

KATERFELTO,

A STORY OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE SCENT.

It was delightful to breathe a free, fresh air untrammelled by the smells of London—to see the sky come down to a wide horizon uninterrupted by streets and houses—to feel beneath him the strong elastic action of his good bay horse, and to taste at different halting-places a sound and wholesome ale undisturbed by the tricks of metropolitan trade. To use his own words, he was "as happy as a lung," yet he never wavered for an instant in his merciless purpose, never hesitated as to how he should act when he came face to face with his foe!

Riding along the down, the two subjects nearest his heart were his supper and his revenge.

The moon was sailing high and clear in an unclouded sky. Suddenly the Parson drew rein, sitting for an instant motionless as a statue; then, urging his horse with hand and heel, arrived at a gallop in the midst of the unaccountable little party, of which he had caught sight.

The scene was ridiculous, grotesque, strange enough for a dream. Two strapping servants in bright liveries paced to and fro, looking thoroughly frightened and ashamed, none the less that both were armed to the teeth. A middle-aged person in faded finery sat on the ground apart, weeping feebly and winking her hands. Five horses harnessed to a coach stood patiently on the solitary down, while one lay dead at their feet, and inside the coach were a gentleman and lady calmly playing cards! Abner Gale pulling up suddenly amongst them, created no little commotion. The footmen went down on their knees, the middle-aged person screamed and fell on her back, the horses pricked their ears and snorted, while a quiet voice inside the coach was heard to exclaim, "Re-pique, my lady! What? Another gentleman of the road, and on a bay horse this time! Perhaps, sir, before proceeding to business, you will kindly allow us to finish our game!"

Lord Bellinger played a winning card, and thrust his head out of the window, laughing heartily at the discomfiture of his domestics.

"Can I help you?" said the new arrival, in his rough blunt tones. "I am an honest man enough as times go. A poor West-country parson, at your service, and my name is Abner Gale."

"Mr. Gale," replied his lordship, taking off his hat, "let me present you to Lord Bellinger. If you are of the church militant, reverend sir, you should have been here an hour or two ago; you might have seen some fine sport, and taken a turn at it yourself, to the tune of 'Wigs on the Green.' It's too late now, but I think we could have told a different story could I have found something like a man to back me up!"

If levelled at his servants, the taunt fell harmless. Their wits were still abroad, but they felt comforted and reassured to learn that the second highwayman was but a parson after all!

"Have you met with an accident, my lord?" asked Gale, with a clumsy bow. "Ill-usage, or misadventure of any kind? Command my services, I beg, on behalf of yourself and her ladyship."

"The moon! the moon!" exclaimed lady Bellinger, much to the Parson's disturbance, who thought she had gone mad. "It's over the tree! It's eleven o'clock! Don't stop another minute! Let us drive to the inn at once, and try to forget, only I never shall forget this dreadful night!"

So my lord and the servants, with the powerful assistance of their new auxiliary, got the heavy coach once more into motion, my lady so far remembering the parson's existence, as to treat that he would ride close beside the wheel, and if need be, defend them with his life!

The procession soon reached its destination, the same inn at which John Garnet had dined. Driving into the yard without its full complement of horses, the servants in a high state of excitement, everybody talking at once, it was obvious the coach had been attacked by a highwayman. The old outer smiled and winked, the landlord smiled and looked at his wife, the wife smiled and shook her head, the cook smiled, the scullions smiled, everybody seemed interested and well pleased, more particularly when it transpired that the assailant, having taken what he wanted, had made his escape unmolested by so much as a scratch. None

and which, by all the rules of gaming, my lord considered his own property, the Parson gathered that it could be none other than the famous gray, and that its rider must have been the celebrated highwayman, whose features were always masked, but whose figure was so well known at all fairs, races, cock-fights, and other sporting or social gatherings in the West. Parson Gale, indeed, had only seen the horse once, and then for an instant, dismounted, as it was led off to the stable, but his admiring eye had taken its whole frame in at a glance, and he could recall its make and shape, its points and action, as vividly as those of his own good nag that he had ridden many scores and hundreds of miles.

"I always understood the man was hanged," murmured the Parson, as he laid his head on his pillow, "but I should know the horse among ten thousand."

CHAPTER XIV.

LESS THAN KIN.

Again is Nelly Carew sitting among the rocks in Porlock Bay, but the tide is out now, and a broad sweep of wet sand stretches before her to a low and level line of white that seems receding farther and farther towards the chalk-bluffs of the distant Welsh coast. The faint moan of the ebb is melancholy enough, and heavy clouds gathering down Channel, against the wind, derote a coming storm, but gleams of sun are slanting athwart them in pale shafts of light, and there is a color in Nelly's cheek, a lustre in her eye, little in accordance with the dull stagnation of slack water, the heavy atmosphere of a thunder-storm, speaking rather of bright thoughts, tranquil happiness, the springtide of health and youth and hope.

