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HOLMBY HOUSE.

"From intelligence I receive at sure and friendly hands, I learn that Wilmot is wavering; and some speech is even abroad of a treasonable correspondence with Essex, and an intercepted letter from Fairfax, which is to be laid before the Council.

"Such treachery would merit a summary dismissal from his office, and clemency in this case could scarcely be extended to an officer of so high a rank.

"Digby, too, is far from being unsuspected; and should these two commands become vacant, it would be a fertile opportunity for the uniting of his Majesty's whole body of horse under one independent head, acting conjointly with Prince Rupert, who would still remain Commander-in-Chief, but deriving his authority direct from the hand of his blessed Majesty himself.

"Should events walk in this direction, I can safely confide in your discretion to select a proper time at which to whisper in the Queen's ear the humble name of, sweet Mistress Mary,

"Your most passionately-devoted
"and faithful knight and humble slave,
"GEORGE GORING.

"*Post scriptum.*—The dispatches alluded to in 106 Cipher have arrived. They are duplicate, and were delivered to me yesterday by an honest serving-man, who narrowly escaped with his life and his letters from a party of Waller's horse.

"His master, it seems, was sorely wounded, and led off prisoner into Gloucester. This is of less account as his dispatches are in cipher, and the duplicates are safe. He is one Master Bosville, with whom I am personally well acquainted, and whom Mistress Mary may deign to remember when lying wounded by the weapon of her own true knight and slave.

"He is a good officer, and a mettlesome lad, too. I would fain have him back with us, but have nothing to exchange against him but a couple of scriveners and a canting Puritan divine; the latter I shall probably hang. Once more—Fare thee well!"

It was the *post scriptum*, written in her correspondent's own natural off-hand style, and very different from the stilted and exaggerated form of compliment and inuendo contained in the body of the letter, which drove the blood from Mary's cheek, and caused her bosom to heave so restlessly beneath her bodice, her slender foot to beat so impatiently upon the floor. Wounded and a prisoner!—and this so soon after his illness, when weak and scarcely recovered from the consequences of his duel. And it was her doing—hers!—whom he loved so madly, the foolish boy!—who counted his life as nothing at the mere wave of her hand. Why was she so eager to get him this majority, for which she had implored her unwilling and bantering mistress? Why had she sent him off in such a hurry, before he was half recovered, and hardly strong enough to sit upon his horse? And then of course, he had fought—so like him! when his servant wisely ran away. And the stern Puritans had struck his weakened frame to the earth! Ah! he was a strong bold horseman when he was well, and a match for the best of them; but now his arm was powerless, though his courage was as high as ever. And perhaps they had slashed his handsome face—how handsome it was! and what kind eyes those were that used to meet hers so timidly and gently—and he was a prisoner—wounded, perhaps dying. And she shut her eyes and fancied she saw him, pale and faint, in his cell—alone, too, all alone. No, that she should never be! She picked the letter up, and read once more she read it through from beginning to end, scarcely noting the fulsome compliments, the strain of selfish intrigue, and only dwelling on the ill-omened and distressing *post scriptum* which Goring had written so lightly; but in which, to do him justice, the reckless General showed more feeling than he generally did; and even as she read she would fain have given utterance to his grief, and wrung her hands and wept aloud.

Self-command, however, we need not now observe, was a salient point in Mary Cave's character. Whatever she may have known, or whatever she may have suspected, she looked at Grace's pale face and dejected attitude and held her tongue. There was a sisterly feeling between these two far stronger than was warranted by their actual relationship. Ever since their late intimacy, which had grown closer and closer in the quiet shades of Boughton, Mary had seemed to take care of her gentle friend, Grace in return looking up to her protectoress with confiding attachment; and yet there was a secret between them—a secret at which neither ventured to think, yet with which each could not but suspect the other was acquainted. But they never came to an explanation, notwithstanding. We believe women never do. We believe that, however unreservedly they may confide in a brother, a lover, or a husband, they never lay their hearts completely bare before one of their own sex. Perhaps they are right; perhaps they know each other too well.

There was yet another difficulty in Mary's path, for to succor Bosville at all hazards we need hardly say she had resolved, even on her first perusal of the letter. In whom was she to confide? to whom could she entrust the secret of his failure and capture without letting the bad news reach Grace's ears? Sir Giles?—the stout old Cavalier never could keep a secret in his life; his child would worm it all out of him the first time she sat on his knee for two minutes after supper. The Queen?—that volatile lady would not only put the very worst construction upon her motives, but would detail the whole of the confidence reposed in her to each of her household separately, under strict promises of secrecy, no doubt, which would be tantamount to a general proclamation by the herald king-at-arms.

Of the courtiers she could scarcely bethink herself of one who was not so busily engaged engaged in some personal and selfish intrigue as to have no room for any other consideration whatsoever, who would not scruple to sacrifice honor and mercy and good feeling merely to score up, so to speak, another point in the game. What to do for Bosville and how to do it—this was the problem Mary had to solve; and resolute as she generally was, full of expedients and fertile in resources, she was now obliged to confess herself fairly at her wit's end.

