

baldric was all dabbled with recent blood stains, and the black plume defaced and broken, and the whole of his rich dress besmirched with dust, and blackened with the smoke of gunpowder. The very horse which he bestrode, a powerful, thorough-bred charger, fully caparisoned for battle, bore signs which could not be mistaken, of having been but lately in the midst of some hot mellay—for the blood was still streaming fast from a deep wound in his quarters, while several other slighter and superficial cuts were visible upon his neck and shoulders—his gallop, too, was heavy and uncertain; and he rolled in his gait, changing his leg from time to time, and stumbled more than once as if his strength were failing him; although he was recovered quickly by the spur and curb of his rider.

The rider, too, seemed in no better plight, for he reeled in his saddle, wearily, and his head drooped, and his cheek was deadly pale; although he struggled evidently with the increasing faintness of his wounds, and bore himself as one who knew that life itself was on his horse's speed. That speed, however, was fast failing; and as he reached the summit of the little hill, from which the smoke of the woodman's hut was visible, the good horse once more stumbled, and though he rallied at the touch of the reins and recovered himself for a moment, he floundered again heavily, and fell with his head quite under him, despite the exertions of the cavalier, who strove so long to bring him up again that it was not without much difficulty he disengaged his leg, as the poor brute rolled over on his side, and after one convulsive struggle and a few gasping sobslay lifeless at the feet of the master, whom it had died to serve. Too imminent, however, was his peril, and far too brief his time, to suffer him to mourn over his faithful servant; for a moment or two, he appeared stunned by the fall and half bewildered, for he raised his hand to his forehead with an aimless and uncertain gesture; but then he rallied instantly, listened intently for a moment, and hearing nothing that would indicate immediate peril, gazed all around him, as if in search of some place of shelter. The wreath of curling smoke instantly caught his eye, and the low mirthful sounds that floated round the peasant's cottage; and leaving the road without farther consideration, he hurried with faultering and uneven steps toward that happy dwelling. Happy, indeed, and pleasant was the scene, that met the eyes of the war-worn and bleeding fugitive, when, having toiled up the sandy slope of the hillock,

he parted the screen of the weeping birches, and gazed unseen upon the little group before the door.

The cottage was a low, white-washed building, of a single story, with a thatched roof projecting in a little porch before the door, and mantled by the foliage and sweet scented clusters of a woodbine, which climbed the rustic pillars, and overran the eaves, enclosing the small diamond-paned casements with a thick verdant curtain. On either side the porch was a narrow stripe of garden, decked with sweet peas, and blue and yellow lupines, and a bush or two of wild rose and sweet briar, and before it a space, perhaps ten yards in width, fenced in by the tall oaks, and here and there a beech or ash, and carpeted with short and mossy greensward, softer and of a richer hue than the most costly velvets of Genoa. At one end of the cottage was a thatched shed, from over the half door of which protruded the mild face of a sleek well fed cow, and at the other, a noble stack of faggots, larger than the cottage which it sheltered from the northeastern winds, and like it, provided with a thatched roof quite overgrown with lichens and the yellow flowered stonecrop. Under the shade of this lay a she goat, with two kids sporting round her, and the little cur, whose merry bark had been heard just before, peaceably sleeping by her side. A little way in front of the hut, forming the foreground as it were of this lovely rural picture, stood a young girl, of seventeen or eighteen years at most, busily engaged in hanging some sheets of spotless linen upon a cord which was attached to two of the large trees—while a few paces to her left sat a sweet little fairy child, with great blue eyes glancing out of the profuse flaxen curls, which fell at every moment over its bright and laughing features, playing with an enormous black and tan bloodhound of the old Talbot breed, which basked in the sun lazily beside the babe, occasionally giving its huge tail a flap upon the grass, or raising its great tawny muzzle to lick the chubby hands which were bedecking it with wreaths of buttercups and daisies. A little way from these, upon the green, was a fair boy, of some twelve years, practising with a bow and arrow at a mark set up against the bole of an enormous oak at sixty paces distance, which his shaft, headless though it was, failed not to strike at each successive shot, and ever and anon when he had struck the bull's eye, raising a shrill and joyous shout, which was re-echoed by the crowing laughter of his young sister, and listened to with a calm, well-