Keen observers might indeed detect a shade more color than usual in the soft cheeks, a deeper blue in the speaking eyes; but, when young women sit by the sea, in pleasant company, such tokens are neither unusual nor out of place.

And Nelly Carew is not alone. By the merest accident—for how could he tell that this was her favorite haunt in the afternoon?—a gentleman with whom she had lately made acquaintance, happened to stroll in the same direction as herself. Two lonely figures, breaking the solitude of a wide level sea-board, if they have never met before, cannot avoid each other, without rudeness. A start—a stop—a bow—a little hesitation on one side, a little blushing on the other, and John Garnet found himself seated on a slab of rock at Nelly Carew's feet, looking dreamily out to seaward, exceedingly well satisfied with his place.

The exploit and accompanying outrage, of which Galloping Jack must henceforth bear the blame, had been thoroughly carried out. The warrants were burnt, the attained persons warned in time to escape. Some had fled the country—all had taken precautions for their own safety; and, thanks to Katerfelto's speed and endurance, so quickly had this been done, so suddenly had the assailant of Marlborough downs shown himself in the market-place at Taunton, that, like Dick Turpin of immortal memory, he might have proved an alibi in any court of law, thanks to the extraordinary powers of his steed. Many an honest West-country gentleman made it an excuse for an extra glass now, that, after the king's health (not specified by name), he must devote a bumper to Galloping Jack and the good gray horse! But John Garnet was acute enough to leave on the shoulders of the mysterious highwayman the whole burden of guilt he had incurred in the eyes of justice. From his neighbors over the border, in his own North country, he had learnt the wisdom of an excellent maxim, "Jonk an' let the jaw gae bye!" In other words, "Duck your head, and keep under shelter till the storm be past."

He might remain in hiding, he thought, among these western wilds till the indignation of the Government had blown over, the hue and cry become somewhat dulled. Then he hoped to get quietly on board a fishing-boat, put out into the wide Atlantic, and so, working his way back again up Channel, land in safety at some port on the coast of France. In the meantime, all he had to do was to keep quiet, and leave the gray horse shut up in the stable as much as possible. Casting about for a harbor of refuge, he hit upon the little village of Porlock a cluster of houses embosomed on wooded hills washed by silver waves, shut in from all the world by moor and mountain, purple peak, and bare gray headland, clothed in tropical vegetation, calm, beautiful, and secluded as the first paradise of mankind. Here he thought he would be secure and tranquil. Here he

(she declared afterwards—she never thought about it at all) be sure she did not admit so much, even to herself, though conscious she was pleased—a feeling she attributed to the improvement in her grandfather's spirits, and his obvious delight in his new "grand society."

Old Carew, shut out for so many years from the conversation of such men as himself, men of action and adventure, men of the busy world, felt like the blind restored to sight, when he heard once more the familiar tones, the familiar terms, that took him back a score of years at least. It was pleasant to recognize the well-remembered trick of phrase and gesture, that is not to be caught by imitation, nor purchased second-hand. "The man's a gentleman," thought old Carew, "a real gentleman; and how unlike Parson Gale!"

He bade him to stay to supper of course. He opened in his honor one of the dozen bottles of choice Rhine wine that had lasted as many years. He chatted, he chuckled, he coughed and wheezed, and told his stories, and fought his battles, and enjoyed his evening thoroughly, while Nelly sat silent at her needle-work, grateful to the visitor who made grandfather so happy.

John Garnet was a good listener, none the less perhaps that his attention often wandered to the blue eyes in the corner of the room, eyes that rarely met his own, and when they did were immediately cast down; but he put in his exclamations of astonishment, admiration, and approval at the right places, sympathizing with the old man's memories, gentle to his foibles, tolerant of his garrulity—and all honor to him for it, say I.

You do not know what it is to live in the past, you young men who still possess the illimitable inheritance of the future, an account that it seems impossible to overdraw. Even the present is hardly good enough to satisfy you, and you cheat yourselves out of no little happiness by anticipating to-morrow when you should be content with the enjoyment of to-day. But wait a few years, wait till the to-morrows begin to look scantier and scantier, while the yesterdays are counted by thousands—wait till all that made the pride, the excitement, the happiness of life, is an experience, and not a hope—till the good horse has been forgotten by all but yourself—the true love has been cold in her grave for years—the very laurels you have won are become withered garlands, put away in some neglected hiding-place, only to be brought out again when the mourners hang them round your tomb! Then you will know the happiness of living once more, if only for an hour, if only till the glass is empty, or the tobacco burnt to ashes, in the glowing, thrilling memories of an imperishable past. Imperishable, for is it not, in truth, the only reality? Imperishable, for it cleaves to us during life. Imperishable, for we are taught to believe that it goes with us into eternity.