It so fell out, however, that the blind deity whom men call chance and gods Destiny, who never helps us till we are at the very utmost extremity, befriended Mary through the meditation of the very last person about the Court in whom she would have dreamt of confiding—an individual who perhaps was more selfish, intriguing, and reckless than all the rest of the royal circle put together, but who, being a woman, and consequently born an angel, had still retained a scarce perceptible leavening of the celestial nature from which she had fallen.

As Mary sat that evening, pensive and graver than her wont, in the Queen's withdrawing-room, Lady Carlisle crossed the apartment with her calm brow and decorous step, and placed herself by her side. She liked Mary Cave, as far as it was in her nature to like one of her own sex. Perhaps she recognized in Mary somewhat of her own positive character—the uncompromising force of will that for good or for evil, marches directly on towards its purpose steadfast and unwavering, not to be moved from the path by any consideration of danger or of pity, like the volume of a mighty river forcing its way through every obstacle with silent energy.

She sat quietly down by Mary's side and heaved a deep sigh, with a sympathizing and plaintive expression of countenance, like a consummate actress as she was.

"It is bad news I have to break to you Mistress Cave," she whispered, bending her graceful head over the other's work, "if indeed you know it not already. That handsome Captain Bosville who was stabbed by Goring has fallen into the hands of the rebels! Jermyn only heard it this evening; I think he is telling the Queen now. They have got him in prison at Gloucester, as far as we can learn. He must be saved by some means Heaven forfend he should be sacrificed by those villains!"

Mary's heart was full; she could only falter out the word "exchanged."

"Exchanged!" repeated Lady Carlisle, now thoroughly in earnest. Do you not know—have you not heard? Since they hanged our Irish officers in the north the Council has ordered reprisals. Fairfax, Ireton, Cromwell—all of them are furious. They will hang every Royalist prisoner they take now! It was but last week Prince Rupert strung thirteen Roundheads upon one oak tree; they must have heard of it by this time. Poor Bosville is in the utmost danger. We talked of it but now in the presence-chamber. Even Jermyn is in despair, Alas! 'tis a sad business."

Mary turned sick and white! Was it even so? The room seemed to spin round with her, and Lady Carlisle's voice was as the rush of many waters in her ear.

"It is hopeless to talk of exchanges," proceeded her ladyship in a tone of real pity for the too obvious distress of her listener. She had once had a soft place in that corrupted heart, ay, long before she was dazzled with Stafford's fame, or lured by Pym's political influence; before she had sold her lovely womanhood for a coronet, and bartered the peace she could never know again for empty splendor. "Interest must be made with the Parliament. Some of the rising rebels must be cajoled. Essex is in disgrace with them now, and Essex is of no use, or I had brought the prisoner safe off with my own hand in a week from this day. But they are all alike my dear. Courtiers and Puritans, generals and statesmen, Cavaliers and Roundheads, all are men, weak and vain, all are alike fools and all are alike to be won. An effort must be made, and we can save him."

"What would you do?" gasped poor Mary, her self-command now completely deserting her.

"Do!" repeated her ladyship, with her soft lisping voice and dimpled smile; "I would beg him a free pardon if I dragged Cromwell round the room on my bare knees for it, or die with him," she added beneath her breath, "If I really cared one snap of the fingers about the man"

She was no coward, my Lady Carlisle, and there was more of the tigress about her than the mere beauty of her skin.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN OF DESTINY.

In an open space, long since built over by an increasing population, but forming at the time of which we write alternately a play and drill-ground for the godly inhabitants of Gloucester, is drawn up a regiment of heavy cavalry, singularly well appointed as to all the details of harness and horseflesh which constitute the efficiency of dragoons. The troopers exhibit strength, symmetry and blood to execute the forced marches and rapid evolutions which are the very essence of cavalry tactics. The men themselves are worthy of a close inspection. Picked from the flower of England's yeomanry, from the middle class of farmers and petty squires of the northern and eastern counties, their fine stature and broad shoulders denote that physical strength which independent agricultural labor so surely produces, whilst their stern brows, grave faces, and manly upright bearing distinguish them from such of their fellows as have not yet experienced the inspiration derived from military confidence mingled with religious zeal. These are the men who are firmly persuaded that on their weapons depends the government of earth and heaven; that they are predestined to win dominion here and glory hereafter with their own strong arms; that their paradise, like that of the Moslem enthusiast, is to be won sword in hand, and that a violent death is the surest passport to eternal life. Fanatics they, are and of the wildest class, but they are also stern disciplinarians. Enthusiasm is a glorious quality, no doubt, but it has seldom turned the tide of a general action when unsupported by discipline; it is the combination of the two that is *invincible*. Thus did the swarms of the Great Arab Imposter overrun the fairest portions of Europe, and the chivalrous knights of the Cross charge home with their lances in rest at Jerusalem. Thus in later times were the high-couraged Royalists broken and scattered at Marston Moor, and the tide of victory at Naseby turned to a shameful and irrevocable defeat. Deep as in the influence of religious zeal, doubly as is that man armed who fights under the banner of righteousness, it is over life and not death that it exercises its peculiar sway. A high sense of humor, a reckless spirit of ambition, the romantic enthusiasm of glory, will face shot and steel as fearlessly as the devout confidence of faith; and the drinking, swaggering, unprincipled troopers of Goring, Lunsford, and such as they, for a long time proved a match, and more than a match, for the godly soldiers of the Parliament. It was the "Dagoes Right!"—the steady confidence inspired by drill, that turned the scale at last, that confidence and that drill the grim Puritan dragoons are now acquiring on the parade-ground at Gloucester.

