

Fire-the-Fagot,
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mercier; 'why,
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the mercer.
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for shading, as the day was somewhat hot, and for avoiding of dust, because I had on my peach-coloured doublet, pinked out with cloth of gold.'

'Which garment,' said Michael Lambourne, 'thou wouldst willingly make twinkle in the eyes of a fair dame. Ah, villain, thou wilt never leave thy old tricks.'

'Not so—not so,' said the mercer, with a smirking laugh; 'not altogether so—but curiosity, thou knowest, and a strain of compassion withal,—for the poor young lady sees nothing from morn to even but Tony Foster, with his scowling black brows, his bull's head, and his bandy legs.'

'And thou wouldst willingly show her a dapper body, in a silken jerkin—a 't'ib like a short-legged hen's, in a cordovan boot, and a round, simpering, what-d'ye-lack sort of a countenance, set off with a velvet boumet, a Turkey feather, and a gilded brooch? Ah, jolly mercer, they who have good wares are fond to show them! Come, gentles, let not the cup stand—here's to long spurs, short boots, full bonnets, and empty skulls!'

'Nay, now you are jealous of me, Mike,' said Goldthred; 'and yet my luck was but what might have happened to thee, or any man.'

'Marry, confound thine impudence!' retorted Lambourne; 'thou wouldst not compare thy pudding face and sarsenet manners to a gentleman and a soldier?'

'Nay, my good sir,' said Tressilian, 'let me beseech you will not interrupt the gallant citizen; methinks he tells his tale so well, I could hearken to him till midnight.'

'It's more of your favour than of my desert,' answered Master Goldthred; 'but since I give you pleasure, worthy Master Tressilian, I shall proceed, maugre all the gibes and quips of this valiant soldier, who, peradventure, hath had more cuffs than crowns in the Low Countries.—And so, sir, as I passed under the great painted window, leaving my rein loose on my ambling palfrey's neck, partly for mine ease, and partly that I might have the more leisure to peer about, I hears me the lattice open; and never credit me, sir, if there did not stand there the person of as fair a woman as ever crossed mine eyes; and I think I have looked on as many pretty venches, and with as much judgment, as other folks.'

'May I ask her appearance, sir?' said Tressilian.

'O, sir,' replied Master Goldthred, 'I promise you, she was in gentlewoman's attire—a very quaint and pleasing dress, that might have served the queen herself; for she had a forepart with body and sleeves, of ginger-coloured satin, which, in my judgment, must have cost by the yard some thirty shillings, lined with murrey taffeta, and laid down and guarded with two broad laces of gold and silver. And her hat, sir, was truly the best-fashioned thing that I have seen in these parts, being of tawny taffeta, embroidered with scorpions of Venice gold, and having a border garnished with gold fringe;—I promise you, sir, an absolute and all-surpassing device. Touching her skirts, they were in the old pass-devant fashion.'

'I did not ask you of her attire, sir,' said Tressilian, who had shown some impatience

during their conversation, 'but of her complexion—the colour of her hair, her features.'

'Touching her complexion,' answered the mercer, 'I am not so special certain; but I marked that her fan had an ivory handle curiously inlaid;—and then again, as to the colour of her hair, why, I can warrant, be its hue what it might, that she wore above it a net of green silk, parcel twisted with gold.'

'A most mercer-like memory,' said Lambourne; 'the gentleman asks him of the lady's beauty, and he talks of her fine clothes.'

'I tell thee,' said the mercer, somewhat disconcerted, 'I had little time to look at her; for just as I was about to give her the good time of day, and for that purpose had puckered my features with a smile'—

'Like those of a jackanape simpering at a chestnut,' said Michael Lambourne.

'Up started of a sudden,' continued Goldthred, without heeding the interruption, 'Tony Foster himself, with a cudgel in his hand'—

'And broke thy head across, I hope, for thine impertinence,' said his entertainer.

'That were more easily said than done,' answered Goldthred indignantly; 'no, no—there was no breaking of heads—it's true, he advanced his cudgel, and spoke of laying on, and asked why I did not keep the public road, and such-like; and I would have knocked him over the pate handsomely for his pains, only for the lady's presence, who might have swooned, for what I know.'

'Now, out upon thee for a faint-spirited slave!' said Lambourne; 'what adventurous knight ever thought of the lady's terror, when he went to thwack giant, dragon, or magician, in her presence, and for her deliverance? But why talk to thee of dragons, who would be driven back by a dragon-fly? There thou hast missed the rarest opportunity!'

'Take it thyself, then, bully Mike,' answered Goldthred.—'Yonder is the enchanted manor, and the dragon, and the lady, all at thy service, if thou dar'st venture on them.'

'Why, so I would for a quartern of sack,' said the soldier.—'Or stay—I am foully out of linen—wilt thou bet a piece of Hollands against these five angels, that I go not up to the Hall to-morrow, and force Tony Foster to introduce me to his fair guest?'

'I accept your wager,' said the mercer; 'and I think, though thou hadst even the impudence of the devil, I shall gain on thee this bout. Our landlord here shall hold stakes, and I will stake down gold till I send the linen.'

'I will hold stakes on no such matter,' said Gosling. 'Good now, my kinsman, drink your wine in quiet, and let such ventures alone. I promise you, Master Foster hath interest enough to lay you up in lavender at the Castle of Oxford, or to get your legs made acquainted with the town-stocks.'

'That would be but renewing an old intimacy; for Mike's shins and the town's wooden pinfold have been well known to each other ere now,' said the mercer; 'but he shall not budge from his wager, unless he means to pay forfeit.'

'Forfeit!' said Lambourne; 'I scorn it. I value Tony Foster's wrath no more than a shelled