tapping far up the corridor, and withdrew my head in time to see a door open and the faint ray of a candle fall upon a figure standing there, about twenty yards from my hiding-place; the black-coated figure of Mark Leggat.

“Hullo!” I said to myself. “Now for Susie!”

It was not Susie, however, who stepped out and, closing the door behind her, confronted Leggat, candle in hand. It was the pale lady I had seen at the window.

They stood for a moment conversing — so their attitude told me — in short whispers; and then came slowly down the passage towards me, the lady appearing to protest whilst Leggat persuaded and reassured her. At first I took it for granted they would enter one of the doors opposite; but, as they still came on, I saw that I must either retreat or be discovered.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

I backed, therefore, around the half-open door and into the room. Then, as their voices drew near, it flashed on me that this might be the room they were seeking. I took three breathless paces across it, and found the table's edge. Guiding myself by this, and guided by the mercy of Heaven, which kept my feet from striking against the furniture, I found myself within three yards of the window nearest to the fire-place, with just time enough to make a dash for cover, and whip behind the curtain before Leggat pushed the door wide, and the pair entered the room.

"You *must* give me five minutes!" Leggat was saying. "I tell you it's not for my sake, but for yours; it's your last chance!" Then, as the lady made no answer — "You did not believe you had another chance?" he asked.

"There can be none!" she answered now. "You have ruined me; you have ruined us all: and it was my fault for not warning Harry in time."

"My dear Ethel," he began; but a gesture of hers must have interrupted him, for he checked himself, and went on — "Very well, then, my dear Mrs. Carthew, if you prefer it; you are at once too weak and too scrupulous. A fatal defect, although you make it charming! Until too

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

late, you hid from yourself that you loved me. When that became impossible you ran for shelter behind your vows and a theory — which you know in your heart to be impossible — that I, who had ventured so much for you, did not love you.”

“Love!” she echoed hoarsely. “What love could it have been that sought this way?”

“Well, as it happens, it *was* a way. Harry? Tut-tut, with Harry I was merely the handiest excuse for going to the devil. Suppose you had never set eyes on me. You know well enough he was bound to gamble away Welland sooner or later, just as he will sooner or later drink himself dead. I am sorry for the child; but, look you, I am going to be frank. It was just through the child I hoped to get you. To save Welland for *him* I believed you would follow your heart and take my help with my love. You wouldn’t. You couldn’t help loving me, but — as you put it — you are a good woman: and even now, with the sale but an hour away and a sot of a husband to lead off with poverty, you won’t.”

She had set down the candle on the table; and now, having made a peephole between the two curtains, I saw her lift her head proudly.

“No,” she said, “to my shame I loved you; but you would buy me, and I am not to be bought.”

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“I know it,” he answered, and let out a grim laugh. “But on one point I am going to prove you mistaken. You believe that because I tried bribery I did not love you. You can win by that error; but it is an error nevertheless, as I am going to prove.”

While her eyes questioned him he drew a roll of notes from his pocket.

“Your fond brother-in-law intends to buy Welland,” said he.

“James?”

“To be sure,” he nodded while he ran through the notes with finger and thumb. “As the eldest brother, James Carthew wants Welland, to add it to the entailed estates. He has always wanted it: but these eight months, since that infant was born to him, he has wanted it ten times more. To-night he bids for it: and for decency’s sake he bids through me — which is precisely where he comes to grief.”

“I don’t understand.”

Leggat went on silently counting the notes. “Three thousand, five hundred,” he answered; “the deposit money and a trifle over, in case of accidents. James Carthew is a rich man. I should reckon him up at a hundred and twenty thousand, and be within the mark.”

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“But why should he employ you?”

“In the first place, I suppose, because I’ve played the game for him throughout, and played it pretty successfully.”

“You?”

He nodded. “You don’t suppose Harry was playing against *me* all this while? My dear lady, you cannot ruin a man at the cards without some capital of your own; that is, supposing you play straight, as I beg to observe that I did. No, no: I had a backer, and that backer was your amiable brother-in-law.”

“But why?”

“Simply because a steady-going man like James, however much he inherits by entail, represents the choicest portion of the property — which does not happen to be entailed — being willed away to a loose dog of a younger brother. And when that younger brother marries and has a son, whereas he has married a childless woman, he resents it yet more bitterly. He cannot digest the grievance that, when he dies, the whole must go to the son of the brother who sits and drinks the wine in Naboth’s vineyard. But, as it happens, his childless wife dies, and presto! he marries again. At a decent interval a child is born, and now is his time to play a tit-for-tat.”

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“He always hated us, I know,” she murmured.
“But *you* ——”

“But I,” he answered gaily, “am about to spoil that pretty game — and for your sake. Yes, and although you don’t know how, and will never know how, I am going to risk my neck for it.” He tossed the bundle of notes across the table towards her. She put out a hand as it rolled off the table’s edge and dropped at her feet. “Count them: because I have to use them to-night to buy Welland back for you.” And now there was a real thrill in his voice. “Count them,” he insisted: “they are only the first-fruits, and after to-night you may never see me again: they are only the deposit on the price, and after the auction I shall ride away — not back to Welland Vicarage. But I have a word to leave, or to send, for Master James Carthew, and if these notes do not buy Welland back for you I am mistaken. I am what I am, and from what we are such poor devils as I cannot escape. But at least I have loved you, and in the end you shall be sure of it. Count them!”

He wheeled about on the words as the door was flung open. On the threshold stood Squire Harry Carthew.

He was white in the face and more than half-

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

drunk. Under one arm he carried a leather-covered case and a pair of foils. His gaze wandered from his wife to Leggat, then back again to his wife. www.libtool.com.cn

“I want,” said he, addressing her with husky solemnity, “a word with Mr. Addison in private.” She bent her head and moved from the room, and he bowed as he passed, but somewhat spoiled the effect by shutting the door upon her train.

“I think,” he said, closing the door a second time and locking it upon her — and his tone grew suddenly sharp, though he remained none the less drunk — “I think, Mr. Addison, we need waste no time. My wife’s maid, Susie, has told me all that is necessary. You will choose one of those pistols, and we can settle the matter here and now. No!” — for Leggat had begun to edge towards the packet of notes lying on the floor — “you are not to stir, please, until we understand one another.” He laid the foils on the table and held out the case. Leggat took the pistol next to his hand.

“You are drunk, Carthew.”

“Am I? Well, that is likely enough, and as a sportsman you won’t object to allow for it in our arrangements.” He slipped the door-key into his breeches pocket and, still holding the pistol

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

in his right hand, leaned forward and laid his left on the base of the candlestick. "You start from that end of the room, and I from this by the fireplace. Are you ready? Here, take one of the foils too. After I have blown the candle out you will remain at your end and count twenty, in silence, of course. I will do the same at my end, and then we begin."

"Don't be a fool, man! This is no duel; it is murder, and foolish murder."

Squire Carthew puffed out the candle. Then the guard of the foil rattled softly upon the mahogany as he closed his hand upon it. "Count twenty, please."

I leave the reader to picture my situation. There, in the silence and the darkness with these two — one of them drunk — prowling to kill. In all my experience I can recall nothing so entirely uncomfortable. I had no defence but the folds of a window curtain. I could not stir without inviting a thrust or a pistol shot, or both. And I may remark here, that there is a degree of terror which resembles physical sickness. *Experto credite.*

I heard the men kick off their shoes; and after that for many seconds — though I strained my ears, you may be sure — I heard nothing.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Then a hand brushed upon the woodwork of the recess and even rested for a moment against the curtain, within six inches of my nose. It was Leggat I could be sworn. I drew back as his fingers felt the stuff of the curtain and passed on groping; I even heard the soft crack of his elbow-joint as he gripped the foil again, which for the moment he must have tucked under his arm-pit.

And with that it flashed on me what he was after — the roll of notes lying on the floor, between the table and the fireplace, barely a foot beyond the table's edge and perhaps four yards from my hiding place. I knew the spot exactly. Squire Carthew had almost touched the packet with his foot as he stooped to blow out the candle.

I dropped on hands and knees behind my curtain, pushed it softly aside and began to crawl. I could hear nothing now but my own heart drumming. For the next few moments, if I made no sound, it was unlikely either that Leggat would steal back upon me or that the squire could reach me without encountering Leggat. My hand touched the table-leg, and the touch of it, coming unexpectedly, almost made me cry out. A moment later I felt more easy. Once beneath the table I was comparatively safe. But I must get my hand on these notes, and after pausing a

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

second I steered towards the fireplace, poked out my head and shoulders beyond the table, and smoothed my palm across the floor until my fingers touched the packet and closed upon it.

At that moment, in the darkness, to the left, a foil rattled against a chair. The sound was a slight one, but it betrayed Leggat's whereabouts, and, with a gasp of triumph, Carthew came running upon him from the right.

I ducked my head, but before I could slip back he had blundered right across my shoulders, which reached, perhaps, to his knees. He went over me with an oath and a crash, and as he struck the floor his pistol exploded.

I drew back with the smoke of it in my mouth and nostrils — and listened. Not a sound came from Leggat's corner, not a groan from the body stretched within reach. The man was dead, for certain; and we others had no time to lose.

A thud in the corridor outside called me to my senses. "Robert Leggat," I cried, "this is a black night's job for you! Lay down that pistol, find your shoes, and run!"

At this distance of time I would give something to know how it took him — this voice calling his true name out of the darkness and across Carthew's body.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“My God! Who is that?” he asked, and I could hear his teeth chattering.

Before I had need to answer, he broke from his corner and flung up the window, but recollected himself, and ran for his shoes. He had scarcely found them when there came that rush upon the stairs for which I had been listening, and a woman's voice screamed, “The Mistress! They've murdered the mistress!”

In my heart I blessed Mrs. Carthew — poor soul — for having swooned so conveniently outside the door. By this time Leggat was clambering across the window sill. What sort of drop lay below it? I saw the black mass of his body framed there for a moment against a sky almost as black, and watched as he lowered himself, and disappeared. I listened for the thud of a fall; but none came, and running to see what had befallen him, I caught another glimpse of him as he stole past a lit skylight in a long flat roof scarcely six feet below.

Here was luck beyond my hoping. The crowd in the passage was still occupied with Mrs. Carthew, but at length someone tried the handle of the door. This was my cue. I clambered out after Leggat — who by this time had disappeared — drew down the window-sash cau-

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

tiously and wriggled across the leads of the roof, pausing only at the skylight to peer down into an empty room, where a score of wooden-seated chairs stood in disarray by a long table — the deserted auction-room, doubtless. At the far end of this roof a chimney-stack rose gaunt against the night; and flattening myself against the side of it, I waited for the dull crash which told that the crowd had broken in the door.

I had made better speed, you understand, but for the risk of overtaking Leggat and being recognised. As it was, I had set the worst of all terrors barking at his heels, and by and by — it may have been after three minutes' wait — I chuckled at the sound of a horse's hoofs in the stable-yard below me. It was too dark for me to catch sight of the rider as he mounted; but he made for the lower gate of the yard and, once past it, broke into a gallop. As its echoes died away, I began my search for the ladder by which Leggat had descended; found it, as I had expected, in the form of a stout water-pipe; and having reached the ground without mishap, brushed and smoothed my clothes and sauntered up the stable-yard to the hotel archway.

At the foot of the stairs there, I was almost bowled over by the Boots, who came flying down

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

three stairs at a stride. "The Doctor!" he shouted: "the Doctor!" He tore past me and out into the street.

I entered the coffee-room and rang the bell.

I suppose that I rang it at intervals for something like half-an-hour before the waitress found me yawning before the exhausted fire.

"Sale over yet?" I asked pleasantly.

"Sale over? Sale ov —?" She set down the lamp and gasped. "Do you tell me that you've slept through it all?"

"All what, my dear?"

Out it all came in a flood. "The Squire's shot himself! In the Blue Room over your very head — locked the door and shot himself clean through the brains! Poor gentleman, he felt his position, though he did drink so fierce. And now he's gone, and Mrs. Carthew no sooner out of one swoon than into another."

"Bless my soul!" cried I. "Now you speak of it, I *did* hear something like a pistol shot; but that must have been half-an-hour ago."

"It's a wonder," she said tragically, "his blood didn't drip on you through the ceiling."

It was useless (she agreed with me) to expect Mr. Addison to attend to my business that night. Indeed, though he was doubtless somewhere in

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

the crowd, she could not recall having seen him. It would also be useless, and worse, to seek an interview with Susie, who was attending to her poor mistress. www.libtool.com.cn

“Very well,” I said. “Then since I can see neither the parson nor the girl, I must make shift with the lawyer. No, my dear, you need not stare at me like that, I don’t put my money on my back, like some of your gentry; but while I keep enough in my pocket there’s no law in England against my employing as good an attorney as poor Mr. Carthew — or, if I choose, the very same man.”

“What? Mr. Retallack?”

I nodded. “That’s it — Mr. Retallack. I take it he came to attend the auction, and is upstairs at this moment.”

“Why, yes; it was he that gave orders to break in the door and found the body. He began putting questions to Mrs. Carthew, but the poor soul wasn’t fit to answer. And then he and Mr. James tackled Susie, who swore she knew nothing of the business until she heard the shot — as we all did — and, running out, found her mistress stretched in the passage: and now she’s attending to her in the bedroom with the doctor. So the lawyer’s at a standstill.”

“Mr. James Carthew? Is *he* here too?”

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“Yes: he’s living at his town house this week, but he came here to-night — for the sale, I suppose. He’s upstairs now, and his wife along with him; she heard the news cried up the street and came running down all agog with her bonnet on top of her nightcap. But I mustn’t stay talking.”

“No, indeed you must not,” said I. “Here, tell me where you keep your tinder-box. . . . Now, while I light the candles, do you run upstairs and tell Mr. Retallack privately that a person wishes to speak with him in the coffee-room on an important matter and one connected with to-night’s business.”

The girl, hungry to be back at the scene of horror, lost no time. I had scarcely time to light the four candles on the chimney-piece when the baize door opened and I found myself bowing to a white-haired little gentleman with a kindly, flustered face. He was plainly suffering from nervous excitement in a high degree, and in the act of bowing attempted to rearrange his shirt-frill with an undecided hand.

“Good evening, Mr. Retallack.”

“You sent for me ——” he began, and broke off, obviously dismayed by my rough clothes and not altogether liking the look of his customer.