They sit their horses as only Englishmen can, the only seat, moreover, that is at all adapted to the propulsive power of an English horse, a very different animal from that of any other country. They are armed with long straight cut-and-thrust swords, two edged, and basket-hilted, glittering and sharp as razors, with large horse-pistols of the best locks and workmanship, with the short handy musquetoon, deadly for outpost duty, and hanging readily at the hip. Breastplates and backpieces of steel enhance the confidence inspired by faith, and the men ride to and fro in their armor with the very look and air of invincibles. Yes, these are the Ironsides the famous Ironsides that turned the destinies of England.

They are drawn up in open column, waiting for the word of command. Their squadrons are dressed with mathematical precision; their distances correct to an inch—woe be to the culprit, officer or soldier, who fails in the most trifling of such *minutiæ*. The eye of the commander would discover him in a twinkling—that commander sitting there so square and erect on his good horse. Like all great men, he is not above detail; he would detect a button awry as readily as the rout of a division.

He scans his favorite regiment with a quick, bold, satisfied glance—the glance of a practised workman at his tools. There is no peculiarity in his dress or appointments to distinguish him from a simple trooper; his horse is perhaps the most powerful and the speediest on the ground, and he sits in the saddle with a rare combination of strength and ease; in every other respect his exterior is simple and unremarkable. He even seems to affect a plainness of attire not far removed from sloth, and in regard to cleanliness of linen and brightness of accoutrements presents a striking contrast to Fairfax, Harrison, and other of the Parliamentary officers, who vie with their Cavalier antagonists in the splendor of their apparel.

It is the man's voice which arrests immediate attention. Harsh and deep, there is yet something so confident and impressive in its tones, that the listener feels at once its natural element is command, ay, command, too, when the emergency is imminent, the storm at its greatest violence. It forces him to scan the features and person of the speaker, and he beholds a square, powerful man of middle stature, loosely and awkwardly made, but in the liberal mould that promises great physical strength, with coarse hands and feet, such as the patrician pretends are never seen in his own race, and with a deep chest which readily accounts for the powerful tones of that authoritative voice. This vigorous frame is surmounted by a countenance that, without the slightest pretensions to comeliness, cannot but make a deep impression on the beholder. The scoffing Cavaliers may jeer at "red-nosed Noll," but Cromwell's face is the face of a great man. The sanguine temperament, which expresses, if we may so speak, the material strength of the mind, is denoted by the deep ruddy coloring of his skin. The strong broad jaw belongs to the decided and immovable will of the man of action, capable of carrying out the thoughts that are matured beneath those prominent temples, from which the thin hair is already worn away; and although the nose is somewhat large and full, the mouth somewhat coarse and wide, these distinguishing characteristics seem less the brand of indulgence and sensuality than the adjuncts of a ripe, manly nature almost always the accompaniment of great physical power. Though the eyes are small and deep-set, they glow like coals of fire; when excited or angered (for the General's temper is none of the sweetest, and he has more difficulty in commanding it than in enforcing the obedience of an army), they seem to flash out sparks from beneath his heavy head-piece. A winning smile is on his countenance now. The Ironsides have executed an "advance in line" that brings them up even and regular as a wall of steel to his very horse's head, and the reflection steals pleasantly across his mind, that the tools are fit for service at last, that the tedious process of discipline will ere long bring him to the glorious moment of gratified ambition.

A new officer has at this moment been appointed to the regiment. He seems thoroughly acquainted with his duty, and manœuvres his squadron with the ready skill of a veteran. Already George Effingham has caught the Puritan look and tone. Already he has made no little progress in Cromwell's good graces. That keen observing eye has discovered a tool calculated to do good service in extremity. A desperate man, bankrupt in earthly hopes, and whose piety is far exceeded by his fanaticism, is no contemptible recruit for the ranks of the Ironsides, when he brings with him a frame of adamant, a heart of steel, and a thorough knowledge of the duties of a cavalry officer. Pale, gaunt, and worn, looking ten years older than when he last saw these same troopers at Newbury, Effingham still works with the eager, restless zeal of a man who would fain stifle remembrance and drive reflection from his mind.

