

HOW THE KING CAME HOME.

"Oh, why are you waiting children, And why are you waiting the way?" "We are waiting because the king has not yet come home today."

Hanno Sands.

A TALK OF THE DAYS OF THE PRESS GANG.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A REAL QUEEN."

(Continued from last week.)

Though it was well on in the forenoon the shutters were up and the door was closed. As he stood staring up and down, speculating what this eccentricity should mean, he heard a harsh voice say, from somewhere near his ribs:

"Ah—you may look at that bank, young man."

"I suppose I may, old gentleman," said Oliver, looking down at the queer figure he had ever seen. The old gentleman in question was a short, almost dwarfish, nearly coffee-colored creature, with prodigiously thick shoulders that stooped forward till they were nearly close together, a bush of grizzled hair, a thick, perfectly straight nose, glowing eyes of dull black, and what was rare in those days—a full black beard. The shabbiness of his clothes was extreme, and their cut was something outlandish, so that the grease stains and the ill-matched patches were the more prominently displayed.

Oliver, as a traveller in Spain, had seen a good many outlandish and picturesque specimens of humanity—the Combranchillo, the Zimolo, the Mastador, etc.; and he fancied at first that the creature who had accosted him in Redruth must be some Jew of the baser sort strayed from San Sebastian. But the same experience told him that the stranger was no Jew in spite of the beard. He had not a Hebrew feature; and the coloring was much too dark besides. Then the visor was harsh and rugged, the nose was hooked, the eyes the least experienced ear. Finally, in his Spanish experiences, Oliver had never met an uncourteous Jew, while this man was rough, almost combative, in his manner of accosting a complete stranger. In those days a Jew scarcely dared to hold up his head before a Gentile; this man held up his as high as he could—very nearly five feet one, his hat included.

"A great many people were looking at that bank yesterday. A very great indeed. I was looking at it, yes, by St. Merop, even I." Oliver had never heard of the Saint, but it settled the matter. The old gentleman could be no Jew. "Is anything—"

"I'm worth looking at, young man? Yes, I'm worth looking at; the only man in Redruth who has lost not one penny by Lancelot Ambrose, unless the other is you."

Oliver had not a glimmer of the truth, and began to fancy the old gentleman might be some sort of an oddity, or innocent; there was always one in those days, in every town. Now, nobody dares to be odd, save for advertisement; and as for innocence—well, bless our souls.

Yesterday like a green bay tree; today cut down and withered. That is, business; and the more you cut and you wither, the more you blow and bloom. I hope you have not much in that bank, young man?"

"I don't know—I must see." Oliver hurried to the office of Mr. Lambert, whom he knew to be Mr. Ambrose's attorney. Mr. Lambert was in, and received him gravely. It was true a terrible calamity had befallen. The most trusted man in Redruth and all its region had vanished—no one knew where. The attorney was more than sympathetic. He sent for books and papers, and went, at the cost of a whole afternoon, into the affairs of Zion Farm.

And the result was—null. "It was yesterday," said Mr. Lambert, "that Lancelot Ambrose left Redruth; and yesterday also—"

"Captain Vasco called from Portbury!" groaned Oliver. The attorney was silent. It is not to be supposed that he was unaware of the traffic in which the Lively Peg of Portbury, Captain Vasco, chief owner, Oliver Grath, was engaged. But it was no time to deliver a homily on the text of rendering to Caesar; and, besides, what was the crime of cheating the king to robbing widows and orphans, who, after all, enabled Lawyer Lambert himself to come by better liquor at a cheaper rate than if the letter of the law had been observed?

There was no use in the process of going through the whole miserable business all over again; but the attorney carried his good nature even so far as that, and inquired without the hope of a fee. And the answer they were through the business, the clearest it became. Lancelot Ambrose had left his wards without either a penny or the means of making one. And he had so timed the culmination of his plans in light that he might just miss the day of reckoning when Oliver became 21.

If only the Lively Peg had been left, then, at any rate, he would not have been left without a breadwinner. Tears came into his eyes for the comfort that he had come to love with the sort of human love that a ship inspires. "It is a bad business Mr. Grath," said the attorney, "and though you're not the only victim, you're the heaviest. On the other hand, you're the youngest—and the strongest, to look at you, at all."

"Yes, I'm pretty strong," said the boy, turning away with the suspicion of a choke in his voice; for though fortune of course is dross, and all that sort of thing, still it was hard to have to spend one's one-and-twentieth birthday in a general shipwreck of one's cargo, dross though it be. The wind had fallen when Oliver turned his mare's willing head home; but the weather had ceased to be any concern. I doubt if, at the moment, he was so much overcome by the sense of ruin—which nobody can truly realize until it has actually befallen—as by a terrible sense of humiliation and shame. In what triumph he had ridden out that morning—how would he return?

Then his mother. She was not the latest in his thoughts because she came late in mention. Of course he would be able to take life by the throat with his strong hands, and compel fortune to disclose somehow—the worst case to the worst, or rather not the worst, he could get employment like Captain Vasco; he could feel ruined at sea. But he knew how his mother clung to the farm, and to the familiar freestone; or, at any rate, he partly knew.

Outward bound, the mare had not been able to go quick enough for him; homeward bound, she trotted to fast by. When he came in sight of Portbury, St. Merop he stifled his course, so as to reach Zion Farm without meeting anybody by the way. His horse was so wet to the place quietly, stable the mare, and then consider the whole position over a solitary pipe before bringing the bad news to the folks at home. But when in the midst of the cart track that served for an approach, he found himself confronted by the one person to whom he had not given a thought—St. Merop Ambrose; the daughter of the man who had robbed them of their all.