I offered him a chair; he looked at it doubtfully,

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

but shook his head. "My business is of moment," said I, "and of some urgency. That must excuse me for summoning you just now, since as a matter of fact it has less to do with the unhappy pair upstairs than with what I take to be the cause of it. I mean the sale of the Welland estate."

He spread out his hands. "At such a time!" he protested.

"I am glad to find, sir, that you feel so deeply, since it proves you to be a real friend of the family. But as a lawyer you will not let emotion obscure your good sense, or miss a chance of saving Welland for the poor lady and orphan child upstairs merely because it happens to present itself at an untoward moment."

He eyed me, fumbling with the seals at his fob. His mind was by no means clear, but professional instinct seemed to warn him that my words were important.

"I do not know you, sir," he quavered; "but if you are here with any plan of saving Welland, I must tell you sadly that you waste time. I have thought of a hundred plans, sir, but have found none workable. It has destroyed my rest for months — for, with all his failings, I was sincerely attached to young Mr. Carthew, and no less sincerely to his unhappy lady. I warned him a

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

hundred times: but the debts exist, the mortgagees foreclose, and Welland must go."

"Who are the mortgagees?"

"A joint-stock company in London, sir, which lives upon this form of usury. Men with bowels of brass. It was against my strongest warning that Mr. Harry went to them."

"The amount?"

"Thirty-four thousand pounds."

"Will the estate sell for that figure?"

"Scarcely, at a forced sale; unless some purchaser took a special fancy to it or had some special reason for acquiring it."

"Suppose, now, that I offer thirty-four thousand to buy the estate by private contract. Would such an offer be accepted?"

"Indubitably. The mortgagees could offer no objection, even if they wished; for they would be paid; but, in fact, they scarcely hope for so much. You will excuse me, however —"

"In a moment, Mr. Retallack. Still, supposing that I offer thirty-four thousand, a deposit on the purchase money would be required. Can you name the sum?"

"Unless the purchaser were well known in this neighbourhood ten per cent. would be asked, or three thousand four hundred."

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“Leaving me a hundred,” I said musingly.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Nothing: a bad habit I have of talking to myself. Will you pardon a question of some abruptness? You are acquainted, no doubt, with the present Mrs. James Carthew?”

“Slightly.” He looked at me in some puzzlement. “She was Mr. James’s housekeeper.”

“So I have heard. Is she a woman of strong mind? with an influence upon her husband?”

Mr. Retallack positively smiled.

“You may be sure he would never have married her without it. Oh, there’s no doubt about the strength of her mind!”

“Middle-aged, I believe? With one child, and not likely to have another?”

“It astonished us all when this one was born. Indeed, people do say — but I mustn’t repeat tattle.”

“No, indeed. But a man like James Carthew, with a large entail at stake, might be forgiven ——” I did not finish my sentence, but stepped to the bell and rang it.

“Excuse me, sir,” said Mr. Retallack; “you began by promising — at least by holding out some hope — that Welland might be preserved for Mrs. Harry Carthew and her son. But so far

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

you have told me nothing except that you wish to purchase it yourself.”

“I think, rather, that you must have jumped to that conclusion. My dear sir, do I *look* like a man able to purchase Welland? No, no; I am merely the agent of a friend who is unhappily prevented from treating in person. My dear” — I turned to the waitress who entered at this moment — “would you mind running upstairs and telling Mr. and Mrs. James Carthew that Mr. Addison has ridden home, leaving a packet of notes behind him; and that the person in possession of that packet wishes to see them both — be particular to say ‘both’ — in private.”

“Sir, sir!” exclaimed Mr. Retallack, as the maid shut the door. I turned to find him eyeing me between suspicion and alarm. “Either you have not been frank with me, or you must be ignorant that James Carthew has been no brotherly brother of poor Harry. He is the last man before whom I should care to discuss the purchase of Welland. I have, indeed, more than once suspected him of being in collusion with the Mr. Addison you mention, and, in part, responsible for the disaster into which, as I maintain, that reverend gentleman has hurried my poor friend. If there be any question of James Carthew’s pur-

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

chasing Welland (and I will confess the fear of this has been troubling me) I must decline to listen to it until fate compels me. To-night, with Harry Carthew lying dead in the room above, I will not hear it so much as suggested."

"Then, my excellent Mr. Retallack, do not start suggesting it. Ah, here they are!" said I, pleasantly, as the door opened, and, as I expected, my bald-headed man appeared on the threshold, and was followed by a grim-looking female in a fearsome head-dress compounded of bonnet and nightcap. "Sir," I began, addressing James Carthew with much affability, "it is through our common friend, Mr. Addison, that I venture to commend myself to you and to your good lady."

"And who may you be?" Mrs. James demanded, with sufficient bluntness.

"You may put me down as Captain Richard Steele, madam, of the *Spectator*, not the *Tatler*; and I have sent for you in a hurry, for which I must apologise, because our friend, Mr. Addison, has ridden from Tregarrick to-night on urgent private business, and I am here to carry out certain intentions of his with regard to a bundle of notes which he left in my keeping."

"I don't know you, sir; and I don't know your game," struck in James Carthew roughly; "but

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

if the notes are mine, as I suspect, I beg to state that I never intended ——”

“Quite so,” I took him up amiably. “You do good by stealth and blush to find it known. But, in view of the sad event upstairs, there can be no harm in my stating before so discreet a lawyer as Mr. Retallack what I had from Mr. Addison’s own lips — that these notes were intended by you for the deposit-money on the purchase of Welland.”

“Addison had no right ——”

“Of course, if I misread his directions, you can refer to him to correct me — when he returns. As it is, I heard it from him most plainly that — thanks to you — Welland was to be rescued and preserved for Mr. Harry Carthew’s child. Mr. Retallack tells me that thirty-four thousand pounds is the sum needed, and that, of this, ten per cent., or three thousand four hundred, will be accepted as deposit money. It happens that I have but a short time to spend in Tregarrick, and therefore I have ventured to summon you and madam to bear witness that I hand this sum over to the person competent to receive it.” And with this I took the notes from my breast-pocket and began to count them out carefully upon the table.

“This fellow is drunk,” said Mr. James

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Carthew, addressing the lawyer. "The notes are mine, as I can prove. They were entrusted by me to Mr. Addison ——"

"Who, it appears, has surrendered them," said Mr. Retallack drily. "Did Mr. Addison give you a receipt?"

"They are mine, and were entrusted to him for a private purpose. This fellow can have come by them in no honest way. Impound them if you will; I can wait for Addison's testimony. But as for intending to make a present of Welland to that brat of Harry's ——"

"Not directly to him," I interrupted, having done with my counting, and folding away two notes for fifty pounds apiece in my pocket. "On second thoughts, Mr. Retallack shall make out the conveyance to me, and I will assign a lease retaining the present tenant in possession at a nominal rent of, let me say, five shillings a year. I am sorry to give him so much trouble at this late hour, but it is important that I leave Tre-garrick without avoidable delay."

"I can well believe that," James Carthew began. But the lawyer who, without a notion of my drift, was now playing up to me very prettily, interrupted him again.

"This is very well, sir," said he, addressing me;

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“very well, indeed. But if, as you say, you are leaving Tregarrick, at what date may we expect the purchase to be completed?”

“Why, that I must leave to you and Mr. James Carthew.”

“To me, sir?” thundered Mr. James, every vein on his bald head swelling. “To *me!* Are you mad, as well as drunk? When I tell you, Mr. Retallack ——”

I glanced up with a smile and caught his wife’s eye. And to my dying day I shall respect that woman. From first to last she had listened without the wink of an eyelash; but now she spoke up firmly.

“If I were you, James, I wouldn’t be a fool. The best use you can make of your breath is to ask Mr. Retallack to leave the room.”

The lawyer, at a nod from me, withdrew.

“Now,” said she, as the door closed, “speak up and tell me what’s the matter.”

“The matter, madam,” I answered, “is Addison. He’s an escaped convict, and no more a clergyman than — excuse me — you are.”

I declare that, still, not an eyelash of her quivered: but her ass of a husband broke in —

“I don’t believe it! I won’t believe it! Tell us how you came by the notes.”

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“James, I beg you not to be a fool. Has he cut and run?” she asked.

“He has.”

“You can find [him?](http://libtool.com.cn)”

“No,” said I, “and I don’t want to. But I can get a message conveyed that will probably reach and warn him — if he has not thought of it already — to send a letter to the Bishop formally resigning his living.”

Then Mrs. James Carthew made a totally unexpected and, as I still hold, a really humorous remark.

“Drat the fellow!” she said. “And he preached an Assize Sermon too!”

But once again her ass of a mate broke in.

“What, in the devil’s name, are you parleying about, Maria? Addison or no Addison, you don’t suppose I’m to be blackmailed into buying Welland for that young whelp!”

“Just as you please,” said I. “If you prefer the money being raised for him on the entail, so be it.”

“On the entail?” He opened and shut his mouth like a fish.

“Yes, sir; on the entail — *his parents not having employed Mr. Addison to marry them.*”

But at this point Mrs. James, without deigning me another look, tucked the poor fool under her arm and carried him off.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

I left Tregarrick two days later with a hundred pounds in my pocket: for the odd notes seemed to me a fair commission on a very satisfactory job. Now, ~~was. I look back~~ on my adventure, I detect several curious points in it. The first is, that I have never set eyes on Susie Martin: the second, that I never had another interview with Mr. or Mrs. James Carthew: the third, that neither then nor since have I ever had a word of thanks from the lady and child to whom I rendered this signal service. The one, so far as I know, never saw me: the other saw me only for that instant when he dropped me a penny for a trick. To both, I am known only as Captain Richard Steele, and whoever inhabits Welland pays five shillings out of one pocket into another for his tenancy, and will continue to do so. But, perhaps, what the reader will most wonder at, is that I — Gabriel Foot — having my hand on three thousand five hundred pounds, and a clear run for it, should have yielded up all but a hundred for a widow and orphan, who never heard of my existing. Well, perhaps, the secret is that Leggat intended to yield it, and I pride myself on being a better man than Leggat. In short, I have, within limits, a conscience.

RAIN OF DOLLARS

I

AT nine o'clock or thereabouts in the morning of January 5, 1809, five regiments of British infantry and a troop of horse artillery with six guns were winding their way down the eastern slope of a ravine beyond Nogales, in the fastnesses of Galicia. They formed the reserve of Sir John Moore's army, retreating upon Corunna; and as they slid or skidded down the frozen road in the teeth of a snowstorm, the men of the 28th and 95th Rifles, who made up the rearguard — for the cavalry had been sent forward as being useless for protection in this difficult country — were forced to turn from time to time and silence the fire of the French, close upon their heels and galling them.

A dirty brown trail, trodden and churned by the main army and again frozen hard, gave them the course of the road as it zig-zagged into the ravine; but, even had the snow obliterated the

RAIN OF DOLLARS

track, the regiments could have found their way by the dead bodies strewing it — bodies of men, of horses, even of women and children — some heaped by the wind's eddies with thick coverlets of white, so that their forms could only be guessed; others half sunk, with a glazing of thin ice over upturned faces and wide-open eyes; others again flung in stiff contortions across the very road — here a man with his fists clenched to his ribs, there a horse on its back with all four legs in air, crooked, and rigid as poles. The most of these horses had belonged to the dragoons, who, after leading them to the last, had been forced to slaughter them: for the poor brutes cast their shoes on the rough track, and the forage-carts with the cavalry contained neither spare shoes nor nails. The women and children, with sick stragglers and plunderers, had made up that horrible, shameful tail-pipe which every retreating army drags in its wake — a crowd to which the reserve had for weeks acted as whippers-in, herding them through Bembibre, Calcabellos, Villa Franca, Nogales; driving them out of wine-shops; shaking, pricking, clubbing them from drunken stupor into panic; pushing them forward through the snow until they collapsed in it to stagger up no more. Strewn between the corpses along the wayside lay broken

RAIN OF DOLLARS

carts and cartwheels, bundles, knapsacks, muskets, shakos, split boots, kettles, empty wine-flasks — whatever the weaker had dropped and the stronger had found not worth the gleaning.

The regiments lurched by sullenly, savagely. They were red-eyed with want of sleep and weary from an overnight march of thirty-five miles; and they had feasted their fill of these sights. On this side of Herrerias, for example, they had passed a group of three men, a woman, and a child, lying dead in a circle around a broken cask and a frozen pool of rum. And at Nogales they had drained a wine-vat, to discover its drowned owner at the bottom. They themselves were sick and shaking with abstinence after drunkenness; heavy with shame, too. For though incomparably better behaved than the main body, the reserve had disgraced themselves once or twice, and incurred a stern lesson from Paget, their General. On a low hill before Calcabellos he had halted them, formed them in a hollow square with faces inwards, set up his triangles, and flogged the drunkards collected during the night by the patrols. Then, turning to two culprits taken in the act of robbing a peaceful Spaniard, he had them brought forward with ropes around their necks and hoisted, under a tree,

RAIN OF DOLLARS

upon the shoulders of the provost-marshal's men. While the ropes were being knotted to the branches overhead, an officer rode up at a gallop to report that the French were driving in our picquets on the other side of the hill. "I am sorry for it, Sir," answered Paget; "but though *that* angle of the square should be attacked, I shall hang these villains in *this* one." After a minute's silence he asked his men, "If I spare these two, will you promise me to reform?" There was no answer. "If I spare these men, shall I have your word of honour as soldiers that you will reform?" Still the men kept silence, until a few officers whispered them to say "Yes," and at once a shout of "Yes!" broke from every corner of the square. This had been their lesson, and from Calcabellos onward the division had striven to keep its word. But a sullen flame burned in their sick bodies; and when they fought they fought viciously, as men with a score to wipe off and a memory to drown.

A few hours ago they had resembled scarecrows rather than British soldiers; now, having ransacked at Nogales a train of carts full of Spanish boots and clothing — which had been sent thither by mistake and lay abandoned, without mules, muleteers, or guards — they showed a medley of

RAIN OF DOLLARS

costumes. Some wore grey breeches, others blue; some black boots, others white, others again black and white together; while not a few carried several pairs slung round their necks. Some had wrapped themselves in *ponchos*, others had replaced the regulation greatcoat with a simple blanket. But, wild crew as they seemed, they swung down the road in good order, kept steady by discipline and the fighting spirit and a present sense of the enemy close at hand.