The line breaks into column once more—the squadrons wheel rapidly, the rays of a winter's sun flashing from their steel head-pieces and breastplates—the horses snort and ring their bridles cheerily—the word of command flies sonorous from line to line—the General gallops to and fro, pleased with the progress of the mimic war—the drill is going on most satisfactorily, when a small escort of cavalry is seen to appreach the parade-ground, and remains at a cautious distance from the manœuvres. An officer flaunting in scarf and feathers singles himself out, gallops up to the General, and salutes with his drawn sword as he makes his report. Cromwell thunders out a "Halt!" that brings every charger upon his haunches. The men are permitted to dismount; the officers gather round their chief, and Harrison—for it is Harrison—who has just arrived, sits immovable upon his horse, with his sword-point lowered, waiting to learn the General's pleasure as to the disposal of his prisoner, whose sex makes it a somewhat puzzling matter to decide.

"They have made reprisals upon us," said Cromwell, in his deep, harsh tones, patting and making much of the good horse under him. "Man or woman, let the prisoner be placed in secure ward. Verily, we are more merciful than just in that we spare the weaker sex. The Malignants deal more harshly with the saints. Their blood be on their own head!" he added solemnly.

Harrison turned his horse's head to depart. Little cared he, that reckless soldier, how they disposed of the lady he had taken prisoner; he was thinking how he should billet the men and horses he had brought in, not of the fate of his unhappy captive.

"Stay," said Cromwell, "dismiss the soldiers, and bring the Malignant woman hither. I will myself question her ere she be placed in ward."

As he spoke he dismounted, and entered a large stone building converted into a barrack, attended by a few of his officers, amongst whom was Effingham, and followed by the prisoner under escort of two stalwart troopers, who "advanced" their musquetoons with a ludicrous disinclination thus to guard an enemy of the softer sex.

The prisoner was a fair, handsome woman in the prime of her beauty. She was dressed in a lady's riding-gear of her time, which, notwithstanding its masculine character, was powerless to diminish her feminine attractions; and looked thoroughly exhausted and worn out by physical fatigue. Yet was there a haughty turn about her head, an impatient gesture of her gloved hand, that denoted the spirit within was dauntless and indomitable as ever.

The instant that the short cloak she wore was removed, and the beaver hitherto slouched over her face taken off by Cromwell's orders, an operation which allowed a profusion of rich brown hair to fall nearly to her waist, Effingham started as if he had been shot. He would have spoken, but an imperious glance from the prisoner seemed to freeze the words upon his lips. He held his peace, and stood there, deadly pale, and trembling like a child.

Harrison's report was soon made, and amounted to this:—

That in his duty of patrolling the open country lying nearest to Goring's outposts, and visiting his videttes, he had espied a lady, mounted on a good horse, who had ridden boldly into the centre of his escort, and demanded to be conducted at once to Gloucester, and brought before Cromwell—that she avowed she belonged to the Royalist party, but had abandoned their cause, and was the bearer of important papers, which were to be laid before Cromwell alone—that on his proposition that he should be searched for these papers, and a corporal's attempting to do so, she had snapped a pistol in the sub-officer's face, which providentially flashing in the pan, only singed his beard and eyebrows—that out of respect to Cromwell he had brought her on without further violence, "though that she has not some evil intentions I never can believe," concluded Harrison, "for she is the very first woman I ever came across yet that could ride nearly a dozen miles and never open her lips to speak a word, good or bad."

The General scanned his prisoner carefully. His usual tact and discernment were here at fault. "Woman!" he said, rudely and sternly, "what want you here—whence came you—and why venture you thus amongst the people of the Lord?"

"I would see Cromwell alone," replied Mary Cave (for Mary Cave it was, as Effingham too surely knew), and she no longer looked exhausted and fatigued, but the blood came back to her cheek, the haughty turn to her head and neck, the indomitable curve to her lip, as she felt the crisis had come, and her spirit mounted with the occasion. "I have ridden far and fast to see you, General," she added, with a certain tone of irony in her voice; "you will not refuse to grant an interview when a lady asks it."

Effingham felt a strange thrill to hear her voice. How it took him back to that which seemed now some other stage of existence, albeit so short a time ago. How associated she was in his mind with that other one. To him, though "she was not the Rose, she had been near the Rose," and he would willingly at that moment have given a year of his life to ask tidings of her whose name was still nestling at his heart.

Cromwell hesitated. Bold schemer, undaunted soldier as he was, he entertained a morbid dread of assassination, a dread that in later days, when in the full flush of his prosperity, and seated on the throne, caused him to wear proof armor on all public occasions under his clothes.

He had read, too, of women who would not hesitate to sacrifice their lives in a political cause; his own enterprising spirit told him how readily it was possible to encounter certain death for a great object; and this lady did not look as if she was likely to shrink from any desperate deed because of its danger. And yet to fear a woman! Pshaw! it seemed absurd. He would grant her the interview she desired; though, according to Harrison's report, she had been so ready with her pistol, she was now obviously disarmed; besides, he was well guarded, surrounded by his troopers and his friends. He looked upon his officers, for the most part trustworthy, fearless veterans, whose courage and fidelity he had already tried in many a well-fought field. Effingham alone was a new acquaintance, and his quick eye caught the expression of Gerge's countenance watching the prisoner's face.

