

them. He tells me there is a good deal of disaffection, and, in brief, he has gained over one man, a trumpeter, body and soul. Need I remind you that that regiment is most likely to be the one that will furnish the detachment that guards the king?"

"A most precious man; we ought to reckon him as good as another three; but let us say nineteen!"

"I have here a list," said the Jesuit, in a low, humble, deprecating kind of voice, which wonderfully enhanced the value of his communication, "of thirteen persons, all known to me individually—their characters, religious principles, and their loyalty; every man of them has besought me to employ him in the solemn and glorious work of which I have vaguely spoken.

"Thirteen, say you?" cried Sir George.—"Hurrah for the Church militant! Our nineteen suddenly leaps up to thirty-two!"

"Put me down for five stout-hearted but thick-headed fellows, devoted to me, and ready to fight the devil himself if I told them!" So spake the brewer.

"Thirty-seven!" exclaimed Sir George. "The king and Holy Church still need friends, Noel," he added, addressing a man who sat rather apart from the rest, and who seemed lost in his own thoughts, "can you help us? You, our Quixote of the press, who, while the minions of this contemptible Government are for ever seeking you, are yourself thinking only how to make your terrible broadsides reach them; and, while they don't get to you, the broadsides do get to them, and sting them into madness—come, can you bring us recruits?"

"No, I am unlucky, and the wise shun such."

"Unlucky!" echoed Sir George. "Yes; they caught my press—my place, though they did not catch me. I am broken up—bankrupt!"

"Pooh, pooh, man! we'll soon set you agoing again. But you, who have struck so well with the pen, can strike now with the sword still better."

"I—I will try."

"But can do no more?"

"I—I think not."

"My brother shall join!" called out a voice.

"Thirty-eight!"

"And my father," shouted another, in emulation. "He's as strong as I am, as devoted to the cause, and a good deal better able to serve; but till now we thought it sufficient to offer one of us—now take the two!"

"Thirty-nine! Immortal be the man who provides the last, and completes the tale."

"I give him unwillingly—I cannot deny that—but take him, use him—my only beloved son is yours!" said a Jacobite.

"But not unwillingly, my dear son?" asked the Jesuit. "The flesh is dear to us, the sacrifice heavy, but the reward boundless—eternal glory!"

"Yes, yes; pardon me, holy father, I repent of my word. I give him now with all my heart and all my soul!"

And so was the forty made up.

In an hour after this the few persons still left in the darkened, melancholy winter streets saw, as they passed a certain building, light streaming forth through the painted windows, heard the organ pealing for a midnight service of the mass; and on listening closer were able, finally, to distinguish the awful voice of the priest who, having confessed and absolved all the conspirators, ended by invoking all the dreadful spiritual armoury of the Church to punish the traitors, if any such there were, or might be hereafter.

#### CHAPTER LXXXIV.—THE JUDAS KISS.

While the preparations were going on for what was now seen clearly enough to mean assassination—while the new men were brought in one by one, examined, and sworn—while arms were being vigorously tested, so that every piece might be relied on as if that one piece was to consummate the business by being the chosen weapon to kill the king—while horses were being looked for distinguished for strength, speed, and training—and while, lastly, all sorts of ar-

rangements were being discussed as to what was to follow afterwards—while all this was going on, and the English king himself and his Government were daily trading, as it were, unconsciously, upon a powder-mine, Clarence Harvey and Noel chanced one night to meet, under the feeble ray of a street lantern, and recognise each other.

Clarence Harvey passed rapidly on, hoping to remain unknown; but in passing, a heavy hand was pressed on his shoulder, and the words were heard from the other of—

"Well met!"

"Good night, Noel. I cannot speak to you just now; my master waits for me."

"Your master? Come, I like that! Let me again remind you, my pretty mistress, you have another master."

"And let me remind you, Noel, that I never mean to acknowledge that master."

"No?"

"No."

"Art sure?"

"I am sure. But, for goodness' sake, Noel, remember what we are, and what we are doing. Is the cause to suffer for our contemptible jangles?"

"The cause—the cause! How pretty the words sound out of those rosy and ripe lips! No wonder those who cling to one cling to another. But then, you know, those who are forbidden the one may also desert the other."

"Very well. Desert as much as you like. Go and tell of us if you like."

"Oh, yes! I understand! You and the chief, I dare say, are quite one. But doesn't my beautiful spy-wife expect that some day her double face will be apt to get 'damaged in one, at least, of its aspects? Which is it, now? True to the Jacobites, and betraying King George? or true to King George, and betraying the Jacobites?"

"You are rude, Noel, and I shall not stop to be insulted."