Ahead of them, on the far side of the ravine, loomed a mountain white from base to summit save where a scarp of sheer cliff had allowed but a powder of snow to cling or, settling in the fissures, to cross-hatch the wrinkles of its forbidding face. A stream, hidden far out of sight by the near wall of the ravine, chattered aloud as it swept around the mountain's base on a sharp curve, rattling the boulders in its bed. During the first part of the descent mists and snow-wreaths concealed even the lip of the chasm through which this noisy water poured; but as the leading regiment neared it, the snowstorm lifted, the clouds parted, and a shaft of wintry sunshine pierced the valley, revealing a bridge of many arches. For the moment it seemed a fairy bridge spanning gulfs of nothingness; next — for it stood aslant to the road — its

RAIN OF DOLLARS

narrow archways appeared as so many portals, tall and cavernous, admitting to the bowels of the mountain. But beyond it the road resumed its zig-zags, ~~plainly traceable~~ on the snow. The soldiers, as they neared the bridge, grunted their disapproval of these zig-zags beyond it. A few lifted their muskets and took imaginary aim, as much as to say, "That's how the French from here will pick us off as we mount yonder."

The General had been the first to perceive this, and ran his forces briskly across the bridge — his guns first, then his infantry at the double. He found a party of engineers at work on the farther arches, preparing to destroy them as soon as the British were over; but ordered them to desist and make their way out of danger with all speed. For the stream — as a glance told him — was fordable both above and below the bridge, and they were wasting their labour. Moreover, arches of so narrow a span could be easily repaired.

Engineers, therefore, and artillery and infantry together pressed briskly up the exposed gradients, and were halted just beyond musket-shot from the bank opposite, having suffered little on the way from the few French voltigeurs who had arrived in time to fire with effect. Though

RAIN OF DOLLARS

beyond their range, the British position admirably commanded the bridge and the bridge-head; and Paget, warming to his work and willing to give tit-for-tat after hours of harassment, devised an open insult for his pursuers.

He ordered the guns to be unlimbered and their horses to be led out of sight. Then, regiment by regiment, he sent his division onward — 20th, 52nd, 91st, and Rifles — pausing only at his trusted 28th, whom he proceeded to post with careful inconspicuousness; the light company behind a low fence in flank of the guns and commanding the bridge, the grenadiers about a hundred yards behind them, and the battalion companies yet a little further to the rear. While the 28th thus disposed themselves, the rest of the division moved off, leaving the guns to all appearance abandoned. The General spread his great-coat, and seating himself on the slope behind the light company, cheerfully helped himself to snuff from the pocket of his buff-leather waist-coat. Meanwhile the sky had been clearing steadily, and the sunshine, at first so feeble, fell on the slope with almost summer warmth. The 28th, under the lee of the mountain-cliffs, looked up and saw white clouds chasing each other across deep gulfs of blue, looked down and saw

RAIN OF DOLLARS

the noon rays glinting on their enemy's accoutrements beyond the bridge-head. The French were gathering fast, but could not yet make up their minds to assault.

"Our friends," said the General, pouring himself a drink from his pocket-flask, "don't seem in a hurry to add to their artillery."

The men of the light company, standing near him, laughed as they munched their rations. For three days they had plodded through snow and sleet with hot hearts, nursing their Commander-in-Chief's reproof at Calcabellos: "You, 28th, are not the men you used to be. You are no longer the regiment who to a man fought by my side in Egypt!" So Moore had spoken, and ridden off contemptuously, leaving the words to sting. They not only stung, but rankled; for to the war-cry of "Remember Egypt!" the 28th always went into action: and they had been rebuked in the presence of Paget, now their General of Division, but once their Colonel, and the very man under whom they had won their proudest title, "the Backplates." It was Paget who, when once in Egypt the regiment had to meet two simultaneous attacks, in front and rear, had faced his rear rank about and gloriously repulsed both charges.

At the moment of Moore's reproof Paget had

RAIN OF DOLLARS

said nothing, and he made no allusion to it now. But the 28th understood. They knew why he had posted them www.libtoo.com.cn alone here, and why he remained to watch. He was giving them a splendid chance, if a forlorn one. In the recovered sunshine their hearts warmed to him.

Unhappily, the French did not seem disposed to walk into the trap. Their fire slackened — from the first it had not been serious — and they loitered by the bridge-end awaiting reinforcements. Yet from time to time they pushed small parties across the fords above and below the bridge; and at length Paget sent a young subaltern up to the crest of the ridge on his flank, to see how many had collected thus on the near side of the stream. The subaltern reported — “Two or three hundred.”

By this time the 28th had been posted for an hour or more; time enough to give the main body of the reserve a start of four miles. General Paget consulted his watch, returned it to his fob, and ordered the guns to be horsed again. As the artillerymen led their horses forward, he turned to the infantry, eyed their chapfallen faces, and composedly took snuff.

“Twenty-eighth, if you don’t get fighting enough it’s not my fault.”

RAIN OF DOLLARS

This was all he said, but it went to the men's hearts. "You'll give us another chance, Sir?" answered one or two. He had given them back already some of their old self-esteem, and if they were disappointed of a scrimmage, so was he.

But it would never do, since the French shirked a direct attack, to linger and be turned in flank by the numbers crossing the fords. So, having horsed his guns and sent them forward to overtake the reserve, Paget ordered the 28th to quit their position and resume the march.

No sooner were they in motion than the enemy's leading column began to pour across the bridge; its light companies, falling in with the scattered troops from the fords, pressed down upon the British rear; and the 28th took up once more the Parthian game in which they were growing expert. For three miles along the climbing road they marched, faced about for a skirmish, drove back their pursuers, and marched forward again, always in good order; the enemy being encumbered by its cavalry, which, useless from the first in this rough and wavering track, at length became an impediment and a serious peril. It was by fairly stampeding a troop back upon the foot-soldiers following that the British in the end checked the immediate danger, and, hurry-

RAIN OF DOLLARS

ing forward unmolested for a couple of miles, gained a new position in which they could not easily be assailed. The road here wound between a line of cliffs and a precipice giving a sheer drop into the ravine; and here, without need of flankers or, indeed, possibility of using them, the rear-most (light) company, halted for a while and faced about.

This brought their right shoulders round to the precipice, at the foot of which, and close upon three hundred feet below, a narrow plateau (or so it seemed) curved around the rock-face. The French, held at check, and once more declining a frontal attack, detached a body of cavalry and voltigeurs to follow this path in the hope of turning one flank. But a week's snow had smoothed over the true contour of the valley, and this apparent plateau proved to be but a gorge piled to its brim with drifts, in which men and horses plunged and sank until, repenting, they had much ado to extricate themselves.

On the ledge over their heads a young subaltern of the 28th — the same that Paget had sent to count the numbers crossing the fords — was looking down and laughing, when a pompous voice at his elbow inquired —

“Pray, Sir, where is General Paget?”

RAIN OF DOLLARS

The subaltern, glancing up quickly, saw, planted on horseback before him, with legs astraddle, a podgy, red-faced man in a blue uniform buttoned to the chin. The General himself happened to be standing less than five yards away, resting his elbows on the wall of the road while he scanned the valley and the struggling Frenchmen through his glass: and the subaltern, knowing that he must have heard the question, for the moment made no reply.

“Be so good as to answer at once, Sir? Where is General Paget?”

The General closed his glass leisurably and came forward.

“I am General Paget, Sir — at your commands.”

“Oh — ah — er, I beg pardon,” said the little blue-coated man, slewing about in his saddle. “I am Paymaster-General, and — er — the fact is ——”

“Paymaster-General?” echoed Paget in a soft and musing tone, as if deliberately searching his memory.

“Assistant,” the little man corrected.

“Get down from your horse, Sir.”

“I beg pardon ——”

“Get down from your horse.”



“GET DOWN FROM YOUR HORSE, SIR!”

www.libtool.com.cn

RAIN OF DOLLARS

The Assistant-Paymaster clambered off. His vanity was wounded and he showed it; the mottles on his face deepened to crimson. "Beg pardon — ceremony — hardly an occasion — treasure of the army in danger."

Paget eyed him calmly, but with a darkening at the corner of the eye; a sign which the watching subaltern knew to be ominous.

"Be a little more explicit, if you please."

"The treasure, Sir, for which I am responsible ——"

"Yes? How much?"

"I am not sure that I ought ——"

"How much?"

"If you press the question, Sir, it might be twenty-five thousand pounds. I should not have mentioned it in the hearing of your men ——" he hesitated.

The General concluded his sentence for him. "—Had not your foresight placed it in safety and out of their reach: that's understood. Well, Sir, — what then?"

"But, on the contrary, General, it is in imminent peril! The carts conveying it have stuck fast, not a mile ahead: the bullocks are foundered and cannot proceed; and I have ridden back to request that you supply me with fresh animals."

RAIN OF DOLLARS

“Look at me, Sir, and then pray look about you.”

“I beg your pardon ——”

“You ought to. Am I a bullock-driver, Sir, or a muleteer? And in this country” — with a sharp wave of his hand — “can I breed full-grown mules or bullocks at a moment’s notice to repair your d——d incompetence? Or, knowing me, have you the assurance to tell me coolly that you have lost — yes, lost — the treasure committed to you? — to confess that you, who ought to be a day’s march ahead of the main body, are hanging back upon the rearmost company of the rearguard? — and come to me whining when that company is actually engaged with the enemy? Look, Sir” — and it seemed to some of the 28th that their General mischievously prolonged his address to give the Assistant-Paymaster a taste of rearguard work, for Soult’s heavy columns were by this time pressing near to the entrance of the defile — “Observe the kind of strife in which we have been engaged since dawn; reflect that our tempers must needs be short; and congratulate yourself that, if this mountain be bare of fresh bullocks, it also fails to supply a handy tree.”

The little man waited no longer on the road, along which French bullets were beginning to

RAIN OF DOLLARS

whistle, but clambered on his horse, and galloped off with hunched shoulders to rejoin his carts.

The rearguard, galled now by musketry and finding that, for all their floundering, the enemy were creeping past the rocky barrier below, retired in good order but briskly, and so, in about twenty minutes, overtook the two treasure-carts and their lines of exhausted cattle. Plainly this procession had come to the end of its powers and could not budge: and as plainly the officers in charge of it were at loggerheads. Paget surveyed the scene, his brow darkening thunderously: for, of the guns he had sent forward to overtake the reserve, two stood planted to protect the carts, and the artillery-captain in charge of them was being harangued by the fuming Assistant-Paymaster, while the actual guard of the treasure — a subaltern's party of the 4th (King's Own) — stood watching the altercation in surly contempt. Now the 28th and the King's Own were old friends, having been brigaded together through the early days of the campaign. As Paget rode forward they exchanged hilarious grins.

“Pray, Sir,” he addressed the artilleryman, “why are you loitering here when ordered to overtake the main body with all speed? And what are you discussing with this person?”

RAIN OF DOLLARS

“The Colonel, Sir, detached me at this officer’s request.”

“Hey?” Paget swung round on the Assistant-Paymaster. www.ylibtool.com.cn “You *dared* to interfere with an order of mine? And, having done so, you forbore to tell me, just now, the extent of your impudence!”

“But — but the bullocks can go no farther!” stammered the poor man.

“And if so, who is responsible? Are *you, Sir?*” Paget demanded suddenly of the subaltern.

“No, General,” the young man answered, saluting. “I beg to say that as far back as Nogales I pointed out the condition of these beasts, and also where in that place fresh animals were to be found: but I was bidden to hold my tongue.”

“Do you admit this?” Paget swung round again upon the Assistant-Paymaster.

“Upon my word, Sir,” the poor man tried to bluster, “I am not to be cross-examined in this fashion. I do not belong to the reserve, and I take my orders ——”

“Then what the devil are you doing here? And how is it I catch you ordering my reserve about? By the look of it, a moment ago you were even attempting to teach my horse-artillery its business.”

RAIN OF DOLLARS

“He was urging me, Sir,” said the artillery-captain grimly, “to abandon my guns and hitch my teams on to his carts.”

The General's expression changed, and he bent upon the little man in blue a smile that was almost caressing. “I beg your pardon, Sir: it appears that I have quite failed to appreciate you.”

“Do not mention it, Sir. You see, with a sum of twenty-five thousand pounds at stake ——”

“And your reputation.”

“To be sure, and my reputation; though that, I assure you, was less in my thoughts. With all this at stake ——”

“Say rather ‘lost.’ I am going to pitch it down the mountain.”

“But it is money!” almost screamed the little man.

“So are shot and shells. Twenty-eighth, forward, and help the guard to overturn the carts!”

Even the soldiers were staggered for a moment by this order. Impossible as they saw it to be to save the treasure, they were men; and the instinct of man revolts from pouring twenty-five thousand pounds over a precipice. They approached, unstrapped the tarpaulin covers, and feasted their eyes on stacks of silver Spanish dollars.

RAIN OF DOLLARS

“You cannot mean it, Sir! I hold you responsible ——” Speech choked the Assistant-Paymaster, and he waved wild arms in dumbshow.

But the General did mean it. At a word from him the artillerymen stood to their guns, and at another word the fatigue party of the 28th climbed off the carts, put their shoulders to the wheels and axle-trees, and with a heave sent the treasure over in a jingling avalanche. A few ran and craned their necks to mark where it fell: but the cliffs just here were sharply undercut, and everywhere below spread deep drifts to receive and cover it noiselessly. After the first rush and slide no sound came up from the depths into which it had disappeared. The men strained their ears to listen. They were listening still when, with a roar, the two guns behind them spoke out, hurling their salutation into Soult's advance guard as it swung into view around the corner of the road.

II

In a mud-walled hut perched over the brink of the ravine and sheltered there by a shelving rock, an old Gallegan peasant sat huddled over a fire and face to face with starvation. The fire, banked in the centre of the earthen floor, filled

RAIN OF DOLLARS

all the cabin with smoke, which escaped only by a gap in the thatch and a window-hole overlooking the ravine. An iron crock, on a chain furred with soot, hung from the rafters, where sooty cobwebs, a foot and more in length, waved noiselessly in the draught. It was empty, but he had no strength to lift it off its hook; and at the risk of cracking it he had piled up the logs on the hearth, for the cold searched his old bones. The windowhole showed a patch of fading day, wintry and sullen: but no beam of it penetrated within, where the firelight flickered murkily on three beds of dirty straw, a table like a butcher's block, and, at the back of the hut, an alcove occupied by three sooty dolls beneath a crucifix — the Virgin, St. Joseph, and St. James.

