

But that fear now also dies out; men breathe again in comfort, and England is itself once more.

At this precise moment of time Lord Langton is sitting in a miserable garret in Spitalfields, where he has found temporary shelter with a friend of Clarence Harvey's—a friend of whose fidelity the latter is absolutely sure.

A long row of letters lies on the table, and Lord Langton is now finishing the last of the series.

As he seals it, and puts it with the others, spread out to allow the addresses to dry, he says to his servant—

"Clarence, you know what I do?"

"Yes."

"And you have no fear for yourself?"

"None!"

"You persist then, in spite of my most earnest wishes that you should leave me, and not further compromise yourself?"

"I do."

"And I, knowing of your relations with the Chief of the Secret Service Department, may still trust you?"

"How do you wish me to answer that?" asked Clarence Harvey, earnestly. "How can I, one so little esteemed, say aught that you will care to hear?"

"I will tell you: explain why you feel this interest in me; and that would be the exact assurance I should like to receive from you."

"Does Lord Langton really not know?" asked Clarence Harvey, reproachfully, and, to Lord Langton's astonishment, he saw the tears gathering in the youth's eyes.

"I—I know? What do you mean—what can you mean?"

There was something in the youth's look and manners so inexplicable, that Lord Langton could not but gaze steadily in his face.

Then he rose, came to Clarence Harvey, put his two hands upon his shoulders, and said—

"Have you deceived me? Are you other than what you seem? By heavens, it is so! That blush! A woman! Oh, Maria, there is no resisting the truth! I know you now?"

Maria's face was indeed suffused with colour as she saw herself—and in that garb—at last recognised.

Presently she saw, or fancied she saw, a stern expression gathering over his countenance.

"Forgive me! forgive me! oh, my dear lord and master, and I will tell you all. I love Paul Arkdale. I could not bear to think of his hearing the story that you had to tell about me to his master and to your sister. I determined to do something bold, dangerous, and to me not profitable, in the hope that he and you might at last—at last—"

Here Maria broke down into a passionate fit of weeping, and it was a long and sad task for Lord Langton to restore her to anything like spirit and confidence. And then, when she found he meant at once to send her away—perhaps back to the mercer—she broke out into such wild and agitating appeals, that he was obliged to consent to let her preserve for a short time longer her incognito, and so go on to fulfil his errands.

"Clarence," said he—"since I suppose I must still call you so—we must not deceive ourselves. I am undertaking a business that I believe, in my conscience, even more desperate than that which Sir George Charter has carried to such a lamentable end. I am now calling together all the men who have committed themselves to me, but who were not mixed up with that foul business—"

"But will they come?" asked Clarence, "after the events of the last few days?"

"They must! They shall! I have that in my hands which will compel them. But have you the courage to say so, in delivering these letters, if they make any kind of excuses?"

"What should I have to say?"

"Nothing but this—*my master expects you.*"

"I understand. Trust me, master!"

"Very good. Now go into that room, and you will find every requisite for once more so changing your personal appearance and dress,

that not even our friend the Chief shall penetrate your disguise!"

Maria clapped her hands, then instantly relapsed into sobriety.

"You do not mind forgetting for awhile your personal beauty, do you?"

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Maria, inquisitively.

"Make you into as ugly and old a hag as I possibly can. But never mind, Mistress Preston, Master Paul shall not see you!"

Maria blushed, and consented.

"Go, then, put on the dress—then come to me, and I will give you the finishing touches!"

Maria obeyed, and returned in a few minutes the oddest picture possible. The incorrigible coquette had taken advantage of the circumstance in a truly characteristic way. Finding the dress consisted of the black, rusty, decayed weeds of some poor old widow, and conscious that her Clarence-Harvey face would be just as unsuitable as her own for the future representation, she had ridded herself of all the stains on her face and neck, and restored her natural loveliness to its pristine power. What little she lost through the effects of the dyes used, was more than compensated for by the vivid blushes which covered her features as she returned to Lord Langton, conscious of that beauty, and of the fact that he, too, would be so.

He was indeed conscious. The laugh that first greeted such a grotesque apparition changed as he gazed, and he found his own colour mounting, his own thoughts wandering in unlawful directions, till checked by a single thought—Lady Herrial! Then the danger was gone. That powerful talisman saved him.

"So, Mistress Preston! you thought, I suppose, I should be obliged to ask myself whether I could bear to destroy such a piece of God's work, even for a short time? Eh?"

Maria laughed, and became more radiantly lovely than ever.