"What shall we do with him, St. Merop?" asked Tom; "over the cliff, or only into the pond?" "We'll see about that in a minute," said Oliver, with faint heart, but in royal style. "First of all, let him go before you've clean throttled him. Now, my man, who are you? And what do you want here? Let the fellow speak; Tom, his play's a jewel. Come-out with it, man. Don't look so scared."

"Scared? No—but I'm strangled," puffed the prisoner, gasping from the grasp of Tom. "Are you Oliver Grath of Zion Farm, parish of Portbury?" "Very good. Then I'm the law."

"Aye—I thought you was uglier than cotton," growled Tom. "Only, I'd a thought the law could have kept her coat on his back, if all's true I've heard." And it must be owned that the fellow was not ill-fitted, either in looks or in garb, to represent the majesty, beauty, and loveliness of law. Tom's growl was answered with a howl from Oliver's friends.

"And—" began Oliver, his tongue getting tight in his throat; for he began to have a suspicion, though not at all certain, that the fellow was not all that he seemed. "I take you, wister, and this young woman here, to bear witness how I've been set upon by force of arms, with divers guns, swords, pikes, and other engines of war, and assaulted, battered, maimed and otherwise interfered with in the execution of my duty, against the peace of His Majesty King George, his crown and dignity. And you'll bear witness, and this here young woman too, I don't depart but the will of my life; and nobody can't do more. Prigge when the sejmers come, your month'll 'grin 'toider side; and you best know if he's a write you'd like a search warrant as well. There's a good bit of talk, St. Agnes way, about the Lively Peg—and lively she do seem."

"A writ?" asked Oliver. "Hand it here, and Tom don't let one of the lads lay a finger on the fellow till I've read it through. I know something more about the law now than I did last night, ay, or this morning. There my lads, I've read it through. And what more, law for all it be, I understand. I got my lesson up in Redruth before I came home. And this is a stick and a penny; not the money, but a pleasant nobody. He had not been used to think of anybody but himself; and how should he, as the only man about the place, whose every least caprice had been a law to his whole world? But he felt at this moment as if to tell Susan the whole truth would be to write the coarsest and most cowardly of letters."

"Quite sure," said he. "—Thank God for that!" said Susan, with a sigh that seemed more of relief than of sorrow. "You're mistaken if you think your mother will think about rain for herself; she'll be feeling it for you, Oliver, and if you put a brave face and a stout heart on it, why then she'll bear anything but pain you by complaint or sorrow."

"How can you tell that?" he asked, opening his eyes. "Because I can," she answered with the only logic worth a straw. "It's just what I should feel; and so will she." Oliver left her and paced the floor. It would have been all very well to talk to him about stout hearts and brave faces had he stood alone; and if only the Lively Peg had been left him. That would have been some set off against even such a blow as his loss of faith in mankind—a mere bagatelle in middle age, but a crushing calamity at 21. Without preparation, without anything to look for daily bread but his wife and washed hands, she would have to turn out of her home in an hour; she would not have even a roof to cover her head. Susan had been the tender of the feelings of a girl who had taken the announcement of ruin as a quietly as if he had told her that a chimney had fallen—of the daughter of his enemy? He was almost angry with himself for his misplaced mercy—he should have said, "See what we owe to you and yours." Well, she would have to know in time, when her father sent her to help to live on the proceeds of the ruin of Zion Farm. And for the future—say, for the present, rather? He would have to work; but how could he come down from his throne and his pedestal to hold a plough on another man's farm, or an ear in another man's hat, and be a servant where he had ruled?

A good part of the law's hour must have passed white, not heeding that Susan was to be kept, the tender, he paced up and down, finding the security of breaking the news to his mother more and more impossible at every turn. At length he felt that he would sooner have faced the wildest Atlantic storm between San Sebastian and Portbury.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"And carried his head another good bit too high." "But not ducking the preventive—that that bias me; and giving it without an word."

"'Twasn't a preventive; 'twas a bun; so, 'tis queerer still." "Ah—if old Ned had seen this day!" "He'd never have seen it. What's to be done about supper now?" "What indeed? Yet, somehow, the given of the feast and the guests alike gratified to the tavern in two and three, and the question somehow answered itself without any trouble of them. And if by the end of the feast there was one who remembered the original cause of it, then is popularity in Fortbury altogether different from that phenomenon elsewhere."

"How am I to tell—her?" "It was Oliver who was speaking to Susan—the daughter of the villain to whom he owed his ruin. Nor had it ever occurred to him to ask her consent before."

The girl positively flushed. The notion of his consulting her seemed so odd and strange. "Tell me first," said she quietly—she had always been nonsensical in her ways. "You've heard. Every word I have said outside is true. I heard in Redruth that we were ruined—"

"From father?" "What should he say? To tell her the whole truth would seem like striking her—a girl. She would have to know all, of course, at last, but could not bring herself to deal the blow—there had been enough misery for one day. "That we are ruined; your father and all. He has had to leave the country, Sus. And so shall I."

He had to wipe his forehead after that; it was the nearest approach to a lie he had ever made—and he had taken too much trouble to tell the truth. "Oliver!" "Yes. I suppose it's nobody's fault unless it's mine. I ought to have looked after things; but I thought—well, never mind what I thought. But should mother, Sue?"

"You—you are sure that father lost everything of his own, as well as yours?" He looked down into her anxious and upturned face; and the girl, Susan, who had for the moment become to him something a little more than a pleasant nobody. He had not been used to think of anybody but himself; and how should he, as the only man about the place, whose every least caprice had been a law to his whole world? But he felt at this moment as if to tell Susan the whole truth would be to write the coarsest and most cowardly of letters."

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