The alcove was just a recess scooped out of the *adobe* wall: and the old man himself could not have told why his house had been built of unbaked mud when so much loose stone lay strewn about the mountain-side ready to hand. Possibly even his ancestors, who had built it, could not have told. They had come from the plain-land near Zamora, and built in the only fashion they knew — a fashion which *their* ancestors had learnt from the Moors: but time and the mountain's bad habit of dropping stones had taught

RAIN OF DOLLARS

them to add a stout roof. For generations they had clung to this perch, and held body and soul together by the swine-herding. They pastured their pigs three miles below, where the ravine opened upon a valley moderately fertile and wooded with oak and chestnut; and in midwinter drove them back to the hill and styed them in a large pen beside the hut, in which, if the pen were crowded, they made room for the residue.

The family now consisted of the old man, Gil Chaleco (a widower and past work); his son Gil the Younger, with a wife, Juana; their only daughter, Mercedes, her young husband, Sebastian May, and their two-year-old boy. The two women worked with the men in herding the swine and were given sole charge of them annually, when Gil the Younger and Sebastian tramped it down to the plains and hired themselves out for the harvest.

But this year Sebastian, instead of harvesting, had departed for Corunna to join the insurrectionary bands and carry a gun in defence of his country. To Gil the Elder this was a piece of youthful folly. How could it matter, in this valley of theirs, what King reigned in far-away Madrid? And would a Spaniard any more than a Corsican make good the lost harvest-money?

RAIN OF DOLLARS

The rest of the family had joined him in raising objections; for in this den of poverty the three elders thought of money morning, noon, and night, and of nothing but money; and Mercedes was young and in love with her husband, and sorely unwilling to lend him to the wars. Sebastian, however, had smiled and kissed her and gone his way; and at the end of his soldiery had found himself, poor lad, in hospital in Leon, one of the many hundreds abandoned by the Marquis of Romana to the French.

News of this had not reached the valley, where indeed his wife's family had other trouble to concern them: for a forage party from the retreating British main guard had descended upon the cabin four days ago and carried off all the swine, leaving in exchange some scraps of paper, which (they said) would be honoured next day by the Assistant-Paymaster: he could not be more than a day's march behind. But a day had passed, and another, and now the household had gone off to Nogales to meet him on the road, leaving only the old man, and taking even little Sebastianillo. The pigs would be paid for handsomely by the rich English; Juana had some purchases to make in the town; and Mercedes needed to buy a shawl for the child, and thought it would be a

RAIN OF DOLLARS

treat for him to see the tall foreign redcoats marching past.

So they had started, leaving the old man with a day's provision (for the foragers had cleared the racks and the larder as well as the sty), and promising to be home before nightfall. But two days and a night had passed without news of them.

With his failing strength he had made shift to keep the fire alight; but food was not to be found. He had eaten his last hard crust of millet-bread seven or eight hours before, and this had been his only breakfast. His terror for the fate of the family was not acute. Old age had dulled his faculties, and he dozed by the fire with sudden starts of wakefulness, blinking his smoke-sored eyes and gazing with a vague sense of evil on the straw beds and the image in the alcove. His thoughts ran on the swine and the price to be paid for them by the Englishman: they faded into dreams wherein the family saints stepped down from their shrine and chattered with the foreign paymaster; dreams in which he found himself grasping silver dollars with both hands. And all the while he was hungry to the point of dying; yet the visionary dollars brought no food — suggested only the impulse to bury them out of sight of thieves.

RAIN OF DOLLARS

So vivid was the dream that, waking with a start and a shiver, he hobbled towards the window-hole and stopped to pick up the wooden shutter that should close it. Standing so, still half asleep, with his hand on the shutter-bar, he heard a rushing sound behind him, as though the mountain-side were breaking away overhead and rushing down upon the roof and back of the cabin.

He had spent all his life on these slopes and knew the sounds of avalanche and land-slips — small land-slips in this Gallegan valley were common enough. This noise resembled both, yet resembled neither, and withal was so terrifying that he swung round to face it, aquake in his shoes — to see the rear wall bowing inwards and crumbling, and the roof quietly subsiding upon it, as if to bury him alive.

For a moment he saw it as the mirror of his dream, cracking and splitting; then, as the image of the Virgin tilted itself forward from its shrine and fell with a crash, he dropped the shutter, and running to the door, tugged at its heavy wooden bolt. The hut was collapsing, and he must escape into the open air.

He neither screamed nor shouted, for his terror throttled him; and after the first rushing noise the wall bowed inwards silently, with but a trickle

RAIN OF DOLLARS

of dry and loosened mud. His gaze, cast back across his shoulder, was on it while he tugged at the bolt. Slowly — very slowly, the roof sank, and stayed itself, held up on either hand by its two corner-props. Then, while it came to a standstill, sagging between them, the wall beneath it burst asunder, St. Joseph and St. James were flung head-over-heels after the Virgin, and through the rent poured a broad river of silver.

He faced around gradually, holding his breath. His back was to the door now, and he leaned against it with outspread palms while his eyes devoured the miracle.

Dollars! Silver dollars!

He could not lift his gaze from them. If he did, they would surely vanish, and he awake from his dream. Yet in the very shock of awe, and starving though he was, the master-habit of his life, the secretive peasant cunning, had already begun to work. Never once relaxing his fixed stare, fearful even of blinking with his smoke-sored eyes, he shuffled sideways toward the window-hole, his hands groping the wall behind him. The wooden shutter and its fastening bar — a short oak pole — lay where he had dropped them, on the floor beneath the window. He crouched, feeling backwards for them; found,

RAIN OF DOLLARS

lifted them on to the inner ledge, and, with a half-turn of his body, thrust one arm deep into the recess and jammed the shutter into its place. To fix the bolt was less easy; it fitted across the back of the shutter, its ends resting in two sockets pierced in the wall of the recess. He could use but one hand; yet in less than a minute he found the first socket, slid an end of the bolt into it as far as it would go, lifted the other end and scraped with it along the opposite side of the recess until it dropped into the second socket. He was safe now — safe from prying eyes. In all this while — these two, perhaps three, minutes — his uppermost terror had been lest strange eyes were peering in through the window-hole: it had cost him anguish not to remove his own for an instant from the miracle to assure himself. But he had shut out this terror now: and the miracle had not vanished.

A few coins trickled yet. He crawled forward across the floor, crouching like a beast for a spring. But as he drew close his old legs began to shake under him. He dropped on his knees and fell forward, plunging both hands into the bright pile.

Dollars! real silver dollars!

He lay on the flood of wealth, stretched like a

RAIN OF DOLLARS

swimmer, his fingers feebly moving among the coins which slid and poured over the back of his hands. He did not ask how the miracle had befallen. He was starving; dying in fact, though he did not know it; and lo! he had found a heaven beyond all imagination, and lay in it and panted, at rest. The firelight played on the heave and fall of his gaunt shoulder-blades, and on the glass eyes of the Virgin, whose head had rolled half-way across the floor and lay staring up foolishly at the rafters.

.
“Mother, open! Ah, open quickly, mother, for the love of God!”

Whose voice was that? Yes, yes—Mercedes’, to be sure, his granddaughter’s. She had gone to Nogales . . . long ago . . . Yet that was her voice. Had he come, then, to Paradise that her voice was pleading for him—pleading for the door to open?

“Mother—Father! It is I, Mercedes! Open quickly—It is Mercedes, do you hear? I want my child—Sebastianillo—my child—quick!”

The voice broke into short agonised cries, into sobs. The door rattled.

At the sound of this last the old man raised himself on his knees. His eyes fell again on the

RAIN OF DOLLARS

shining dollars all around him. His throat worked.

Suddenly terror broke out in beads on his forehead. Someone was shaking the door! Thieves were there trying the door: they were come to rob him!

He drew himself up slowly. As he did so the door ceased to rattle, and presently, somewhere near the windy edge of the ravine, a faint cry sounded.

But long after the door had ceased to rattle, old Gil Chaleco stared at it, fascinated. And long after the cry had died away it beat from side to side within the walls of his head, while he listened and life trickled from him, drop by drop.

“Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night.” But he was listening for it: it would come again. . . .

And it came — with a rough summons on the door, and, a moment later, with a thunderous blow. The old man stood up, knee-deep in dollars, lifting both arms to cover his head. As the door fell he seemed to bow himself toward it, toppled, and slid forward — still with his arms crooked — amid a rush of silver.

RAIN OF DOLLARS

III

Although crushed in the rear and broken inwards there, the hut showed its ordinary face to the path as Mercedes reached it in the failing daylight. She ran like a madwoman, and with short, distraught cries, as she neared her home. Her eyes were wild as a hunted creature's, her coarse black hair streamed over her shoulders, her bare feet bled where the rocks and ice had cut them. But one thing she did not doubt — would not allow herself to doubt — that at home she would find her child. For two days she had been parted from him, and in those two days . . . God had been good to her, very good: but she could not thank God yet — not until she clutched Sebastianillo in her arms, held his small, wriggling body, felt his feet kick against her breast. . . .

The great sty beside the cabin was empty, of course: and the cabin itself looked strange to her and desolate and unfriendly. For some hours the snow had ceased falling, and, save in a snow-storm or a gale, it was not the family custom to close door or window before dark: indeed, the window-hole usually stood open night and day the year round. Now both were closed. But warm firelight showed under the chink of the

RAIN OF DOLLARS

door; and on the door she bowed her head, to take breath, and beat with her hands while she called urgently —

“Mother! Quickly, mother — open to me for the love of God!”

No answer came from within.

“Mother! Father! Open to me — it is I, Mercedes!”

Then, after listening a moment, she began to beat again, frantically, for at length she was afraid.

“Quick! Quick! Ah, do not be playing a trick on me: I want my child — Sebastianillo!”

Again and again she called and beat. No answer came from the hut or from the sombre twilight around her. She drew back, to fling her full weight against the door. And at this moment she heard, some way down the path, a man’s footstep crunching the snow.

She never doubted that this must be her father returning up the mountain-side, perhaps after a search for her. What other man — now that her husband had gone soldiering — ever trod this path? She ran down to meet him.

The path, about forty yards below, rounded an angle of the sheer cliff, and at this angle she came to a terrified halt. The man, too, had

RAIN OF DOLLARS

halted a short gunshot away. He did not see her, but was staring upward at the cliff overhead; and he was not her father. For an instant there flashed across her brain an incredible surmise — that he was her husband, Sebastian: for he wore a soldier's overcoat and shako, and carried a musket and knapsack. But no: this man was taller than Sebastian by many inches; taller and thinner.

He was a soldier, then: and to Mercedes all soldiers were by this time incarnate devils — or all but one, and that one a plucky little British officer who had snatched her from his men just as she fell swooning into their clutches, and had dragged and thrust her through the convent doorway at Nogales and slammed the door upon her; and (though this she did not know) held the doorstep, sword in hand, while the Fathers within shot the heavy bolts.

The British had gone, and after them — close after — came the French: and these broke down the convent door and ransacked the place. But the Fathers had hidden her and a score or so more of trembling women, nor would allow her to creep out and search for Sebastianillo in the streets through which swept, hour after hour, a flood of drunken yelling devils. So now Mer-

RAIN OF DOLLARS

cedes, who had left home two days ago to watch an army pass, turned from this one soldier with a scream and ran back towards the cabin.

In her terror lest he should overtake and catch her by the closed door, she darted aside, clambered across the wall of the empty sty, and crouched behind it in the filth, clutching at her bodice: for within her bodice was a knife, which she had borrowed of the Fathers at Nogales.

The footsteps came up the path and went slowly past her hiding-place. Then they came to a halt before the hut. Still Mercedes crouched, not daring to lift her head.

Rat, rat-a-tat!

Well, let him knock. Her father was a strong man, and always kept a loaded gun on the shelf. If this soldier meant mischief, he would find his match: and she, too, could help.

She heard him call to the folks within once or twice in bad Spanish. Then his voice changed and seemed to threaten in a language she did not know.

Her hand was thrust within her bodice now, and gripped the handle of her knife; nevertheless, what followed took her by surprise, though ready for action. A terrific bang sounded on the timbers of the door. Involuntarily she raised her

RAIN OF DOLLARS

head above the wall's coping. The man had stepped back a pace into the path, and was swinging his musket up for another blow with the butt. www.libtool.com.cn

She stood up, white, with her jaw set. Her father could not be inside the hut, or he would have answered that blow on his door as a man should. But Sebastianillo might be within — nay, must be! She put her hands to the wall's coping and swung herself over and on to the path, again unseen, for the dusk hid her, and a dark background of cliff behind the sty: nor could the man hear, for he was raining blow after blow upon the door. At length, having shaken it loose from its hasp, he stepped back and made a run at it, using the butt of his musket for a ram, and finishing up the charge with the full weight of one shoulder. The door crashed open before him, and he reeled over it into the hut. A second later, Mercedes had sprung after him.

“Sebastianillo! You shall not harm him! You shall not ——”

The door, falling a little short of the fire, had scattered some of the burning brands about the floor and fanned the rest into a blaze. In the light of it he faced round with a snarl, his teeth showing beneath his moustache. The light also

RAIN OF DOLLARS

showed — though Mercedes neither noted it nor could have read its signification — a corporal's chevron on his sleeve.

“Who the devil are you!” The snarl ended in a snap.

Mercedes stood swaying on the threshold, knife in hand.

“You shall not harm him!”

She spoke in her own tongue and he understood it, after a fashion; for he answered in broken Spanish, catching up her word —

“Harm? Who means any harm? When a man is perishing with hunger and folks will not open to him ——”

He paused, wondering at her gaze. Travelling past him, it had fastened itself on the back wall of the hut, across the fire. “Hullo! What's the matter?” He swung round. “Good Lord!” said he, with a gulp.

He sprang past the fire and stooped over the old man's body, which lay face downward on the shelving heap of silver. It did not stir. By-and-by he took it by one of the rigid arms and turned it over, not roughly.

“Warm,” said he: “warm, but dead as a herring! Come and see for yourself.”

Mercedes did not move. Her eyes sought the

RAIN OF DOLLARS

dark corners of the cabin, fixed themselves for a moment on the shattered image of the Virgin, and met his across the firelight in desperate inquiry.

“What is this? What have you done?”

“Done? I tell you I never touched the man; never saw him before in my life. Who is he? Your father? No: grandfather, more like. Eh? Am I right?”

