

too. You've a right to kill me, Mike,—I deserted; but I'm hanged if I wouldn't do the same again. Directly I saw his fierce old head at the window, stap me! if I didn't feel like a boy caught stealing apples. I couldn't face it, and that's the simple truth."

"But why the plague didn't you tell me this before?" asked Lefroy.

Eccles shrugged his shoulders. "You didn't give me overmuch time, Captain. Besides, there's no denying I ran away. I deserve to be shot."

Lefroy dropped his pistol into his holster, and laughed softly.

"Come away home, Tom Eccles," he cried. "You are as mad as your father. But you are a trifle better shot. Both horses clean through the head—not bad that—at full gallop."

"You did a neat little piece of winging yourself, Captain."

Lefroy shrugged his shoulders. "Target work," he said. Then he turned to Peter. Lord Wildmore presented a somewhat disreputable appearance. His coat was torn, his forehead cut and bleeding, a large green and yellow bump already disfigured one eye. Lefroy laughed.

"A hot corner—eh, my lord? What do you think of night riding now?"

Peter pushed back his hat and pressed his hand to his throbbing brow.

"Egad! honesty is undoubtedly the safer policy," he said, with a smile. "But, 'pon my soul, it's plaguey dull."

Lefroy nodded thoughtfully. In silence they galloped over the dreaming downs. Presently the lights of the house glimmered in the distance.

Lefroy drew rein suddenly and turned to Peter.

"Look you, Lord Wildmore," he said, "you stood by us well to-night. Hang me if I won't trust you with our lives, and go surety for you myself to the company. So here's your choice. Marry Biddy if you will. I'll trust her to you right gladly; and, mark me, she'll make you the most loyal wife in England—save one. But, if you'd