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"THE GREAT MOGUL"

By Louis Tracy

Author of The Wings of the Morning

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"Nay, lass, I am getting old. Be not vexed with young Master Beeston because he guessed not of your peril."

"I would brave a hundred swords to serve you," stammered George. Better had he remained silent. No girl likes love-making in public. Anna seemingly paid no heed to his bashful words, but her eyes sparkled with some glint of annoyance.

Roger Sainton, ever more ready to laugh than to quarrel, smoothed over the family tiff by breaking out into a diatribe on the virtues of the knight's Brown Devon ale. Mowbray, too, seeing how the land lay, offered more attention to Mistress Eleanor Roe than to her stately cousin.

Herein he only followed his secret inclination. The girl's shy blue eyes and laughing lips formed a combination difficult to resist, if resistance were thought of. She was dressed in simple white. Her hair, plaited in the Dutch style, was tied with a bow of blue riband, nor was her gown too long to hide the neat shoes of saffron-colored leather which adorned her pretty feet.

She wore no ornaments, and her attire was altogether less expensive than that of Anna Cave. His own experiences had given Mowbray a clear knowledge of domestic values. Judging by appearances, he thought that the house of Roe was not so well endowed with wealth as the house of Cave. He did not find the drawback amiss. He was young enough, and sufficiently romantic in disposition, to discover ample endowment in Eleanor's piquant face and bright, if somewhat timid, wit.

Anna, who looked preoccupied, quickly upset an arrangement which threatened to leave her and Beeston to entertain each other.

It was not yet dark when the supper was ended. Anna, rising suddenly when a waiting-man produced a dust-covered flagon of Alicant, assumed an animated air.

"I see you sip your wine rather than drink it, Master Mowbray," she cried. "Will you not join Nellie and me in the garden, and leave to these graver gentlemen the worship of Bacchus?"

"Aye," growled George Beeston, spurred into a display of spirit, "though Venus may be coy the god of wine never refuses his smile."

"Take an old man's advice, George," said Sir Thomas confidentially, "and never seek to woo a girl with a glum face."

"Better still, said Roger, reaching for the flagon, "wait until she woos thee. Gad, a woman plagues a man sufficiently after he is wed that his heart should ache before the knot is tied."

"If your heart ached, Master Sainton, its size would render the ailment of much consequence," said Eleanor.

"Mayhap 'tis like an August mushroom, which, when overgrown, hath the consistency of hide," he answered, and his jolly laugh caused even young Beeston to smile.

"Roger and I were bred together," said Mowbray, as he walked with the two girls into the small public garden which faced the house. "I vow he never cared for woman other than his mother."

"*Belike it* is the fashion in Wensleydale," was Anna's comment.

"Nay, Mistress Cave, such fashion will not commend itself anywhere. Certes, I have observed that it does not prevail in London."

This with a glance at Eleanor, but the retort told Anna that although Mowbray came from the shires his wits were not dull.

As his hostess, however, she curbed the inclination to make some one suffer vicariously for poor George Beeston.

"May I make bold to ask if you seek advancement at court?" she inquired civilly.

"Yes, if it help one at court to wish to fight for his Majesty. That is my desire. After much entreaty, my mother allowed me to travel hither, in the hope that my distant kinsman, the Earl of Beverley, might procure me the captaincy of a troop of horse. As for Roger, his mother was my mother's foster-sister, so the worthy dame sent her son to take care of me."

"What will the good ladies say when they hear that you had not been in London an hour ere you stormed Gondomar's house to succor a couple of silly wenches?" put in Eleanor.

"My mother will remember that my father lamed two men who sought to stop their wedding, but Mistress Sainton will clasp her hands and cry, 'Mercy o' me! what manner o' fules be those Spaniards that they didna run when they set eyes on my Roger? They mun be daft!"

His ready reproduction of the Yorkshire dialect brought a laugh to their lips; it aided Eleanor in no small degree to hide the blush which mantled her fair cheeks when Walter so aptly turned the tables on her.