She bent her head, staring at the money.

“This? This is dollars, my girl: dollars enough to set a man up for life, with a coach and lads in livery, and dress you in diamonds from head to heel. Don’t stand playing with that knife. I tell you I never touched the old man. What’s more, I’m willing to be friendly and go shares.” He stared at her with quick suspicion. “You’re alone here, hey?”

She did not answer.

“But answer me,” he insisted, “do you live alone with him?” And he pointed to the body at his feet.

“There was my mother,” said Mercedes slowly, in her turn pointing to the third bed of straw by the fire. “We journeyed over to Nogales, she and I. Your soldiers came and took away our pigs, giving us pieces of paper for them. They

RAIN OF DOLLARS

said that if we took these to Nogales someone would pay us: so we started, leaving *him*. And at Nogales your men were rough and parted us, and I have not seen her since.”

The Corporal eyed her with the beginnings of a leer. She faced him with steady eyes. “Well, well,” said he, after a pause, “I mean no harm to you, anyway. Lord! but you’re in luck. Here you reach home and find a fortune at your door — a sort of fortune a man can dig into with a spade; while a poor devil like me ——” He paused again and stood considering.

“You knew about this?” She nodded towards the dollars. “You knew how it came here, and you came after it?”

“I did and I didn’t. I knew ’twas somewhere hereabouts; but strike me, if a man could dream of finding it like this!”

“Yet you came to this door and beat it open!”

“You’ve wits, my girl,” said the Corporal admiringly; “but they are on the wrong tack. I mean no harm; and the best proof is that here I’m standing with a loaded musket and not offering to hurt you. As it happens, I came to the door asking a bite of bread. I’m cruel hungry.”

Mercedes pulled a crust of millet-bread from her pocket. The Fathers at the convent had

RAIN OF DOLLARS

given it to her at parting, but she had forgotten to eat. She stepped forward; the Corporal stretched out a hand.

“No,” said she, and, avoiding him, laid the crust on the block-table. He caught it up and gnawed it ravenously. “I think there is no other food in the house.”

“You don’t get rid of me like that.” He ran a hand along the shelves, searching them. “Hullo! a gun?” He took it down and examined it beside the fire, while Mercedes’ heart sank. She had hoped to possess herself of it, snatching it from the shelf when he should be off his guard. “Loaded, too!” He laid it gently on the block and eyed her, munching his crust.

“You’d best put down that knife and talk friendly,” said he at length. “What’s the use? — you a woman, and me with two guns, both loaded? It’s silliness; you must see for yourself it is. Now look here: I’ve a notion — a splendid notion. Come sit down alongside of me, and talk it over. I promise you there’s no harm meant.”

But she had backed to her former position in the doorway and would not budge.

“It’s treating me suspicious, you are,” he grumbled: “hard *and* suspicious.”

“Cannot you take the money and go?” she

RAIN OF DOLLARS

begged, breathing hard, speaking scarcely above a whisper.

“No, I can’t: it stands to reason I can’t. What can I do in a country like this with dollars it took two carts to drag here — two carts with six yoke of bullocks apiece? And that’s where my cruel luck comes in. All I can take, as things are, is just so much as this knapsack will carry: and even for this I’ve run some risks.”

The man — it was the effect of hunger, perhaps, and exposure and drunkenness on past marches — had an ugly, wolfish face; but his eyes, though cunning, were not altogether evil, not quite formidably evil. She divined that, though lust for the money was driving him, some weakness lay behind it.

“You are a deserter,” she said.

“We’ll pass that.” He seated himself, flinging a leg over the block and laying the two guns side by side on his knees. “I can win back, maybe. As things go, between stragglers and deserters it’s hard to choose in these times, and I’ll get the benefit of the doubt. I’ve taken some risks,” he repeated, glancing from the guns on his knees to the pile of silver and back: “pretty bad risks, and only to fill my knapsack. But, now it strikes me — Can’t you come closer?”

RAIN OF DOLLARS

But she held her ground and waited.

"It strikes me, why couldn't we collar the whole of this, we two? We're alone: no one knows; I've but to lift one of these" — he tapped the guns — "and where would you be? But I don't do it. I don't want to do it. You hear me?"

"You don't do it," said Mercedes slowly, "because without me you can't get away with more than a handful of this money. And you want the whole of it."

"You're a clever girl. Yes, I want the whole of it. Who wouldn't? And you can help. Can't you see how?"

"No."

He sat swinging his legs. "Well, that's where my notion comes in. I wish you'd drop that knife and be friendly: it's a fortune I'm offering you. Now my notion is that we two ought to marry." He stood up.

Mercedes lifted the knife with its point turned inward against her breast. "If you take another step!"

"Oh, but look here: look at it every way. I like you. You're a fine build of a woman, with plenty of spirit — the very woman to help a man. We should get along famously. One country's as good as another to me: I'm tired of soldiering,

RAIN OF DOLLARS

and there's no woman at home, s' help me!" He was speaking rapidly now, not waiting to cast about for words in Spanish, but falling back on English whenever he found himself at a loss. "I dare say you can fit me out with a suit of clothes." His glance ran round the hut and rested on the body of the old man.

Mercedes had understood scarce half of his words: but she divined the meaning of that look and shuddered.

"No, no; you cannot do that!"

"Hark!" said he raising his head and listening. "What's that noise?"

"The wolves. We hear them every night in winter."

"A nice sort of place for a woman to live alone in! See here, my dear; it's sense I'm talking. Better fix it up with me and say 'yes.'"

She appeared to be considering this. "One thing you must promise."

"Well?"

"You won't touch him" — she nodded towards her grandfather's corpse. "You won't touch him to — to ——"

"Is it strip him you mean? Very well, then, I won't."

"You will help me to bury him? He cannot

RAIN OF DOLLARS

lie here. I can give you no answer while he lies here."

"Right you are, again. Only, no tricks, mind!"

He stowed the guns under his left arm and gripped the collar of the old man. Mercedes took the feet; and together they bore him out — a light burden enough. Outside the hut a pale radiance lay over all the snow, forerunner of the moon now rising over the crags across the ravine.

"Where?" grunted the Corporal.

Mercedes guided him. A little way down the path, beyond the wall of the sty, they came to a recess in the base of the cliff where the wind's eddies had piled a smooth mound of snow. Here, under a jutting rock, they laid the body.

"Cover him as best you can," the Corporal ordered. "My hands are full."

He stood, clasping his guns, and watched Mercedes while she knelt and shovelled the snow with both hands. Yet always her eyes were alert and she kept her knife ready. From their mound they looked down upon the ravine in front and over the wall of the sty towards the cabin. Behind them rose the black cliff.

"Hark to the wolves!" said the Corporal, listening: and at that moment something thudded down from the cliff, striking the snow a few yards

RAIN OF DOLLARS

from him; rolled heavily down the slope and came to a standstill against the wall of the sty, where it lay bedded.

www.libtool.com.cn

The round moon had risen over the ravine, and was flooding the mound with light. The Corporal stared at Mercedes: for the moment he could think of nothing but that a large, loose stone had dropped from the cliff. He ran to the thing and turned it over.

It was a knapsack.

He did not at once understand, but stepped back a few paces and gazed up at the crags mounting tier by tier into the vague moonlight. And while he gazed a lighter object struck the wall over head, glanced from it, went spinning by him, and disappeared over the edge of the ravine. As it passed he recognized it — a soldier's shako.

Then he understood. Someone had found the spot on the road above where the treasure had been upset, and these things were being dropped to guide his search. The Corporal ran to Mercedes and would have clutched her by the wrist. The knife flashed in her hand as she evaded him.

“Quick, my girl — back with you, quick! They're after the money, I tell you!”

He caught up the knapsack. They ran back

RAIN OF DOLLARS

together and flung themselves into the cabin. The Corporal bolted the door.

“King’s Own,” he announced, having dragged the knapsack to the firelight. “If there’s only one, we’ll do for him.”

He stepped to the window-hole, pulled open the shutter, laid the two guns on the ledge, and waited, straining his ears.

“Got such a thing as a shovel or a mattock?” he asked after a while. “I reckon you could make shift to cover up the dollars: there’s a deal of loose earth come down with them.”

It took her some time to guess what he wanted, for he spoke in a hoarse whisper. He listened again for a while, then pointed to the treasure.

“Cover it up. If there’s more than one, we’ll have trouble.”

She produced a mattock from a corner of the cabin and began, through the broken wall, to rake down mud and earth and cover the coins. For an hour and more she worked, the Corporal still keeping watch. Once or twice he growled at her to make less noise.

He did not stand the suspense well, but after the first hour grew visibly uneasy.

“I’ve a mind to give this over,” he grumbled, and fell to unstrapping his knapsack. “Here!”

RAIN OF DOLLARS

— he tossed it to her — “pack it, full as you can. Half a loaf may turn out better than no bread.”

She laid the knapsack open on the floor and set to work, cramming it with dollars.

“Talking of bread,” he went on by-and-by, “that’s going to be a question. My stomach’s feeling at this moment like as if it had two rows of teeth inside.”

“Hist!” Mercedes rose, finger to lip. He turned again to the window-hole and peered out, gun in hand, his shoulder blocking the recess.

A man’s footsteps were coming up the path — coming cautiously. Their crunch upon the snow was just audible, and no more. Mercedes stole towards the window and crept close behind the Corporal’s back; stood there, holding her breath.

The man on the path halted for a moment, and came on again, still cautiously. . . . There was a jet of flame, a roar; and the Corporal, after the kick of his musket, strained himself forward on the window-ledge to see if his shot had told.

“Settled him!” he announced, drawing back and turning to face her with a triumphant grin.

But Mercedes confronted him with her father’s fowling-piece in hand. She had slipped it off the window-ledge from under his elbow as he leaned forward.

RAIN OF DOLLARS

“Unbar the door!” she commanded.

“Look here, no nonsense!”

“Unbar the door!” She believed him to be a coward, and he was.

“You just wait a bit, my lady!” he threatened, but drew the bolt, nevertheless; when he turned, the muzzle of the fowling-piece still covered him.

She nodded toward the knapsack. “Pick up that, if you will. . . . Now turn your back — your back to me, if you please — and go.”

He hesitated, rebellious: but there was no help for it.

“Go!” she repeated. And he went.

Above the cabin the path ended almost at once in a *cul de sac* — a wall of frowning cliff. There was no way for him, whether he wished to descend or climb the mountain, but that which led him past the body of the man he had just murdered. He went past it tottering, fumbling with the straps of his knapsack: and Mercedes stood in the moonlit doorway and watched him out of sight.

By-and-by she seated herself before the threshold, and, laying the gun across her knees, prepared herself to wait for the dawn. The dead man lay huddled on his side, a few paces from her. Overhead, along the waste mountain heights, the wolves howled.



“UNBAR THE DOOR!” SHE COMMANDED

www.libtool.com.cn

RAIN OF DOLLARS

Hours passed. Still the wolves howled, and once from the upper darkness Mercedes heard, or fancied that she heard, a scream.

www.libtool.com.cn

At noon, next day, two men — a priest and a young peasant — were climbing the mountain-path leading to the hut. The young man carried on his shoulder a two-year-old child; and, because the sun shone and the crisp air put a spirit of life into all things untroubled by thought, the child crowed and tugged gleefully at his father's *berret*. But his father paid no heed, and strode forward at a pace which forced the priest (who was stout) now and again into a run.

"She will not be there," he kept repeating, steeling himself against the worst. "She cannot be there. When she missed her child ——"

"She is waiting on her grandfather, belike," urged the priest. "They left him with one day's food: so she told the Brothers. And they, like fools, let her go with just sufficient for her own needs. Yet I ought not to blame them for losing their heads in so small a matter. They saved many women."

He told again how he — the parish priest of Nogales — had found Gil the Younger and his wife dead and drunken, with their heads in a

RAIN OF DOLLARS

gutter and the child wailing in the mud beside them. "Your wife had given her mother the child to guard but a minute before she fell in with the soldiers. A young officer saved her, the Brothers said."

"Mercedes will have sought her child first," persisted Sebastian; and rounding the corner of the cliff, they came in sight of the hut and of her whom they sought.

She sat in the path before it, still with the fowling-piece across her knees. But to reach her they had to pass the body of a soldier lying with clenched hands in a crimson patch of snow. The child, who had passed by many horrors on the road, and all with gay unconcern, stretched out his arms across this one, recognising his mother at once, and kicking in his father's clasp.

She raised her eyes dully. She was too weak even to move. "I knew you would come," she said in a whisper; and with that her eyes shifted and settled on the body in the path.

"Take him away! I — I did not kill him."

Her husband set down the child. "Run indoors, little one: you shall kiss mamma presently."

He bent over her, and, unstringing a small wine-skin from his belt, held the mouth of it to her lips. The priest stooped over the dead man,

RAIN OF DOLLARS

on whose collar the figures "28" twinkled in the sunlight. The child, for a moment rebellious, toddled towards the doorway of the hut.

Mercedes' eyelids had closed: but some of the wine found its way down her throat, and as it revived her, they flickered again.

"Sebastian," she whispered.

"Be at rest, dear wife. It is I, Sebastian."

"I did not kill him."

"I hear. You did not kill him."

"The child?"

"He is safe — safe and sound," he assured her, and called, "Sebastianillo!"

For a moment there was no answer: but as he lifted Mercedes and carried her into the hut, on its threshold the boy met them, his both hands dropping silver dollars.

www.libtool.com.cn

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

[FROM THE MEMOIRS OF MANUEL, OR MANUS, MACNEILL,
AN AGENT IN THE SECRET SERVICE OF GREAT BRIT-
AIN DURING THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGNS OF 1808-13.]

I HAVE not the precise date in 1811 when Fuentes and I set out for Salamanca, but it must have been either in the third or fourth week of July.

In Portugal just then Lord Wellington was fencing, so to speak, with the points of three French armies at once. On the south he had Soult, on the north Dorsenne, and between them Marmont's troops were scattered along the valley of the Tagus, with Madrid as their far base. Being solidly concentrated, by short and rapid movements he could keep these three armies impotent for offence; but *en revanche*, he could make no overmastering attack upon any one of them. If he advanced far against Soult or against Dorsenne he must bring Marmont down on his flank, left or right; while, if he reached out and

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

struck for the Tagus Valley, Marmont could borrow from right and left without absolutely crippling his colleagues, and roll up seventy thousand men to bar the road on Madrid. In short, the opposing armies stood at a deadlock, and there were rumours that Napoleon, who was pouring troops into Spain from the north, meant to follow and take the war into his own hands.