You may make an old man happy at trifling cost, if you will only yield a few minutes of patient attention, while he wanders back through its well-remembered maze, and loses himself dreamily in the labyrinth we call life.

Nelly never knew her grandfather so communicative. He talked till he was thoroughly tired out. Marlborough, Prince Eugene, the vineyards of France, the swamps of the low countries, London coffee houses, foreign theatres, dice, dawning, midnight revels, and the fierce joys of the old roaring Mohawk days—he had something to recall of each, and seemed nothing loth to embark on his adventurous godless career once again.

But his voice grew weaker, his chin sank on his breast, the light in his eye, that had flickered up in transient gleams, dimmed visibly, and the guest resisting his host's quavering entreaties to remain, discreetly took leave, thereby earning golden opinions of Nelly Carew. She opened the door for him herself. She even condescended to shake hands, and wished him good-night with a grateful smile. Walking home to his lodgings, through the balmy summer air, with slow and lingering steps, John Garnet began to think that his term of retirement would be no such dreary penance after all, that, under certain conditions, a man might do worse than settle down to vegetate at Porlock for the rest of his life.

Had he forgotten Walf? No! he told himself. A thousand times, No! He was grateful to her; he was interested in her; he pitied the girl from his heart; but hers was not the whisper that seemed floating on the night breeze in his ear, and it was a pair of blue eyes that peered at him out of the twilight gloom whichever way he turned. Blue eyes, calm, deep, and beautiful as the summer sky and the summer sea.

We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, but, alas! there is too much truth in the adage, "We always believe our first love is our last, and our last love our first!"

John Garnet was like the rest of mankind. Still, it had not come to that yet.

"You've been grave enough," she replied, with a little nervous laugh, "this while past, to be anybody's grandfather. I've been wondering what you could see down Channel yonder that seemed to take up all your attention!"

This ought to have been encouraging. She was watching him, then, following the direction of his eyes, trying to make out his thoughts. Strange to say, John Garnet, usually so debonaire and ready of speech, seemed at a loss for a reply.

"I was wondering," he hesitated and looked down, while Nelly, whose work had been idly folded in her lap, began plying her needle very fast—"I was wondering whether it could really be less than a week since I first came to Porlock?"

She had been pondering the same marvel herself, but took care not to express her astonishment.

"It's not—not at all the kind of place you expected, is it?"

Nelly thought it strange that her heart should beat, and her breath come quick, in asking so simple a question.

He tried to catch her eye, but she steadily refused to look at him, while he answered, "I thought it would be a prison and a purgatory. I never dreamed it was to prove a Paradise."

He stopped short without finishing the word, for she had grown deadly pale and her blue eyes, looking over his head at something beyond and behind him, were dilated with actual fear. Turning in the same direction, he could detect no more alarming object than a stout, square-built man, in a black riding suit, walking leisurely towards them through the soft sand.

"Good-morrow, Mistress Carew," said Abner Gale's harsh voice, while the scowl that accompanied his greeting gave it more the character of a ban than a blessing. "They told me in the village I should find you here or whereabouts, but I didn't think to see you so well attended. My service to you, sir," scanning John Garnet from head to foot. "A warm day this, but pleasant enough to be taking a young woman a walk by the seashore."

There was something offensive in the man's tone and manner. At any other time John Garnet would probably have resented his intrusion on the spot, but his attention was now so entirely taken up with Nelly's discomposure, that he failed to notice those indications of a wish to brawl, which he was generally only too ready to indulge.

Parson Gale was indeed in the worst of humors. Only the night before he had reached his home, and yet no sooner had he reached his morning fast, than, after a visit to his Spanish pointer, a cursory glance at his Irish pigs, but taking no thought whatever for his Devonshire parish, he was in the saddle again to get a glimpse of Nelly Carew. Following the devious tracks of Exmoor, with the instinct of the wild sheep, the wild ponies, or the wild red-deer, he threaded the coombe into Badgeworthy, crossed its foaming waters at his accustomed ford, climbed and clattered among the rocks, cantered freely over the heather, and paced down the hill into Porlock like a man in a dream—for his whole mind was filled with the fair face and the blue eyes that he had longed to look on for weeks. Though familiar with every acre of the forest and the moor, he would never have reached his destination, but that his horse knew the way as well as his master, having travelled it many a time of late.

It was characteristic of the man that he should not have ridden straight to old Carew's cottage, and gone frankly in to see his friends. He stabbed his horse instead at a little farm on the outskirts of the village, and hovered stealthily about its vicinity, hoping to meet some one who would tell him how matters had been going on his absence.

