

a group of character nobodies, who had drawn apart to eat and drink, and were discussing the viands with such interest as to show they cared about little else.

He saw after a time that he had not been missed—not noticed by any one he feared—and then he glided noiselessly into and through the passage, and there, in the right branch of the crossing corridor, found Clarence Harvey waiting for him.

Holding up his finger towards his lips, though he did not unmask, Clarence Harvey led the way till a door confronted them, which was locked.

Bending his head, he looked through the key-hole; then, turning his ear to it, he listened.

Satisfied, apparently, with this precaution, he inserted a key in the lock, turned it with extreme care, and opened the door.

A great rush of air swept past them, and threatened of itself to tell the story of the secret comers to those beyond.

"Quick! quick! the door!" he exclaimed. And Lord Langton instantly advanced, and closed it after him, and Clarence locked it and removed the key.

"We must run, but as hares run—noiselessly," he said, and himself started off.

Lord Langton followed with a foot of equal swiftness, turning and winding about, expecting every instant to dash his brains out against the solid walls which he was continually and unexpectedly confronting.

Clarence stopped at last, and Lord Langton was in a moment by his side stopping too, both breathing hard.

"We have passed the door safely where they might have come out upon us and intercepted us. Hark! Yes—there they are! The door opens, their swords are accidentally clashing—we were only just in time."

"But why should they attack me?" demanded Lord Langton.

"For two reasons. They hate you because they think you are fanatically honest—and in politics now—a-days leaders mustn't be too honest—and they would have had a fair chance of giving you an *accidental* stab through your coming upon them this way in the dark, when they don't expect you."

"I think better of them than you do," said Lord Langton.

"What sort of a picture do you fancy I am going to show you, in accordance with my promise?" demanded Clarence Harvey.

"I don't know much about pictures. What I hope now to see is a handful of brave and able Englishmen—men of mark and position—sick of the inevitable mummery of this masquerade, and now drawing apart in solemn council over the fortunes of England, and desirous to discover what is their duty with regard to their legitimate but most unfortunate monarch."

"Well, here they are. Hush!" responded Clarence, as he hung a heavy cloak against the wall stretched wide, then motioned to his master to go under it with him.

Within that stifling enclosure they soon obtained air and room by pressing the cloak outwardly on their shoulders, and then, all chance of light being shut out, Clarence removed a thick slip of wood a couple of inches deep and about eighteen inches long, and the room within was at once visible, and the hum of many voices heard.

Never had Lord Langton looked upon a more extraordinary group, considering what he expected, and knowing, as he did, of what it must be composed—the flower of the Jacobite gentry and aristocracy. There were about twenty-five or perhaps thirty persons in all, for it was not easy to count them, there was so much smoke—so much movement of certain persons passing from one little group to another—and such a general buzz and clamour and jovial excitement.

The first persons that he saw were the Turkish and Circassian beauties of the masquerade, just six in number, all wearing the same kind of dress, though of different colours. One of these delicate ladies was sitting upon a stool—one leg high upon a chair, the other leg similarly disposed of upon another chair—while she wiped a bald head with a pocket-handkerchief, and

showed a chin that would have been the better for a clean shave. Another charming Circassian was stalking about smoking, and with a sword sticking out from under the silken petticoat. Two more were having a dance to themselves, more remarkable for spirit than decency—a dance certainly not of English, but of Eastern or Spanish origin.

The masks of all those present were off, for the sake of the relief, and perhaps in evidence of good faith one to another. The faces were all of hard-visaged men—some young, some old—the greater part middle-aged. Among these the fair Turks and Circassians were particularly noticeable, as belying their effeminate costume. They looked only too ready for deeds of desperation and blood.

Hard drinking, chiefly of wine, was going on in all directions; dozens of bottles together came and disappeared, leaving no particular sign behind of their effect. Here, again, the fair ones were conspicuous for their rousing draughts.

These six fair ladies at present, however, were quiet, though they seemed, to acute bystanders like Lord Langton, to have an understanding among themselves, that did not extend to the rest of the company. Just now they were bent on relieving the tedium of political discussion by making as much mirth as possible out of trifles.

"Gentlemen," suddenly broke in a powerful voice, which Lord Langton recognised as that of the master of the ceremonies, "I need hardly say the sports of to-night were intended to usher in something a little more serious and timely. I am asked to play the chairman, and I consent to keep out a better man rather than waste time in seeking him. Welcome, then—a hearty welcome to all!"

"Ah! we must have the toast!" shouted one of the fair Circassians.

"The toast! the toast!" was echoed on all sides.

"In bumpers!—bumpers, gentlemen! Are you all ready? Now, then, I am going to let the cat out of the bag! To a recent visitor—God bless him!"