Now, the strength and the weakness of the whole position lay with Marmont; while the key of it, curiously enough, was Ciudad Rodrigo, garrisoned by Dorsenne — as in due time appeared. For the present, Wellington, groping for the vital spot, was learning all that could be learnt about Marmont's strength, its disposition, and (a matter of first importance) its victualling, Spain being a country where large armies starve. How many men were being drafted down from the north? How was Marmont scattering his cantonments to feed them? What was the state of the harvest? What provisions did Salamanca contain? And what stores were accumulating at Madrid, Valladolid, Burgos?

I had just arrived at Lisbon in a *chassemarée* of San Sebastian, bringing a report of the French troops, which for a month past had been pouring across the bridge of Irun: and how I had

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

learnt this is worth telling. There was a cobbler, Martinez by name — a little man with a green shade over his eyes — who plied his trade in a wooden hutch at the end of the famous bridge. While he worked he counted every man, horse, standard, wagon, or gun that passed, and forwarded the numbers without help of speech or writing (for he could not even write his own name). He managed it all with his hammer, tapping out a code known to our fellows who roamed the shore below on the pretence of hunting for shellfish, but were prevented by the French cordon from getting within sight of the bridge. As for Martinez, the French Generals themselves gossiped around his hutch while he cobbled industriously at the soldiers' shoes.

I had presented my report to Lord Wellington, who happened to be in Lisbon quarrelling with the Portuguese Government and re-embarking (apparently for Cadiz) a battering train of guns and mortars which had just arrived from England: and after two days' holiday I was spending an idle morning in a wine-shop by the quay, where the proprietor, a fervid politician, kept on file his copies of the Government newspaper, the *Lisbon Gazette*. A week at sea had sharpened my appetite for news; and I was wrapped in

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

study of the *Gazette* when an orderly arrived from headquarters with word that Lord Wellington requested my attendance there at once.

I found him in conference with a handsome, slightly built man — a Spaniard by his face — who stepped back as I entered, but without offering to retire. Instead, he took up his stand with his back to one of the three windows overlooking the street, and so continued to observe me, all the while keeping his own face in shade.

The General, as his habit was, came to business at once.

“I have sent for you,” said he, “on a serious affair. Our correspondents in Salamanca have suddenly ceased to write.”

“If your Excellency’s correspondents are the same as the Government’s,” said I, “’tis small wonder,” and I glanced at the newspaper in his hand — a copy of the same *Gazette* I had been reading.

“Then you also think this is the explanation?” He held out the paper with the face of a man handling vermin.

“The Government publishes its reports, the English newspapers copy them: these in turn reach Paris; the Emperor reads them: and,” concluded I, with a shrug, “your correspondents cease to

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

write, probably for the good reason that they are dead.”

“That is just what I want you to find out,” said he.

“Your Excellency wishes me to go to Salamanca? Very good. And, supposing these correspondents to be dead?”

“You will find others.”

“That may not be easy: nevertheless, I can try. Your Excellency, by the way, will allow me to promise that future reports are not for publication?”

Wellington smiled grimly, doubtless from recollection of a recent interview with Silveira and the Portuguese Ministry. “You may rest assured of that,” said he; and added: “There may be some delay, as you suggest, in finding fresh correspondents: and it is very necessary for me to know quickly how Salamanca stands for stores.”

“Then I must pick up some information on my own account.”

“The service will be hazardous ——”

“Oh, as for that ——” I put in, with another shrug.

“— and I propose to give you a companion,” pursued Wellington, with a half-turn toward the

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

man in the recess of the window. "This is Señor Fuentes. You are not acquainted, I believe? — as you ought to be."

Now from choice I have always worked alone: and had the General uttered any other name I should have been minded to protest, with the old Greek, that two were not enough for an army, while for any other purpose they were too many. But on hearsay the performances of this man Fuentes and his methods and his character had for months possessed a singular fascination for me. He was at once a strolling guitar-player and a licentiate of the University of Salamanca, a consorter with gypsies, and by birth a pure-blooded Castilian hidalgo. Some said that patriotism was a passion with him; with a face made for the love of women, he had a heart only for the woes of Spain. Others averred that hatred of the French was always his master impulse; that they, by demolishing the colleges of his University, and in particular his own beloved College of San Lorenzo, had broken his heart and first driven him to wander. Rewards he disdained; dangers he laughed at: his feats in the service had sometimes a touch of high comedy and always a touch of heroic grace. In short, I believe that if Spain had held a poet in those

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

days, Fuentes would have passed into song and lived as one of his country's demigods.

He came forward now with a winning smile and saluted me cordially, not omitting a handsome compliment on my work. You could see that the man had not an ounce of meanness in his nature.

"We shall be friends," said he, turning to the Commander-in-Chief. "And that will be to the credit of both, since Señor MacNeill has an objection to comrades."

"I never said so."

"Excuse me, but I have studied your methods."

"Well, then," I replied, "I had the strongest objection, but you have made me forget it — as you have forgotten your repugnance to visit Salamanca." For although Fuentes flitted up and down and across Spain like a will-o'-the-wisp, I had heard that he ever avoided the city where he had lived and studied.

His fine eyes clouded, and he muttered some Latin words as it were with a voice indrawn.

"I beg your pardon?" put in Wellington sharply.

"Cecidit, cecidit Salmantica illa fortis," Fuentes repeated.

"'Cecidit' — ah! I see — a quotation. Yes,

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

they are knocking the place about: as many as fifteen or sixteen colleges razed to the ground." He opened the newspaper again and ran his eyes down the report. "You'll excuse me: in England we have our own way of pronouncing Latin, and for the moment I didn't quite catch — Yes, sixteen colleges; a clean sweep! But before long, Señor Fuentes, we'll return the compliment upon their fortifications."

"That must be my consolation, your Excellency," Fuentes made answer with a smile which scarcely hid its irony.

The General began to discuss our route: our precautions he left to us. He was well aware of the extreme risk we ran, and once again made allusion to it as he dismissed us.

"If that were all your Excellency demanded!"

Fuentes' gaiety returned as we found ourselves in the street. "We shall get on together like a pair of schoolboys," he assured me. "We understand each other, you and I. But oh, those islanders!"

We left Lisbon that same evening on muleback, taking the road for Abrantes. So universally were the French hated that the odds were we might have dispensed with precautions at this

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

stage, and indeed for the greater part of the journey. The frontier once passed we should be travelling in our native country — Fuentes as a gypsy and I as an Asturian, moving from one harvest-job to another. We carried no compromising papers: and if the French wanted to arrest folks on mere suspicion they had the entire population to practise on. Nevertheless, having ridden north-east for some leagues beyond Abrantes — on the direct road leading past Ciudad Rodrigo to Salamanca — we halted at Amendoa, bartered one of our mules for a couple of skins of wine and ten days' provisions, and, having made our new toilet in a chestnut grove outside the town, headed back for the road leading east through Villa Velha into the Tagus valley.

Beyond the frontier we were among Marmont's cantonments: but these lay scattered, and we avoided them easily. Keeping to the hill-tracks on the northern bank of the river, and giving a wide berth to the French posts in front of Alcantara, we struck away boldly for the north through the Sierras: reached the Alagon, and, following up its gorges, crossed the mountains in the rear of Bejar, where a French force guarded the military pass.

So far we had travelled unmolested, if toil-

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

somely; and a pleasanter comrade than Fuentes no man could ask for. His gaiety never failed him: yet it was ever gentle, and I suspected that it covered either a native melancholy or some settled sorrow — sorrow for his country, belike — but there were depths he never allowed me to sound. He did everything well, from singing a love-song to tickling a trout and cooking it for our supper: and it was after such a supper, as we lay and smoked on a heathery slope beyond Bejar, that he unfolded his further plans.

“My friend,” said he, “there were once two brothers, students of Salamanca, and not far removed in age. Of these the elder was given to love-making and playing on the guitar; while the other stuck to his books — which was all the more creditable because his eyes were weak. I hope you are enjoying this story?”

“It begins to be interesting.”

“Yet these two brothers — they were nearly of one height, by the way — obtained their bachelor’s degrees, and in time their licentiate, though as rewards for different degrees of learning. They were from Villacastin, beyond Avila in Old Castille: but their father, a hidalgo of small estates there, possessed also a farm and the remains of a castle across the frontier in the

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

kingdom of Leon, a league to the west of Salvatierra on the Tormes. It had come to him as security for a loan which was never paid: and, dying, he left this property to his younger son Andrea. Now when the French set a Corsican upon the throne of our kingdoms, these two brothers withdrew from Salamanca; but while Andrea took up his abode on his small heritage, and gave security for his good behaviour, Eugenio, the elder, turned his back on the paternal home (which the French had ravaged), and became a rebel, a nameless, landless man and a wanderer, with his guitar for company. You follow me?"

"I follow you, Señor Don Eugenio ——"

"Not 'de Fuentes,'" he put in with a smile. "The real name you shall read upon certain papers and parchments of which I hope to possess myself to-night. In short, my friend, since we are on the way to Salamanca, why should I not apply there for my doctor's degree?"

"It requires a thesis, I have always understood."

"That is written."

"May I ask upon what subject?"

"The fiend take me if I know yet! But it is written, safe enough."

"Ah, I see! We go to Salvatierra? Yes, yes,

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

but what of me, who know scarcely any Latin beyond my *credo*?"

"Why, that is where I feel a certain delicacy. Having respect to your rank, *caballero*, I do not like to propose that you should become my servant."

"I am your servant already, and for a week past I have been an Asturian. It will be promotion."

He sprang up gaily. "What a comrade is mine!" he cried, flinging away the end of his cigarette. "To Salvatierra, then — Santiago, and close Spain!"

Darkness overtook us as we climbed down the slopes: but we pushed on, Fuentes leading the way boldly. Evidently he had come to familiar ground. But it was midnight before he brought me, by an abominable road, to a farmstead the walls of which showed themselves ruinous even in the starlight — for moon there was none. At an angle of the building, which once upon a time had been whitewashed, rose a solid tower, with a doorway and an iron-studded door, and a narrow window overlooking it. In spite of the hour, Fuentes advanced nonchalantly and began to bang the door, making noise enough to wake the dead. The window above was presently

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

opened — one could hear, with a shaking hand. “Who is there?” asked a man’s voice no less tremulous. “Who are you, for the love of God?”

“*Gente de paz*, my dear brother — not your friends the French. I hope, by the way, you are entertaining none.”

“I have been in bed these four hours or five. ‘Peace,’ say you? I wish you would take your own risks and leave me in peace! What is it you want, this time?”

“’Tis a good six weeks, brother, since my last visit: and, as you know, I never call without need.”

“Well, what is it you need?”

“I need,” said Fuentes with great gravity, “the loan of your spectacles.”

“Be serious, for God’s sake! And do not raise your voice so: the French may be following you ——”

“Dear Andrea, and if the French were to hear it, surely mine is an innocent request. A pair of spectacles!”

“The French ——” began Don Andrea and broke off, peering down short-sightedly into the courtyard. “Ah, there is someone else! Who is it? Who is it you have there in the darkness?”

“*Dios!* A moment since you were begging

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

for silence, and now you want me to call out my friend's name — to who knows what ears? He has a mule, here, and I — oh yes, beside the spectacles I shall require a horse: a horse, and — let me see — a treatise.”

“Have you been drinking, brother?”

“No: and, since you mention it, a cup of wine, too, would not come amiss. Is this a way to treat the *caballero* my friend? For the honour of the family, brother, step down and open the door.”

Don Andrea closed the window, and by-and-by we heard the bolts withdrawn, one by one — and they were heavy. The door opened at length, and a thin man in a nightcap peered out upon us with an oil-lamp held aloft over the hand shading his eyes.

“You had best call Juan,” said his brother easily, “and bid him stable the mule. For the remainder of the night we are your guests; and, to ensure our sleeping well, you shall fetch out the choicest of the theses you have composed for your doctorate and read us a portion over our wine.”

We lay that night, after a repast of thin wine and chestnuts, in a spare chamber, and on beds across the feet of which the rats scudded. I did not see Don Andrea again: but his brother, who

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

had risen betimes, awakened me from uneasy slumber and showed me his spoil. Sure enough it included a pair of spectacles and a bulky roll of manuscript, a leathern jerkin, a white shirt, and a pair of velvet-fustian breeches, tawny yellow in hue and something the worse for wear. Below-stairs, in the courtyard, we found a white-haired retainer waiting, with his grip on the bridles of my mule and a raw-boned grey mare.

“The *caballero* will bring them back when he has done with them?” said this old man as I mounted. The request puzzled me for a moment until I met his eyes and found them fastened wistfully on my breeches.

Assuredly Fuentes was an artist. Besides the spectacles, which in themselves transformed him, he had borrowed a broad-brimmed hat and a rusty black sleeveless *mancha*, which, by the way he contrived it to hang, gave his frame an extraordinary lankiness. But his final and really triumphant touch was simply a lengthening of the stirrups, so that his legs dangled beneath the mare’s belly like a couple of ropes with shoes attached. If Don Andrea watched us out of sight from his tower — as I doubt not he did — his emotions as he recognised his portrait must have been lively.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

In this guise we ambled steadily all day along the old Roman road leading to Salamanca, and came within sight of the city as the sun was sinking. It stood on the eastern bank of the river, fronting the level rays, its walls rising tier upon tier, its towers and cupolas of cream-coloured stone bathed in gold, with recesses of shadowy purple. A bridge of twenty-five or six arches spanned the cool river-beds, and towards this we descended between cornfields, of which the light swept the topmost ears while the stalks stood already in twilight. Truly it was a noble city yet, and so I cried aloud to Fuentes. But his eyes, I believe, saw only what the French had marred or demolished.

A group of their soldiery idled by the bridge-end, waiting for the guard to be relieved, and lolled against the parapet watching the bathers, whose shouts came up to me from the chasm below. But instead of riding up and presenting our passes, Fuentes, a furlong from the bridge, turned his mare's head to the left and reined up at the door of a small riverside tavern.

The innkeeper — a brisk, athletic man, with the air of a retired servant — appeared at the door as we dismounted. He scanned Fuentes narrowly, while giving him affable welcome.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

Plainly he recognised him as an old patron, yet plainly the recognition was imperfect.