"Very well. Now look here!" Lord Langton produced two water-colour drawings. How Maria stared at them! She saw in an instant what they were—a portrait of herself as Clarence Harvey, and a copy of the same portrait, which had been touched all over by some skillful artist, probably Lord Langton himself, so as to make the same portrait change suddenly from twenty to sixty years of age! Every line, every touch of shading was so definitely made, that the second portrait became a working guide as to the alteration of the original lace itself.

"You won't look so ugly, after all, you see!" said Lord Langton, with a laugh. "That is my only regret. But come, we have no time to lose—come, re-darken your pretty self into Clarence Harvey, and then I will try what I can do to turn you out artistically as Dame Gibson, a poor, old, decayed widow, seeking help to go abroad to an only son, and bringing a letter of recommendation from a friend to each of the grand people you have to call on. Thus I think you will be likely to escape notice of the spies who haunt the neighbourhood of all the personages with whom I must now communicate."

"Shall I have no difficulty in obtaining admittance?" asked Clarence.

"Not the slightest. Say always to the servant *his master expects you*. That will invariably compel him to go in with your message. That message will be understood; and then your only other message will be—apart from my letter '*My master expects you!*' Smile off all explanations, and say to the most urgent remonstrances, 'I assure you I have nothing in the world else to say than that *MY MASTER WILL EXPECT YOU.*'"

A couple of hours later the landlady of the house was greatly puzzled to know how that old woman who went out of the house with a bag on her arm had got into it, and hurried up-stairs to ask Lord Langton if she had stolen nothing.

The bag contained all the letters, carefully fastened up in the lining, while the bag itself revealed, on opening, nothing but the old lady's knitting-needles, and worsted, with a stocking half made, her handkerchief, some broken biscuits, and a capital representation, in minor matters, of the heterogeneous contents of that wonderful receptacle—an old woman's pocket.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE LAST APPEAL.

Maria's work has been well done. She has passed from one Jacobite to another the signal for meeting, has resisted, almost with malicious enjoyment, every attempt made to persuade, to terrify, or to bribe her into saying she had "not been able to find" the worthy gentleman in question, or that he was so watched that the cause would be injured if he stirred hand or foot; to these and similar appeals she had ever the same ready answer, "My Master expects you!" and away she went, tarrying no further question.

Some of the more cowardly ones of the party did still hang back, but the great majority came to the appointment, and there they now wait Lord Langton's arrival.

The place of meeting was a miller's, on the edge of a little creek running into the Thames, near Wandsworth. There was still to be seen one of the latest London examples of the wind-mill, with green sward all about it, like a bit of country still lingering in the precincts of the great town, and the miller himself, though a stern and fanatical adherent to James, had enjoyed the singular good fortune to be quite unsuspected by the authorities: hence the choice of his house now.

The miller's house, an old-fashioned one, the remains of what had been a superb old manor house in the Tudor style, was only a short distance from the mill, and there came from near and far some thirty Jacobites, to obey Lord Langton's call.

Beginning with the first darkness of night, the miller—having sent away all his people on one pretence and another—took his boat across alone, and waited.

Not for long. One dark figure came forth, gave the signal "Now if ever!" shook hands, and silently got into the boat.

Then the two waited. Presently two other figures came up at the same moment from different directions, paused, peered suspiciously at each other through the darkness; then one of them tried an experiment, saying—

"Now if—"

"Now if ever, bravo boy!" ejaculated the relieved Jacobite, and these descended to the boat.

Others followed; the boat was soon filled; and then, with muffled oars, the miller and one of the Jacobites rowed the boat over, to return and return again till the whole were assembled.

By this expedient the miller's own neighbours, scattered about further inland, were ingeniously kept in the dark, utterly unsuspecting.

When, after a long delay, no fresh persons appeared, the boat ceased its passages.

A dark, agitated, stormy meeting is the one now being held in the bay-windowed room of the old manor house.

"Where is our summoner?" is the cry, again and again repeated, and in tones and with accents that imply that the evil "spirits," of which Hotspur spake, have for once consented to come from the "vast deep" at Lord Langton's call, but only to read him for his audacity.

The miller, an imperturbable man, goes in and out, bringing beer, and bread and cheese, the only "cheer" he can offer them, and the Jacobites, in spite of the furious passions that possess them, manage to do justice to these simple refreshments.

While he is away from the room on one of these errands—for the Jacobites are terribly thirsty—the miller puts down his can, goes to a door, opens it, and listens. Presently he coughs—the very gentlest of coughs—and steps descend the staircase, and Lord Langton comes into the passage where the miller is.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the miller.

"Of what?" asked Lord Langton.

"That these men do not mean fighting for King James, but may mean murder of King James's noblest adherent!"

"If you mean me, by this extravagant praise, I can only say, my friend, I have within the last few months seen and heard too many roaring lions in my path to heed the monsters much now.

"Besides, what's my life worth if I can do no—"