Uproarious was the enthusiasm at this confession that it was the king—their dear, their true, their exiled monarch—who had been with them this night; who, in his love for them, had ventured his own sacred person away from his foreign sanctuary, and come here to see them, to hear their voices, be with them if but for an hour—then had passed away!

Bumper after bumper was drained off to this and similar toasts before they could go to the work of the night, which was to determine whether or no another insurrection was practicable, was wise, and was ripe as to time and state of preparation.

"You know the chairman?" whispered Clarence to Lord Langton.

"Yes—Sir George Charter," was the reply; "a dangerous and discontented man."

"He thinks very much the same of you, though for different reasons. Do you know he has just returned from Rome?"

"Ha! Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

Lord Langton became silent and thoughtful, while Clarence whispered—

"Do you know anybody else here?"

"Yes. But it so happens that the people I know are those that the least interest me just now. And I can't understand it. I see this plainly—that while I thought I had chiefly designated, directly or indirectly, the greater part of the people who were to be here, those people are not here in any number, and many others are. I want to know about these persons. When I touch you, tell me who it is that is speaking."

The first of the speakers now rose—a tall, elegantly-formed man, with dark, handsome features, very pale very sad, and with a voice that expressed all the melancholy and discontent of his soul.

Lord Langton touched his companion, who whispered—

"The Earl of Stanbury. He has taken the oaths to the present Government!"

"And yet is here—the traitor!" was Lord Langton's indignant comment.

The earl's speech was very brief, and, as far as possible, non-committing. He would gladly see a change, he said, if a change were really practicable; but he must wait to see what others proposed before he could say anything more definite than to express his deep sympathy with the gentlemen now met, and with their wishes.

He had spoken first, because asked to do so—he supposed on account of his rank—and that was what he had to say.

Up jumped one of the fair Circassians, not even waiting for the earl to resume his seat, as he wished, with graceful dignity.

"Are we met?" he demanded in a deep, bass voice, that almost sounded like the roll of distant ordnance—"are we met to amuse ourselves once more with words, or to seize our swords and start like men into action? I am weary to death with this stuff—no disrespect to his lordship—this if—and if—and if again! Our lives are fading away, our king is growing old, England is getting used to the usurper's rule, and there is no saying to what degradation she may not submit when she finds she has let the time pass, and is driven perforce to stand, like the ass between the bundles of hay, perishing because she doesn't know her own mind. I know mine—and this it is!" and therewith he drew his sword, and flourished its bright blade before the eyes of those about him, who were a good deal excited by the gesture.

Again Clarence Harvey felt the touch, and had to whisper—

"That's Scum Goodman—an actor once, next he was kept in funds by a duchess, then tried for poisoning one of the duchess's children, then for forging bank-notes, now he's a devoted Jacobite."

"Hum! ha! I understand the gentleman's bravery perfectly," said Lord Langton.

"Yes—but he is brave; he is quite capable —"

"Of anything, I doubt not—murder inclusive, I dare say—if we wanted such jobs doing."

A middle-aged man was the third speaker, who, in quiet, deliberate accents, and illiterate and ungrammatical speech, spoke very thoughtfully except when he had occasion to touch upon religion. Then his Protestant fanaticism broke out, and raised murmurs from the Catholics around him, till the chairman reminded the assemblage how valuable to their cause was the presence of one who did not belong to their faith, but who represented the faith of the majority of Englishmen; and who was, besides, a rich man, and able to help them with funds; and who, to sum up all, was one of the best of brewers, and able to popularise their cause at a critical time by making all London drunk with their darling beverage! This good humoured speech satisfied at once Mr. John Maltby, the rich Protestant brewer, and the audience he had so unwisely addressed.

It was not till the fourth speaker's address that the actual business of the night began to make progress. He sat bare-headed before them—having removed his wig in order to wipe off the perspiration—and appeared very old and tottering, altogether unfit for the rough work of initiating revolution. But when he began to speak, his thin, clear, silvery, shaky voice soon revealed the subtle and learned politician, a man who had grown grey in the service of the law, and who now was able to bring all the qualities of a legal debater and of a strictly logical mind to the aid of his beloved cause.

He, too, as Clarence whispered, had sworn allegiance to the existing Government; but it was well known he had only done this in order to retain a lucrative post he held in the Court of Chancery; and as his brother Jacobites valued very much his legal acumen, they did not trouble themselves about this seeming submission to the powers that be—or rather they enjoyed the idea of his being an unknown enemy in the Philistines' camp, who, in the time coming, would be of invaluable service when everybody "came into their own."

Such was Sir William Larkyns, Knight, whose