"Do you know anything of the lady?" said he, in short, imperious tones, and turning sharply round upon his new officer, with a frown of displeasure gathering on his thick brows.

"You may speak the truth, Captain Effingham!" said Mary, with a look of quiet contempt.

Thus abjured, Effingham hesitated no longer to acknowledge his acquaintance with the beautiful "Malignant."

"Mistress Mary Cave is too well known at the Court, not to have won the respect and confidence of all who have ever breathed that polluted atmosphere. I will answer for her faith and honesty with my head. If she fail you, my life shall be for the life of her."

Mary thanked him with a grateful glance.

"I have a boon to ask of you, General; a bargain to drive if you will. Grant me the interview I require, and bid me go in peace."

Cromwell signed to her to follow him into a smaller apartment, in which a fire was burning, and which contained a chair, a writing-table, and a few articles of rough comfort.

"Captain Effingham," he said, in his short, stern tones, "place two sentries at the door. Remain yourself within call. Madam, I am now at your service. Speak on; we are alone."

He doffed his heavy head-piece, placed it on the writing-table and was about to throw himself into the chair. The General was no polished courtier—above all, no woman-worshipper—but there was that in Mary Cave's bearing which checked his first impulse, and bade him stand up respectfully before his prisoner.

Never in all her life before had Mary such need to call up the presence of mind and resolution that formed so important a part of her character. Here she stood, a gentle, soft-nurtured lady, brought up in all the exaggerated refinement of a court, before her bitterest enemy, the most uncompromising as he was the most powerful champion of her adversaries' party. Completely in his power, dependent on his generosity for immunity, from exposure, insult—nay, death itself (for, alas! the exasperated feelings aroused by the cruelties practised on both sides were not always restrained by consideration for age or sex); and, save for her accidental meeting with Effingham, whom she had little expected to see here, utterly friendless in the rebel camp. This was the interview that she had been looking forward to for days, that she had so prayed and hoped might be accomplished; that, seeming tolerably easy when seen from a distance, had been the gaol to which all her schemes and wishes tended; and now that she was actually face to face with Cromwell, she shook from head to foot as she had never trembled in her life before—but once.

His manner, though reserved, became less stern than at first. Show us the man of any profession, soldier, statesman, Puritan, or archbishop, from eighteen to eighty (a fair margin), on whom beauty, real womanly beauty, makes no impression, and we will show you the eighth wonder of the world.

"Reassure yourself, madam," said Cromwell, with a tone of kindness in his harsh voice; "I do not to-day hear the name of Mistress Mary Cave for the first time. I can safely affirm I would long ago have given much to obtain possession of the lady who thus voluntarily surrenders herself as a prisoner. I have yet to learn what brings her into the very stronghold of the enemy. Had she been a man, there had been a price on her head."

These words were alarming; but the smile that stole over the General's face was softer and kindlier than his wont.

Mary began her answer with a degree of composure far too obvious not to be affected.

"I am come," said she, "to negotiate the exchange of a prisoner. A messenger might have lingered, letters been intercepted, even a white flag outraged, so, General—so—I came myself. Major Bosville is languishing, perhaps dying, in Gloucester jail. May he not be ransomed, can he not be exchanged? Any sum of money, any number of prisoners—say, ten for one."

Cromwell's brow grew dark. "You ask too much, madam," he replied, shaking his head sternly. "That officer lies even now under sentence of death. He has refused to give any information concerning the strength or movements of the enemy. A confirmed Malignant, he shall die the death! Hath not Rupert slain in cold blood thirteen godly warriors taken with arms in their hands? The blood of the Lord's anointed cries aloud for vengeance! God do so to me, and more also, if I smite not root and branch, till the Amalekite is destroyed out of the land!"

He was chafing now—angry and restless, like some noble beast of prey.

Mary fitted the last arrow to her bowstring. "You know me, General," she said, with something of her old proud air. "You know my power, my influence, my information. Listen, I will buy Bosville's life of you. You shall make your own terms."

Cromwell smiled. Perhaps he had his private opinion of these lady politicians, these fair intriguers with the Queen at their head, who hampered the counsels of their friends far more effectually than they anticipated the designs of their enemies. He was perfectly courteous, but somewhat ironical in his reply.

"You cannot bribe me, madam," said he, "valuable as I doubt not is the price you offer. Your information may or may not be far superior to my own—your talent for intrigue doubtless many degrees finer. I am a simple soldier; my duty lies plain before me. I will have blood for blood, and I have the warrant of Scripture for my determination."