He did not remain long in suspense. Ere half an hour elapsed, a shambling, ill-looking youth, wearing "poacher" written in every line of his face as plain as print, slouched up and touched his hat, waiting however to be questioned, with an awkward grin that denoted how his natural insolence was kept in check by the Parson's quick temper and reputation for physical prowess. "He be soon up, be wor Pa'yon," was the verdict of his parishioners, "and main ready with his hands, right or wrong."

"What, Ike!" said Mr. Cole, assuming a cordiality, he did not feel, for to do him justice he hated a poacher, especially in the vicinity of deer; "not hanged yet, nor even sent to Botany Bay? What has been doing then these so many weeks? Has it been slack time with thee while I've been away?"

"Much as usual, Pa'yon, answered Ike, in the broadest dialect of West Somerset, which it is needless to reproduce here. "It's your gentleness that knows what change means. Frolics, too. There's not much

"Do you mean that old Master Carew has a kinsman paying him a visit?" he asked; and while he spoke Abner Gale wondered at the resolution with which he kept down his wrath. "When did he come, lad? can ye tell, now? And how long is he going away?"

But Ike, whose fingers were itching to spend in drink the money he had earned so easily, did not care to sustain farther cross-examination.

"Them sort comes and goes like the shadows on Brendon Moor," said he. "It's you and me, Master Gale, no offence, as stands to it, blow high blow low, like Dunkerry Beacon. I don't want to breed no mischief, and I don't want to tell no lies. There's others can say more than me. My service to you Pa'yon, and thanking you kindly. If you've an odd job for a poor chap, I'm to be heard off chiefly at the Wheat Sheaf, and I'll not forget to drink your honor's good health."

Thus speaking, Ike slunk off; and the Parson, with scowling brows, proceeded to Nelly's favorite haunt by the sea-shore.

What a bright fresh morning it had been, when he heard the lark singing on Exmoor a few short hours ago? Was it the gathering thunder-storm that made the sky so dark, the air so stifling, now?

A woman's tact seldom fails her at need. Mistress Nelly's greeting was just sufficiently cordial to scotch the Parson into decent behavior, without exceeding the limits of such kindly reception as seemed due to her grandfather's friend. Ere John Garnet had ceased wondering what there was in this new comer to move her so much, she had cleared her brows, steadied her voice, and extended her hand with a pleasant smile. At that moment, perhaps, the Parson knew for the first time, by the jealousy she was capable of arousing, how fiercely he loved her. And it may have been at the same moment that John Garnet discovered something he had never realized before.

An ass between two bundles of hay has always been accepted as the illustration of a false position. Surely a young lady with an admirer on each hand, one of whom she knows she hates, while the other she dreads to acknowledge she is beginning to like, must be equally at a loss on which side to incline. What is she to do or leave undone? Nelly Carew wished John Garnet had never come, wished he would go away; wished a spring-tide would flow in that moment, and float the Parson bodily up to Boscington Point, down to Barnstaple Bay, out into the wide Atlantic, where she might never set eyes on him again? Succor came when most she wanted it. A few heavy drops, a gust of wind, a flash, and a thunder-roll. In five minutes it was obvious that unless they hastened back to the village, all three would be drenched to the skin. With an imploring look at John Garnet, she made him understand he was to leave her without asking why. How delightful it was to feel that he caught her meaning at once and obeyed! Then she hurried the Parson to her grandfather's cottage, at a pace that admitted of no explanation; and once over the threshold disappeared in her own chamber, with that plea of headache (thunder always gave her a headache) which must have been Eve's excuse when she did not want to work in the garden with Adam.

Finding he was not likely to see her again, Abner Gale made but a short visit. As he rode home across Exmoor, the sky was clear, the birds were singing, the long rank grass sprang fresh and green from its recent wetting, flags and rushes were dressed out with rain-drops glistening like jewels in the afternoon sun. But the Parson rode slowly and heavily, looking steadfastly between his horse's ears. Now and again he shook his head, bit his lip, or glared round him with a troubled scowl, suggestive of annoyance and apprehension, as if he doubted there was still thunder in the air.

CHAPTER XV.

MORE THAN KIND.

"He understood me at once," thought Nelly, whose headache left her the moment she entered her own room. "How gentle he always seems, and how nice. I wonder who and what he is? Grandfather says there can be no mistake about his being well-born, and a man of fashion. Parson Gale often boasts he is not a man of fashion; but I know I like a man of fashion best. I wonder when I shall see him again. Not that I want to see him one bit; only he must have thought me so rude to leave like that, and I ought to explain. How angry Mr. Gale looked, and how cross he seemed all the way home. What does it matter to me? What