“Eh, my good Bartolomé, and so you still cling above the river? I hope custom clings here too?”

“But — but can it be the Señor Don ——”

“Eugenio, my friend. The spectacles puzzle you: they belong to my brother, Don Andrea, and I may tell you that after a day’s wear I find them trying to the eyes. But, you understand, there are reasons . . . and so you will suppose me to be Don Andrea, while bringing a cup of wine, and another for my servant, to Don Eugenio’s favourite seat, which was at the end of the garden beyond the mulberry-tree, if you remember.”

“Assuredly this poor house is your Lordship’s, and all that belongs to it. The wine shall be fetched with speed. But as for the table at the end of the garden, I regret to tell your Lordship that it is occupied for a while. If for this evening, I might recommend the parlour ——” The inn-keeper made his excuse with a certain quick trepidation which Fuentes did not fail to note.

“What is this? Your garden full? It appears then, my good Bartolomé, that your custom has not suffered in these bad times.”

“On the contrary, Señor, it has fallen off woe-fully! My garden has been deserted for months,

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

and is empty now, save for two gentlemen, who, as luck will have it, have chosen to seat themselves in your Lordship's favourite corner. Ah, yes, the old times were the best! and I was a fool to grumble, as I sometimes did, when my patrons ran me off my legs."

"But steady, Bartolomé: not so fast! Surely there used to be three tables beyond the mulberry-tree, or my memory is sadly at fault."

"Three tables? Yes, it is true there are three tables. Nevertheless ——"

"I cannot see," pursued Fuentes with a musing air — "no, for the life of me I cannot see how two gentlemen should require three tables to drink their wine at."

"Nor I, Señor. It must, as you say, be a caprice: nevertheless they charged me that on all accounts they were to have that part of the garden to themselves."

"A very churlish caprice, then! They are Frenchmen, doubtless?"

"No, indeed, your Lordship: but two lads of good birth, gentlemen of Spain, the one a bachelor, the other a student of the University."

"All the more, then, they deserve a lesson. Bartolomé, you will tell your tapster to bring my wine to the vacant table beyond the mulberry-tree."

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“But, Señor ——” As Fuentes moved off, the inn-keeper put forth a hand to entreat if not to restrain him.

“Eh?” Fuentes halted as if amazed at his impudence. “Ah, to be sure, I am Don Andrea: but do not forget, my friend, that Don Eugenio used to be quick-tempered, and that in members of one family these little likenesses crop up in the most unexpected fashion.” He strode away down the shadowy garden-path over which in the tree-tops a last beam or two of sunset lingered: and I, having hitched up our beasts, followed him, carrying the saddle-bags and his guitar-case.

Three tables, as he had premised, stood in the patch of garden beyond the mulberry-tree, hedged in closely on three sides, giving a view in front upon the towers and fortifications across the river; a nook secluded as a stage-box facing a scene that might have been built and lit up for our delectation. The tables, with benches alongside, stood moderately close together — two by the river-wall, the third in the rear, where the hedge formed an angle: and the two gentlemen so jealous of their privacy were seated at the nearer of the two tables overlooking the river, and on the same bench — though at the extreme ends of it and something more than a yard apart.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

They stared up angrily at our intrusion, and for the moment the elder of the pair seemed about to demand our business. But Fuentes walked calmly by, took his seat at the next table, pulled out his bundle of manuscript, adjusted his spectacles, and began to read. Having deposited my baggage, I took up a respectful position behind him, ignoring — somewhat ostentatiously perhaps — the strangers' presence, yet not without observing them from the corner of my eye.

They were young: the elder, maybe, three-and-twenty, short, thick-set, with features just now darkened by his ill-humour, but probably sullen enough at the best of times: the younger, tall and nervous and extraordinarily fair for a Spaniard, with a weak, restless mouth and restless, passionate eyes. Indeed, either this restlessness was a disease with him or he was suffering just now from an uncontrollable agitation. Eyes, mouth, feet, fingers — the whole man seemed to be twitching. I set down his age at eighteen. On the table stood a large flask of wine, from which he helped himself fiercely, and beside the flask lay a long bundle wrapped in a cloak.

This young man, having drained his glass at a gulp, let out an oath and sprang up suddenly with a glare upon Fuentes, who had stretched

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

out his legs and was already absorbed in his reading.

“Señor Stranger,” he began impetuously, “we would have you to know if the innkeeper has not already told you ——”

“Gently!” interposed his comrade. “You are going the wrong way to work. My friend, Sir” — he addressed Fuentes, who looked up with a mild surprise — “my friend, Sir, was about to suggest that the light is poor for reading.”

“Oh,” answered Fuentes, smiling easily, “for a minute or two — until they bring my wine. Moreover, I wear excellent glasses.”

“But the place is not too well chosen.”

Fuentes appeared to digest this for a moment, then turned around upon me with a puzzled air.

“My good Pedro, you have not misled me, I hope? I am short-sighted, gentlemen; and if we have strayed into a private garden I offer you my profoundest apologies.” He gathered his manuscript into a roll and stood up.

“To be plain with you, Sir,” said the dark man sullenly, “this is not precisely a private garden, and yet we desire privacy.”

“Oho?” After a glance around, Fuentes fixed his eyes on the bundle lying on the table. “And at the point of the sword — eh?”

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

The two young men started and at once began to eye each other suspiciously.

“No, no,” Fuentes assured them, smiling; “this is no trap, believe me, but a chance encounter; and I am no *alguacil* in disguise, but a poor scholar returning to Salamanca for his doctorate. Nor do I seek to know the cause of your quarrel. But here comes the wine!” He waited until the tapster had set flask and glasses on the table and withdrawn. “In the interval before your friends arrive you will not grudge me, Sirs, the draining of a glass to remembrance in a garden where I too have loved my friends, and quarrelled with them, in days gone by — days older now than I care to reckon.” He raised the wine and held it up for a moment against the sunset. “Youth — youth!” he sighed.

“You are welcome, Sir,” said the younger man a trifle more graciously; “but we expect no seconds, and, believe me, we shall presently be pressed for time.”

Fuentes raised his eyebrows. “You surprise and shock me, Sirs. In the days to which I drank just now it was not customary for gentlemen of the University of Salamanca to fight without witnesses. We left that to porters and grooms.”

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“And pray,” sneered the darker young man, “may we know the name of him who from the height of his years and experience presumes to intrude this lecture on us?”

“You may address me, if you will, as Don Andrea Galazza de Villacastin, a licentiate of your University ——”

To my astonishment the younger man stopped him with a short offensive laugh. “You may spare us the rest, Sir. Don Andrea Galazza is known to us and to all honest patriots by repute: we can supply the rest of his titles for ourselves, beginning with *renegado* ——”

“Hist!” interposed his comrade, at the same time catching up the swords from the table. “Don’t be a fool, Sebastian — speak lower, for God’s sake! — the very soldiers at the bridge will hear you!”

“Ay, Sir,” chimed in Fuentes gravely; “listen to your friend’s advice, and do not increase the peril of your remarks by the foolishness of shouting them.”

But the youngster, flushed with wine and overstrung, had lost for the moment all self-control. “I accept that risk,” cried he, “for the pleasure of telling Don Andrea Galazza what kind of man he passes for among honourable

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

folk. He, the brother of Don Eugenio — of our hero, the noble Fuentes! He, that signed his peace while that noble heart preferred to break! He spat in furious contempt.

Fuentes turned to me quietly. "Behold one of the enthusiasts we came to seek," he murmured; "and one who will not fear risks. But these testimonials are embarrassing, and this fame of mine swells to a nuisance." He faced his accuser. "Nevertheless," answered he aloud, "you make a noise that must disconcert your friend, who is in two minds about assassinating me. Why spoil his game by arousing the neighbourhood?"

"Señor Don Andrea, you know too much — thanks to my friend here," said the dark man slowly.

"But we are not assassins," put in the youngster. "Renegade though you be, Don Andrea, I give you your chance." He snatched the foil from his senior's hand and presented it solemnly, hilt foremost, to Fuentes.

"Youth — youth!" murmured Fuentes with an appreciative laugh, as he tucked the foil under his arm, took off his spectacles and rubbed them, laughing again. He readjusted them carefully and, saluting, fell on guard. "I am at your service, Sir."

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

The youth stepped forward hotly, touched blades, and almost immediately lunged. An instant later his sword, as though it had been a bird released from his hand, flew over his shoulder into the twilight behind.

“That was ill-luck for you, Señor,” said Fuentes lowering his point. “But who can be sure of himself in this confounded twilight?” He swung half-about towards the river-wall, with a glance across at the city, where already a few lights began to twinkle in the dusk. And, so turning, he seemed on a sudden to catch his breath.

And almost on that instant the youngster, who had fallen back disconcerted, sprang forward in a fresh fury and gripped his comrade by the arm, pointing excitedly towards a group of houses above the fortifications, whence from a high upper storey, deeply recessed between flanking walls, a light redder than the rest twinkled across to us.

“The proof!” cried he. “She knew you would be here, and that is the proof! *You* at least I will kill before I leave this garden, as I came to kill you to-night.”

In his new gust of fury he seemed to have forgotten his discomfiture — to have forgotten even the existence of Fuentes, who now faced them

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

both with a smile which (unless the dusk distorted it) had some bitterness in its raillery.

“If I mistake not, Sirs, the light you were discussing signals to us from an upper chamber in the Lesser Street of the Virgins. It can only be seen from this garden and from the far end of it, where we now stand. I will not ask you who lights it now: but she who lit it in former days was named Luisa. Oh yes, she was circumspect — a good maid then, and no doubt a good maid now: in that street of the Virgins there was at least one prudent. Youth flies, *ay de mi!* But youth also, as I perceive to-night, repeats itself; and Luisa — who was always circumspect, though a conspirator — apparently repeats herself too.”

“Luisa? What do you know of Luisa?” stammered the younger man. The name seemed to have fallen on him like the touch of an enchanter’s wand, stiffening him to stone. Like a statue he stood there, peering forward with a white face.

“My friend” — Fuentes turned to me — “be so good as to unstrap the case yonder and hand me my guitar.”

He laid his foil on the table, took the guitar from me, and, having seated himself on the bench, tried the strings softly, all the while looking up with grave raillery at the two young men.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“What do I know of Luisa? Listen!” Under his voice he began a light-hearted little song, which in English might run like this, or as nearly as I can contrive —

*My love, she lives in Salamanca
All up a dozen flights of stairs;
There with the sparrows night and morning
Under the roof she chirps her prayers.
They say her wisdom comes from heaven —
So near the clouds and chimneys meet —
I rather think Luisa's sparrows
Fetch it aloft there from the street!*

*What would you have? In la Verdura
All the day long she keeps a stall:
Students, bachelors buy her nosegays,
Given with a look and — well, that's all!
Go, silly boy, believe you first with her —
Twenty at once she'll entertain.
Why love a mistress and be curst with her?
Copy Luisa — love all Spain!”*

He paused, still eyeing them. “You recognise the tune, Sirs? Does she play it yet? Well, then, I made it for her.

“You? How came you to make her that tune?” The younger man had found his voice at length. “No, Sir; coquette she may be, but that she ever was friends with such a one as Andrea Galazza I will not yet believe.”

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“And you are right. Sirs, you have not yet told me your names: but in your generous heat you have given me your secret — that you are two lovers of Spain, and even such a pair as my friend and I have travelled some distance to seek. In return you shall have mine. I tricked you just now. I am not Don Andrea, but his brother Eugenio — or, as some call him, Fuentes.”

“Fuentes! *You!*”

“Upon my honour, yes.” He pulled off his spectacles, meeting their incredulity with a frank laugh. “What proof can I give you?” The guitar still lay across his knees: he picked it up as if to play, but set it down after a moment with another laugh, hard and bitter. “Let us go together, gentlemen, to the Street of the Virgins, and ask Luisa if she remembers me.”

It was agreed that the young men — who gave their names as Diego de Ribalta and Sebastian Paz — should not accompany us into the city, but wend their way back across the bridge, while we finished our wine and mounted our beasts at leisure. The officer at the bridge-end made no pother about our passports (borrowed, I need scarcely say, from the estimable Don Andrea, who, as his brother explained, was a careful man, and zealous in all dealings with the authorities);

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

and by-and-by we were clattering up-hill through the ill-lighted streets of Salamanca. At the head of the first street our two friends stepped out of the shadow and joined us in silence. In silence, too, Fuentes regreeted them, and led the way — to an inn first, the Four Crowns, standing almost under the shadow of the Old Cathedral, where we stabled mare and mule; then, on foot, through a maze of zigzagging lanes and alleys, back into the depths of a waterside quarter. Once he was at fault — the lane we followed ending abruptly in an open space strewn with rubble-heaps, a broad area where the French had lately been at work. Among these heaps he blundered for a while in the darkness, and then, retracing his steps, took up the scent again and led us down one narrow street, across another; turned to the right, counting the houses as he went, and knocked at the twelfth door without hesitation. The knock was a peculiar one — five quick taps, followed, after a pause, by one distinct and heavy.

“But I must ask these gentlemen to do what remains,” said he, turning and addressing our companions. “Luisa has doubtless changed the password since my time.”

“Willingly, Señor Fuentes,” agreed de Ribalta.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“You will not, of course, object to be blindfolded? — a formality, merely, in your case.”

The porter, having received the password in a whisper through the grille, unbolted to us, and opened the door upon a pitch-dark passage. Here we submitted to have our eyes bandaged, and Sebastian Paz took my hand to guide me. Eight flights of stairs we mounted before the hubbub of many voices and the tinkle of a guitar saluted my ears; two more, and the hubbub grew louder; another, and it grew obstreperous, deafening. At the head of the twelfth flight one of our guides rapped on a door; the noise died down suddenly; a bolt was shot back and the bandage dragged from my eyes.

I found myself blinking and staring across a room filled with tobacco-smoke, and upon a company which at first glance I took for a crew of demons. They were, in fact, a students' chorus — young men in black, with black silk masks covering the upper half of their faces. All wore the same uniform — black tunic, short black cloak, knee-breeches, and stockings. Some squatted on the floor, two lolled on a divan by the window — each with a guitar across his knees. The man who had opened to us held a tambourine, and he alone wore a little round cap.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

The others wore black cocked hats, or had flung them off for better ease. In a deep armchair beside the fireplace sat a stiff-backed, middle-aged woman in black—a duenna evidently—who regarded us with eyes like large black beads, but did not interrupt her knitting. In the corner behind the door stood a bed, with a crucifix above it: and on the bed, between two crates, the one of them heaped with flowers, sat a young woman dangling a pretty pair of feet and smoking a cigarette while she made up a posy.