But Anna, if restrained in her own behalf, thought that this young spark's wooing of her friend should be curbed.

"There was purpose in your father's prowess," she said. "Sir Harry Revel told me he wished us no indignity, so, perchance, you erred in your boldness, though, indeed, I do not cavil at it."

"Sir Harry Revel lied. When I meet him I shall tell him so."

"Nay, nay. You take me too seriously. I pray you forget my banter. It would ill dequite your services were careless words of mine to provoke another encounter."

"For my part, I plead with you on behalf of the Marquis of Bath. He is but a goose, though he carries the feathers of a peacock," added Nellie.

In their talk they passed along the north side of the garden. Here, a number of trees gave grateful shade in the daytime. A wall beyond, with foliage peeping over it, showed that anotoher smaller enclosure, belonging to some civic dignitary, occupied one of the few open spaces remaining within the city defenses.

At this moment, though darkness had not yet fallen, the gloom cast by the trees rendered persons near at hand indistinct. Their voices must have given warning of their coming, for a tall cavalier, wrapped in a cloak, suddenly stepped from behind a broad-beamed elm.

"Anna!" he said, "and Nellie! But whom else have we here?"

The girls started, and Mowbray would have resented the newcomer's manner had not Eleanor cried:—

"My brother!"

Anna, too, quickly intervened.

"This is Master Walter Mowbray," she said, "and his breeding, no less than the help he rendered so freely today, warrants more courteous greeting from Sir Thomas Roe."

The stranger, a young man of dignified appearance, made much amends for the abruptness of his challenege that Mowbray wondered how it happened that so elegant and polished a gentleman should have startled two ladies with a peremptory challenge.

Soon this bewilderment passed. They strolled on in company, and they had not been discoursing five minutes before he discovered that Sir Thomas Roe was favored of Anna if young Beeston was favored of her father.

A certain reluctance on their part to return to the more open part of the garden did not escape him, and although there was no actual pairing off, he found little difficulty in addressing his conversation exclusively to the bewitching Eleanor.

In the half light of evening she was fairy-like, a living dream of beauty, a coy sprite, who laughed, and teased, and tantalized by her aloof propinquity. It was strange, too, that a youngster who could hold his own so fairly in an encounter of wits with Anna should be suddenly overtaken by one syllable bashfulness when left alone with Eleanor. Yet, if Master Mowbray's confusion were inexplicable, what subtle craft can dissipate the mystery of Nellie Roe's change of manner? From being shy, she became pert. She seemed to pass with a bound from demure girlhood to delightful womanhood. When Walter strove to rally her with an apt retort she overwhelmed him with a dozen. Her eyes met his and looked him out of face. It might be that the presence of her brother gave her confidence, that the sweet gloaming of a summer's eve enchanted her, that the day's adventures flashed a new and wondrous picture into the undimmed mirror of her mind. Whatever the cause, Mowbray was vanquished utterly, and, being of soldierly stock, he recognized his defeat.

There came to him, in that magic garden, the first dazzling vision of love. Never before had he met a maid to whom heart sang out the glad tidings that here was his mate. Somehow, the wondrous discovery, though it thrilled his very soul, sobered his thoughts. And then, with quick alternation of mood, he found his tongue again, and behold, Mistress Roe must fain listen, with many a sigh and sympathetic murmur, whilst he poured forth his day-dream of founding anew the fortunes of his house.

Ah, those summer nights, when hearts are virginal; they are old as Paradise, young as yester eve!

Unhappily, true love does not always find a rose-strewn path. Absorbed though they were in their talk, and ever drawing nearer until a rounded arm touched by chance was now pressed with reassuring confidence, they could not help seeing, when they met Anna and Sir Thomas Roe in a little open space, that the lady had been crying.

Indeed, she herself made no secret of it, but bravely carried off the situation by vowing that old friends should never say "Good-by."

"Here is your brother, Nell, come to tell me that he sails forthwith for some far-off land he calls Quiana," she cried, striving to laugh in order to hide the nervous break in her voice. "Not content with that, he must need add that he hopes to discover the limits of that wild river of the Amazons, as if there were greater fortunes for men of intelligence in savage countries than in our own good city."