Poor Mary! she broke down altogether now. The bold warrior-spirit, the craft of statesmanship, the artificial pride of rank and station, all gave way before the overwhelming flood of womanly pity and womanly fear. She seized the General's rough coarse hand in both her own, so white and soft by the contrast. Ere he could prevent her she pressed it to her lips: she bent over it, and clung to it, and folded it to her bosom. Down on her knees she implored him, she besought him, she prayed to him, with tears and sobs, to spare the prisoner's life. Her pride was fallen altogether now, her humiliation complete. It was no longer the stately Mary Cave, the Queen's minion, the adviser of statesmen, the ornament of a Court, but a broken-hearted woman pleading for life and death.

"Save him, General," she gasped, gazing wildly up in his face; "save him, for mercy's sake, as you hope to be saved yourself at the last day! What is it to you, a life the more or less? What is your authority worth if you can hesitate to exercise it for so trifling a matter? Is Cromwell so completely under the orders of Fairfax, so subservient to Ireton, such a sworn slave of the Parliament, that in his own camp he cannot extend mercy to whom he will?"

Her woman's instinct told her through all her distress and all her confusion where lay the weak point in the fortress she assailed; bid her attach him through his pride, his self-respect, his jealousy of command; and dimmed as were her eyes with tears, she saw she had shot her arrow home.

Cromwell flushed a deeper red up to his very temples, the scowl upon his bent brows, and the conspicuous wart over his right eye lending an ominous and sinister expression to his whole countenance. He spoke not, but the hand she grasped was rudely withdrawn, and the high-born, gently-nurtured lady was fain to clasp him round the knees, cased in those wide, solid riding-boots, with their heavy spurs, that rang and jingled as he stamped twice in his passion against the floor.

"Save him, General!" she repeated. "Is there no consideration you will listen you, no appeal you will respect? Hear me. I sent him on his errand. I got him his appointment. I bade him go forth wounded and helpless into the very jaws of your troopers, and now if he is to die his blood is on my head. Oh! think of your own mother! think of your own child! think of any one that you have ever loved! Would you see her kneeling as I do now? would you see her lonely, helpless, amongst strangers and enemies, pleading for dear life, and bear to know that she was refused? Think better of it, for the love of mercy, General, think better of it. Grant me this one boon, and I will pray for you, enemy though you be, night and morning, on my bended knees, till my dying day."

His voice sounded hoarser than usual, and he loosened the plain linen band around his throat as he muttered the word—"Reprisals!"

She sprang fiercely from her knees, flung his hand, which she had again taken, away from her in scorn, and flashed at him such a glance as made even Cromwell quail.

"Reprisals!" she repeated. "It is the Puritan's English for murder. You have refused me—refused Mary Cave on her bended knees, who never knelt before to mortal man—beware of my revenge! Oh! I meant it not—forgive me!" she added, her whole manner changing once more to one of the softest, the most imploring entreaty, as the impotence and impotley of her anger struck chill and sickening to her heart; "forgive my hasty words, my pride that has never yet learned to stoop. You talk of reprisals, General; one life is worth another—take mine instead of his. Lead me out now—this minute—I am ready, and let him go free."

She had touched the keystone now; the sympathy for courage and devotion which every brave man feels. He turned his face away that she might not see his emotion, for there were tears in Cromwell's eyes. She took the gesture for one of refusal, and it was in sad plaintive tones she offered her last despairing request.

"At least grant me one last boon I have ridden so far to ask. It is not a little thing that will tempt a woman to the step I have taken. You cannot refuse me this—if I cannot save him, at least I can die with him. Shot, steel, or hempen noose, whatever penalty is exacted from Humphrey Bosville shall be shared by her who sent him here to die. I ask you no more favors—I claim it as a right—he shall not suffer for my sake alone. Do not think I shall flinch at the last moment. See! there is not a trooper of all your Ironsides that fears death less than Mary Cave!"

She had conquered triumphantly at last. The brave spirit could not but recognize its kindred nature. He had made up his mind now, and not a hair of Humphrey's head should have fallen had the whole Parliament of England voted his death to a man. Kindly, courteously, nay, almost tenderly, the rough Puritan soldier raised the kneeling lady to her feet. With a consideration she little expected, he placed her carefully in the chair, sent an orderly trooper for food and wine, and even bestirred himself to ascertain where she might be most safely lodged till her departure with a safe conduct under his own hand.

"I grant your request, Mistress Mary Cave, and I attach to my concession but two conditions. The one, it is needless to state, is that Major Bosville passes his *parole* never again to bear arms against the Parliament, and the other"—his glance softened more and more as he proceeded—"that you will not quite forget plain Oliver Cromwell, and that hereafter when you hear his harshness censured, and his rustic breeding derided, you will not be ashamed to say you have known him to show the courtesy of a gentleman and the feeling of a man!"

With an obeisance, the respectful deference of which could not have been outdone by any plumed hat that ever swept the floors of Whitehall, Cromwell took his leave of his fair suppliant, consigning her to the care of George Effingham for the present, and promising her a written pardon in his own hand, and safe conduct through his outposts for herself and Humphrey Bosville, by the morrow's dawn.