In spite of their masks one could tell that all the men were young—mere lads, indeed. And if this were Luisa, Fuentes had slandered her sorely. She seemed scarcely eighteen—and we had taken her, too, at unawares, when a woman forgets for a moment her endless vigilant parry against Time. She tossed her posy into the half-filled basket, clapped her hands, and sprang off the bed.

“Two new recruits! Bravo, Sebastianillo!”

With that, as she stepped gaily forward, her eyes fell on Fuentes, and she swayed and fell back a pace, catching at the foot of the bed.

“Don Eugenio!”

“Your servant, Señorita.” He bowed elaborately and coldly. “You keep the lamp burning, and I accepted its invitation. Your cheeks, too,

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

Señorita, keep the old colour. I congratulate you — and you, Doña Isabel.” He bowed to the old lady. “To live with youth — that is the way to live always young.”

She had moved forward again, as if to take him by both hands: but faltered. “Yes, we have kept the lamp burning, Don Eugenio,” she answered with a voice curiously strained. “My friends” — she turned to the young men — “rise and salute our guest of guests, Don Eugenio Fuentes!”

“Fuentes!”

“What are you telling us, Luisa? *The Fuentes?* But it is impossible!”

“Impossible! Fuentes comes no more to Salamanca.”

Nevertheless all had sprung to their feet, and Fuentes comprehended them all in an ironical bow.

“That is the name by which I call myself, Sirs, since leaving the University.”

Luisa made a dumb signal, and one of the youths handed him a guitar. He struck but one chord to assure himself of its tune —

“There’s one that lives in Salamanca

All up a dozen flights of stairs;

There with the sparrows, night and morning,

Under the roof she chirps her prayers.

They say her wisdom comes from heaven —

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn



SHE CAUGHT UP HER GUITAR AND CHIMED IN

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

Will you not take a guitar, Señorita, and help me with the old song?

*So near the clouds and chimneys meet —
I rather think Luisa's sparrows
Fetch it aloft there from the street!"*

Above all things women suspect and fear irony: it is not one of their weapons. Luisa glanced at Fuentes doubtfully, I could see, and with some pain in her doubt. But it was the old song, after all, and he was singing it *de bon cœur*. She caught up a guitar and chimed in with the second verse, taking up the soprano's part, while he at once obeyed and dropped from treble to alto —

*Which will you have? In la Verdura
Pretty Luisa keeps a stall:
Hands you a rose for your peseta,
Nothing to pay but a thorn — that's all!
King of her love, with no Prime Minister,
Lord of an attic blithe I'd reign.
But ay de mill from here to Finisterre
Pretty Luisa loves all Spain.*

His eyes, as he sang, were fastened on young Sebastian Paz, and she, noting them, played the verse to its ringing close, turned abruptly, and laid the guitar on the bed between the flower-baskets.

“But I think it is business brings you here, Don Eugenio.”

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

He had stepped to the open lattice, and with an upward glance at the lamp, burning steadily in the windless air, leaned on the sill and looked out over the city. Somewhere below by the waterside a dull noise sounded — the thud of a falling beam. The French down there were working by lantern-light, clearing away the houses from their fortifications.

“Yes, I come on business, and from Lord Wellington. The good citizens in Salamanca have ceased to write.”

“And small blame to them,” one of the young men answered.

“Small blame to them, I agree. And yet they must send news — this time to Lord Wellington, who knows better than to print it.”

His eyes interrogated Luisa, who raised hers at length to meet them.

“That will not be easy,” said she, with a pucker of her pretty forehead. “They are scared and afraid for their heads: nevertheless, Don Eugenio might bring back their confidence, if only we can bring him face to face with them.” She seated herself on the bed’s edge and mused awhile with her hands in her lap.

“You know where to find them?” asked Fuentes, addressing the company in general.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“Oh, yes, Señor — assuredly we know where to find them!” answered one or two.

“Then the whole thing is very simple. You must let me join ~~our choir, gentlemen.~~”

“Yes, yes, *that* is simple enough,” put in Luisa impatiently: “the more so, as our chorus is popular not only in the taverns, but at the French officers’ messes. But these spies of ours are slow and dull to a degree: I think sometimes it takes a quite special clumsiness to be a clerk of the arsenal or to swindle the country in the military stores. We can get you into communication with them, Don Eugenio: but how are they to pass their information to *you*? They are born bunglers, and the French begin to use their eyes.” She pursed her lips for a moment. “Is your friend new to this work?” she asked, suddenly turning toward me a gaze of frank inspection.

Fuentes smiled. “You would not say so, Señorita, were I free to tell you his name.”

“As for that,” said I, “where Señor Don Eugenio entrusts his secret I may not hesitate to entrust mine. My name is Manuel MacNeill, Señorita, and I kiss your hands and am at your service.”

Luisa rose and dropped me a very stately curtsey. “Happy were I, Don Manuel MacNeill,

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

to welcome you, even if you did not solve our difficulty. You are clever at disguises, I have been told. Well, I have a disguise for you — though not, to be sure, a pleasant one.”

“I take the downs with the ups,” said I.

“Well, then, Don Diego here is an artist. He can paint you a bunch of grapes so that the birds come to peck at it: moreover, he has studied at the hospital. We must find you a suit of rags, Sir, and Don Diego shall paint you as full of sores as Lazarus.”

“And after that?”

“After that you will go to the porch of the New Cathedral, to the shady side of it — look you how I study your comfort — facing on the Square of the Old College: and there you shall collect the alms of the charitable. Many things, I am told, find their way into a beggar’s hat.”

“Señorita,” said Fuentes gravely, with a glance up at the lamp, “it was a good star that led us here to-night.”

“The star, as you call it, has not failed in all these years,” she answered, with a look of timid appeal which hardened to one of defiance.

“Nay,” answered he coldly and lightly, “I never doubted it would — while there was oil to feed it.”

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

On the morrow, then, I took up my station by the porch of the Cathedral, with a highly artistic wound in my left leg, a shade over my right eye, and beside me a crutch and a ragged cap. The first day brought me coppers only: but late on the second afternoon a stout citizen, pausing on the steps and catching his breath asthmatically before entering the Cathedral, dropped a paper pellet in with his penny. On the third day it began to rain pellets, and I drank that night to the assured success of our campaign.

I saw nothing of Fuentes. It had been agreed between us that I should play my part in my own fashion, and I played it so thoroughly as to take lodgings in the beggars' quarter, in a thieves' den — it was little better — off the Street of the Rosary. It was enough for me that, however Fuentes went about the sowing, the harvest kept pouring in. As for the Street of the Virgins, I had been brought to it and had quitted it in the dark, and it is a question if by daylight I could have found it again. At any rate, I did not try.

But on the fourth day, at about five in the afternoon, as the day's heat began to grow tolerable, I caught sight of Luisa herself picking her way towards the Cathedral porch along the pavement under the façade of the University.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

Before entering the great doors she paused on the step beside me, bent to drop a coin into my cap, and whispered —

“When I come out, follow me.”

She passed on into the Cathedral and did not reappear for a quarter of an hour, perhaps. In this time I had made up my mind that, whatever the risk of my obeying her, she had probably weighed it against some risk more urgent, and perhaps brought the message direct from Fuentes. So when she came forth, and after pausing a moment to readjust her mantilla, tripped down the steps and away to the left down the street leading to the Porta del Rio, I picked up my crutch, yawned, shook the coppers in my wallet, and hobbled after her at a decent distance.

All the way I kept my eyes open and my ears too. In the streets around the Porta del Rio the city's traffic was beginning to flow again after the day's siesta: but I made pretty sure that we were not being tracked. Through half-a-dozen streets she led me, and so to one which I supposed to be the Street of the Virgins, and to a door which I recognised for that to which Fuentes had brought me four nights ago.

She had already knocked and been admitted: but the door opened again as I came abreast of it,

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

and I stepped past the porter into the passage. Luisa stood halfway up the first flight of stairs under a sunny window and beckoned, and aloft I climbed after her to her attic. With her hand on the latch of her own door, she turned.

“You will find your clothes within,” she said, and opened the door for me to pass. “Dress — dress with speed — and find Don Eugenio. Your work is done, and you must both be beyond the bridge before sunset.”

“Is there treachery, Señorita?” I asked.

“There is treachery of a kind, but not of the kind you guess. It is important that Don Eugenio should be beyond the bridge to-night. Your beasts at the Four Crowns are ready saddled. Find your friend, and help him to go with all speed.”

“But where shall I find him, Señorita? I have not set eyes on him for three or four days.”

“Yet he has done his work surely, has he not?”

“Far better than I could have hoped.”

“You ask where he is to be found? But where else than by the Archbishop’s College, near by where the French have pulled down his own College of San Lorenzo, and are destroying more? You men!” She broke out into sudden passionate contempt. “The past is all you have

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

eyes for — the poor, wild, blundering past. You have no eyes for the present, and with the past you poison its living joy. We women cannot be always seventeen: yet because we are not, you kill us — you kill us, I say!” Then, while I stared at her in downright amaze, “Go, dress!” she cried, thrusting me into the room. “In your coat you will find two letters. That without address you will give to Don Eugenio when you find him: that which is marked with a cross you will hand to him when you shall have passed the bridge — on no account before. And now be quick, I beseech you: for this one room is all my house.”

Almost she thrust me within, and closed the door gently upon me. When I emerged, in my right and proper clothes, it was to find her yet waiting there upon the landing.

“I thank you for your speed, Señor Don Manuel; for I, too, am in haste to change my dress: and my dress will require care to-night, since I go to a masquerade.” She gave me her hand. “Farewell, friend!” she said.

I found Don Eugenio behind the College of the Archbishop, seated on a mound and watching the French sappers at their work. I gave him Luisa’s letter.

“The wench,” said he calmly, having read it, “is

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

a born conspirator. She cannot be happy unless she has a card hidden even from her fellow-plotters. Still, it is usually safe to follow her advice. Our work is pretty thoroughly done, I fancy?"

I nodded.

"We will see to our beasts then."

"She tells me they are ready saddled."

"Saints! She is in a hurry, that girl! Ah, well, then let us go and ask no questions."

We found our mare and mule, paid our reckoning, and rode forth from Salamanca. At the bridge-end we showed the passports, and were bidden to go in peace. As we climbed the hill beyond, I handed Fuentes Luisa's second letter.

"She bade me deliver it here," I explained.

He read it, turned in his saddle, and looked back towards the twilit sky. "A likely tale," said he, crushing the letter into his pocket.

Scarcely a year later — to be precise, on the 17th of June, 1812 — the Allied forces crossed the fords above and below Salamanca, and invested the fortifications which still commanded the bridge. In the suburbs and outlying quarters the inhabitants lit up their houses and, cheering and weeping, thronged the streets to press the hands of the deliverers.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

On the 27th the forts fell, and these scenes were renewed. I was passing through the Plaza Mayor that night, about eight o'clock, when a man plucked me by the sleeve, and, turning in the light of a bonfire, I confronted Fuentes. I had not seen him since our return to Lisbon: and his face, in the bonfire's glare, seemed to me to have aged woefully.

"The shells may have spared her house," said he. "Do you care to go with me and see what remains of it?"

He linked his arm in mine. We dived into the dark streets together.

The Street of the Virgins had suffered from the Allies' artillery, and we picked our way over fallen chimney-stacks and heaps of rubble to the remembered door. It stood open, no porter guarding it: but a lamp smoked in the stairway, and by the light of it we mounted together.

On the topmost landing all was dark, but here within the half-open door a light shone. Fuentes tapped on the door and pressed it open. From a deep armchair beside the empty fireplace a woman rose to greet us. It was the duenna, Doña Isabel. Behind her in the open window a lamp shone within a red shade, swaying a little in the draught.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“I give you welcome, Sirs,” quavered the old lady in a voice that seemed to flicker, too, in the draught. “By the shouting I understood that the forts have fallen, and for some while I have been expecting you. . . . It is dull up here, and a poor welcome for young gentlemen since my darling died. But on such a night as this ——”

She gazed around her, resting both hands on the arms of her chair.

“Luisa! Where is Luisa?” cried Fuentes sharply.

“They come very seldom now,” pursued the old woman, not hearing or not comprehending. “It is dull, you understand. You, Sir, are Don Eugenio, are you not?” She nodded palsywise toward the white bed, where a broken guitar lay between two baskets of withered flowers.

“I was to tell you ——” She broke off and lifted a hand half-way to her brow, but let it drop. “I was to tell you, if you came, that her letter was true, and always the lamp had been lit for you only. It burns still, you see. She loved you, my little one did; and she was good — always, though she laughed, she was good.”

Fuentes stepped to the bed and took the guitar in his hands. Some blow had broken in the sounding-board, and one of the strings had snapped.

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“There is no blood upon it,” went on the old woman in the same tone that seemed pitilessly striving not to hurt. “The little one scarcely bled at all. But Don Diego struck hard, and somehow the guitar was broken, yet it may have been with her elbow as she fell. It was not treachery, you understand. At first she believed that in his jealousy he meant to betray you, but he meant only to murder. And she, discovering this, dressed herself in your clothes and took your place in the line that night: I heard her playing down the stairs: they were all playing ‘My love, she lives in Salamanca’ — that was the tune — your own tune, Don Eugenio — and she, with her mask on, singing bravely, the third in the line. She was short, you remember — oh, perhaps a head and shoulders shorter than you! — but Don Diego, outside the door in the darkness, could not see well, or maybe he was misled by your guitar. And, afterwards, Don Sebastian ran him through. They brought her upstairs to me and laid her on the bed. She was breathing yet, but for a very little while: and I was to tell you — I was to tell you ——” She broke off again, seeking to remember.

“Was it something about the lamp, Doña Isabel?”

THE LAMP AND THE GUITAR

“Yes, that was it — but I have told you already, eh? Only for you she had ever lit it: for years, yet always and only for you. . . .”

He crept past me, the guitar beneath his arm, and I followed. He went like a blind man, groping between the stair-rail and the wall.

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

27641

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

QL 001 9 1998

SEP 11 1998

SEP 18 1998

SEP 21 1998

SEP 21 1998

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 672 472 8

www.libtool.com.cn

www.libtool.com.cn

a