"Will you stop for something else?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you stop if I tell you a secret?"

"A secret!"

"Ay; one that will shake my pretty one's nerves, though she can stand a good deal by this time."

"Does it concern me?"

"That depends. It concerns your master, as you call him, who is living just now in a fool's paradise."

"Ah? How?"

"That's my secret. Will you buy it?"

"At what price?"

"Come back to me, forget the past, go again with me to church, and I promise this time to be more careful of the wings of my lovely bird."

"You jest!"

"Do I? It's an ill time for jesting, when one's eye seems to look through a strange veil of mist, and when one finds on touching it the finger is wet with blood."

"Blood! Mercy on me, how you frighten me, Noel! Whose blood?"

"The price—the price!"

"Do you mean that you have discovered something—something that threatens Lord Langton and his schemes?"

"Ay, by threatening somebody or something that the world would indeed stare at to see struck."

"Oh, Noel—dear, dear Noel, do tell me! Come, tell me, and I will give you a kiss."

"Well, I'll take the kiss by way of handsel!"

Noel kissed her, and held her just where the light of the lamp fell most strongly on her face, as if in great secret trouble with himself.

"You beautiful angel, or beautiful devil—I can never quite satisfy myself which, for the angel, even while I look, is always shading off into the devil, and the devil brightening off into the angel—what am I about to do? Make myself infamous, eh?"

"Or glorious," suggested Maria, certain now she was on the eve of some most important discovery.

"Do you know—can you at all imagine what it is for a man who has been devoted to his party heart and soul—who has for many years had no

thought or hope in life that did not connect itself with the cause—who has once stabbed a comrade only on suspicion of treachery—can you, even for an instant, understand what honour, fidelity, devotion, self-sacrifice mean, and then, knowing that all these have been mine, can you ask me to sweep all these things to the winds, to betray my comrades, and live the life henceforward of a despised, abhorred renegade?"

He seized her suddenly and fiercely by the hand, and grasped her wrist so hard that she shrieked with the pain.

"Womtu, can you ask me to do these things?"

"Y—yes," murmured Maria the thought of Lord Langton giving her new courage.

"Then pay the price! Take me; make much of me! Black as I shall seem in my own eyes—spotted as I shall seem in the eyes of every loyal, manly, and generous spirit, you shall love me—ay, by heaven you shall, or—"

"Or what?" fearfully asked Maria, below her breath.

"Or I send you away as empty and as ignorant as you came, to wait for that which, when it comes, will make you wish you had not merely accepted my price, but had conjured me to accept the bargain—had gone down on your knees to entreat me to accept it, even in the public streets and in the mire!"

"Speak, then, mistress. I will waste no more words. I am about to go this way. If you also go the same way, you shall know before we separate all that I know."

"Or go that way, if you like. I shall not follow you; but there will be following you dread, unseen ministers of fate, who will reproach you to your dying day for the calamities, as you and your friends will esteem them, that your conduct to-night alone will bring about. Now choose—that way or this?"

"Is the secret so—so perilous? Is it—is it really—"

"Worth such an extortionate price as the taking me? Well, I do think it is even worth that!"

"Dear Noel, do not speak so bitterly. I have never been insensible to your merits—"

"So I perceived when you fled from me. Come, come, mistress, I am not afraid we shall get on well enough, if you strike the bargain."

"And what is it you demand from me—I mean when and how? You would not disgrace us both by showing the secret motive that actuates you?"

"No," said Noel, after a gloomy pause, and as if that thought had not before struck him.

"If you do change sides," continued Maria, seeing her advantage, "and take with you to the new one, supposing that to be the effect, the claims arising from a most timely and invaluable service, would it be wise for us and our future standing to say it is not for the sake of the good you do it, but for the sake of a woman who is worthless enough, heaven knows?"

"What then?" asked Noel, eyeing her closely and suspiciously.

"Why, that our marriage must be kept most religiously secret."

"As the other was! Thank you, mistress, I decline."

"Very well, then the alternative"—and Maria could not conceal a certain joyous animation as she spoke, though she tried to do so—"is to wait till the first hurry of the event is over."

"How long?"

"Will you give me a month from to-day?"

"Will you play me any new trick at the end of the month?"

Maria went to him, put her arms round him, and led him away in the direction he had indicated as the one he meant to pursue, saying, as they went—

"Dear Noel, if I do try you again, I shouldn't like you to begin by doubting, so, if you like, you may take another kiss, in token of all I could say."

Noel listened, and his soul dissolved within him at the tender sweetness of the words. All past disappointments, past resolve, past threats of vengeance were forgotten. He kissed her in transport; and then, on finding a secure place of shelter where no one could possibly overhear,