Her spirit had kept her up hitherto, but fatigue, watching, and anxiety were too much for her woman's strength; and as Cromwell's massive figure disappeared through the doorway, she laid her head upon the coarse deal table and gave way to a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XXI.

"UNDER SENTENCE."

Condemned to die! Reader, have you ever realised to yourself all that is contained in those three words? Have you ever considered how large a share of your daily life is comprised in what we may term the immediate future, in the cares, so to speak, of "what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and wherewithal you shall be clothed?" Have you ever reflected how your own petty schemes and intrigues—equally petty when viewed at the supreme moment, whether you be a politician on the cross benches, or a grocer behind your counter—fill up the measure of your hopes and wishes? how your own financial budget, whether it affect the revenues of a kingdom or the contents of a till, is the subject that occupies most of your thoughts? and how, when sagacity and foresight upon such matters become superfluous, there is a blank in your whole being, which you feel, perhaps for the first time, ought to have been filled up long ago with something that would not have deserted you at your need, that would have accompanied you into that *terra incognita* which the most material of us feel at some moments is really our home?

And yet at the crisis, it seems as though the spirit-wings were weaker than ever, and instead of soaring aloft into the blue heaven, can but flap heavily and wearily along the surface of earth, as though the mind were incapable of projecting itself into the Future, and must needs dwell mistily and inconclusively on the Past; and there is no proverb truer than that 'the ruling passion is strong in death,' as will readily admit those whose lot it has ever been to look the King of Terrors in the face.

Humphrey Bosville lay condemned to death in Gloucester gaol. His examination, after a short imprisonment, had been conducted by Cromwell himself, with the few rude formalities extended to the trial of a prisoner-of-war. He had been questioned as to the strength of the King's army, and the deliberation of his councillors; like a soldier and a man of honor, he had steadfastly declined to divulge even the little he knew. The court that tried him was composed simply enough, consisting, besides Cromwell, of Harrison and another. The former of these two vainly endeavored to persuade his prisoner, for whom he had taken a great liking, to turn traitor, and save his own life. Humphrey, however, was immovable, and Harrison liked him all the better. The proceedings were short, and not at all complicated. "You refuse, then, to answer the questions put to you by the court?" said Cromwell, folding a sheet of paper in his hands with an ominous frown.

"I do, distinctly," replied the prisoner, regardless of a meaning look from Harrison, and a strenuous nudge from that stout soldier's elbow.

"Sentence of death recorded. His blood be on his own head!" commented Cromwell; adding, with a look that lent a fearful interest to the simple words, "to-morrow morning, at gun-fire."

"God and the King!" exclaimed Humphrey, in a loud, fearless voice, placing his plumed hat jauntily on his head, and marching off between his gaolers, humming cheerfully the Royalist air of "Cuckolds, come, dig!"

So the court broke up. Cromwell went to drill his Ironsides; Harrison to visit his outposts, with what result we have already learned; and another Cavalier was to die.

They placed food and wine in his cell; the grim troopers who guarded him looked on him no longer as an enemy. Already he was invested with the fearful interest of the departing traveller; he who ere twenty-four hours have elapsed will be in that land of which all of us have thought, and which none of us have seen. They were soldiers, too, and they liked his pluck, his gallant bearing, his cheerful good humor, his considerate courtesy even to his escort; for Humphrey was a gentleman at heart, and one essential peculiarity of the breed is that it never shows its purity so much as when *in extremis*. Not a rough dragoon in the guardroom, including Ebenezer the Gideonite, who was still black and blue from shoulder to hip, but would have shared his ration willingly, 'Malignant' though he was, with the Cavalier officer.

He ate his portion of food with a good appetite, and drank off his wine to the King's health. The winter sun streamed in at the grating of his cell, and heavy tramp of the sentry at his door rung through the silence of the long stone corridor. It was all over now. It was come at last, and Humphrey sat him down to think.

Yes, he looked upon Death as a near neighbor for years; he had fronted him pretty often in Flanders before this unhappy civil war, and had improved his acquaintance with him since at Edge-Hill, Roundway-Down, Newbury, and elsewhere; nay, he had felt the grasp of his icy hand but very lately, when he failed to parry that delicate thrust of Goring's. What an awkward thrust it was! and should he not have met it in carte, rather than tierce, and so gone round his adversary's blade? Pshaw! how his mind wandered. And what was the use of thinking of such matters now?—now that he had not twenty-four hours to live—now that he should fix his thoughts on the next world, and pray ardently for the welfare of his soul? Ay, 'twas well that he had not neglected this duty, and put it off till to-day; do what he would he could not control his mind, and bid it obey his will. Thoughts after thoughts came surging in like ocean waves, and bore him on and swamped him, so to speak, in their resistless tide. Might he but have chosen, he would not have died quite like this. No! he had hoped to go down in some victorious onset, stirrup to stirrup with hot Prince Rupert, the best blood in England charging madly behind him to the old war-cry that made his blood boil even now—the stirring battle-word of "God and the King!"—sword in hand, and the sorrel pulling hard!—the poor sorrel. Harrison had promised his prisoner to take care of the good horse; there was some comfort in that, and Harrison was a soldier, though a Roundhead. Ay, that had been a glorious death; or, better still, to have dragged his wounded frame to Mary's feet and laid his head upon her knee,—and died there so peaceful, so happy, like a child hushing off to its sleep. Mary would think of him—mourn him, surely—and never forget him now. How would she look when they told her of it in the Queen's chamber? He tried to fancy her, pale and wobegone, bending to hide her face over the embroidery he knew so well—the embroidery he had told her playfully was to be finished ere he came back again. He would never come back to her now; and the large tears that his own fate had failed to draw from him gathered in his eyes as he thought of that glorious lady's desolation, and fell unheeded on his clasped hands. Well, he had promised her, if need were, to give his life ungrudgingly for the Cause—and he had redeemed his word. Perhaps in another world he might meet her again, and be proud to show her the stainless purity of his shield. He thought over his past life—he was no casuist, no theologian; his simple faith, like that of his knightly ancestors, was comprised in a few words—"*Fur Gott und fur ihr*," might have been engraved on his blade, as it was emblazoned on the banner of the chivalrous Lord Craven—he whose romantic attachment to the Queen of Bohemia was never outdone in the imagination of a Troubadour, who worshipped his royal ladye love as purely and unselfishly as he risked life and fortune ungrudgingly in her cause. So was it with Humphrey—"For God and for her" was the sentiment that had ruled his every action of late—that consoled him and bore him up now, when he was about to die. It was not wisdom, it was not philosophy, it was not perhaps true religion; but it served him well enough—it stood him in the stead of all these—it carried him forward into the spirit-life where, it may be, that some things we wot not of in our worldly forethought are the true reality, and others that we may have worshipped here faithfully and to our own benefit—such as prudential considerations, external respectability, and "good common-sense"—are found to be the myths and the delusions, the bubbles that the cold air of death has dispelled for evermore.

At least, Humphrey knew he had but another night to live; and when he had prayed, hopefully and resignedly, with but one small grain of discontent, one faint repining that he might not see her just once again, he drew his pallet from the corner of his cell, and with folded arms and calm placid brow, laid him down peacefully to sleep.

So sound were his slumbers that they were not disturbed by the armed tread of the captain of the ward, a fierce old Puritan, who ushered up the corridor the cloaked and hooded figure of a woman, accompanied by an officer of the Ironsides, who had shown him an order signed by Cromwell's own hand, which he dared not disobey. The grim warder, however, influenced by the prisoner's gallant and gentle demeanor, would fain have dissuaded the visitors from disturbing his repose.

"If you be friends of the Major's," said he in the gruff tones peculiar to all such custodians, "you won'l act more kindly to let him be; they mostly gets their little snooze about this time of night; and the nearer he wakes to gun-fire, the better for him. You'll excuse my making so free, madam; the Major's got to be shot at daybreak. But if you're come to examine of him, or to get anything more out of him than what he told the Court, I tell ye it's no use, and a burning shame into the bargain. I can't keep ye out, seeing it's the General's order—and Cromwell's a man who will be obeyed; but I can't bear to see the Major put upon neither, and he such a nice, well-spoken gentleman, and the last night as he's to be with us and all." So grumbling, the old gaoler, who was not without a sort of rough coarse kindness of his own, opened the cell door, and admitting the visitors, set his lamp down on the floor for their service; after which civility he returned to cough and grumble by himself in the passage.

Mary looked on the face of the sleeper, and for the first time since she had known him realised the unassuming courage of that honest heart. Could this be the man who, ere twelve hours should elapse, was doomed to die; this calm and placid sleeper, breathing so heavily and regularly, with a smile on his lips, and his fair brow smooth and unruffled as a child's? She turned proudly to Effingham. "Is he not worthy of the cause?" was all she said; and Effingham, looking there upon his comrade and his rival, wiped the dew from his forehead, for the conflict of his feelings was more than he could bear.

Mary bent over him till her long hair swept across his face.

"Humphrey," she whispered, in the sweetest of her soft caressing tones, "Humphrey, wake up; do you not know me—wake up."

The sleeper stirred and turned. The well known voice must have called up some association of ideas in his mind; perhaps he was dreaming of her even then and there. He muttered something. In the deep silence of the cell both his listeners caught it at once. Mary blushed crimson for very shame; and Effingham felt his heart leap as it had never leapt before.

The sleeper had but whispered three words—"Mary, Loyalty, Mary," was all he said; and then he woke and stared wildly upon his visitors.

In another instant he had seized Mary's hand, and was folding it to his heart in a transport of affection and delight. He knew not that his life had been spared—he still thought he was to die; but he believed his prayers had been answered—that, whether in the body or out of the body, he was permitted to look on her once again — and that was enough for him.

Effingham did as he would be done by, and let the cell. If 'he jests at scars who never felt a wound,' on the other hand he is wondrously quick-witted and sympathizing who has himself gone throug the *peine forte et dure* of real affection