"Can it be true that you leave us so soon?" cried Eleanor, disengaging her arm from Mowbray's hand in quick alarm.

"It is, indeed, but a matter of hours," he said lightly. "I did but break in on your after-supper stroll to ask your fair gossip for some token which should cheer my drooping spirits by kind remembrance when England shall have sunk below the line."

"A most reasonable request," put in Walter. "Had I another such keepsake from a lady whom I honor most highly I would seek the further privilege of going with you on your travels."

"Lack-a-day! at this rate we shall lose every youth of our acquaintance," said Anna, who found in excited speech the safest outlet for her emotions. "Yet, lest it be said that I would restrain young gentlemen of spirit who would fain wander abroad, I have here a memento of myself which Sir Thomas Roe shall carry as a talisman against all barbarians."

She took from beneath a ruff of lace on her breast a small oval object which was fastened by a tiny gold chain around her neck. Even in the dim light they could see it was a miniature.

"It is the work of that excellent painter, Master Isaac Olliver," she added hastily, "and, from what I know of his skill, I vow his brush was worthy of a better subject."

"Anna, it is your own portrait!" cried Roe.

"Indeed, would any woman give you the picture of another?"

"Not unless she wished me well and gave me yours."

"Have you also sat to this Master Olliver?" whispered Mowbray to Eleanor.

"'Tis clear you come from the country, sir. His repute is such that to procure one of his miniatures would cost me my dress for a year or more."

"Then he has not seen you, or, being an artist, he would beseech you to inspire his pencil."

Already they were alone again, for Roe and his lady might reasonably be expected to say something in privacy concerning that painting, and there is no telling what topic Walter would have pursued with Eleanor, his dumbness having passed away wholly, had not the noise of some one running hastily in their direction along the gravel path drawn the four together with the men in front.

It was now nearly dark, and they knew not, until he was upon them, that the individual in such urgency was George Beeston.

"Master Mowbray!" he called out, "Master Mowbray, an you be in the company, I pray you answer."

"Here I am. Is aught amiss?"

"But there is another, yet I left your good friend Sainton at the Cave!"

"We are accompanied by Sir Thomas Roe, with whom you are acquainted," intervened Anna, in the clear, cold accents which were but too familiar in Beeston's ears.

"Ah!"

The little word meant a good deal, but the young man was too single-minded to seek a quarrel with a rival at that moment. Gulping back the bitter exclamation which rose to his lips, he said quietly:—

"I am glad it is none other. Here be ill news to hand. The King has sent officers demanding the instant rendition of two strangers, one Mowbray by name and the other a maniac of monstrous growth, who committed grave default today without the confines of the city. The requisition is made in proper form under his Majesty's sign manual. The sheriff cannot withstand it. He hath sent a privy warning, and he comes hither with some pomp quick on the heels of his messenger."

"Then the King's orders must be obeyed. What sayeth Sir Thomas Cave?" said Mowbray.

"His worship is greatly perturbed. He fears that Gondomar has poisoned the King's mind. You had best consult with him instantly."

"The sheriff did not give warning without motive," said Sir Thomas Roe. "He conveyed a hint that those he sought had better be absent. Unhappily Sir Thomas Cave would not be pleased by my presence in his house, or I would accompany you. Nevertheless, I advise you to avoid arrest."

"Tell us, brother dear, how this can be accomplished."

There was a tremulous anxiety in Eleanor Roe's question that sent a thrill of joy through one listener at least. Unnoticed in the darkness, Walter sought and pressed her hand.

"Return, all of you, to the dwelling," said Roe. "Let Master Mowbray bring his friend thither, and I shall conduct them both to a place of safety. None need know of my presence here. If Master Beeston desires an explanation thereof I shall accord it fittingly hereafter."

"For my part I shall be equally ready to receive it, when these Yorkshire gentlemen are provided for," said Beeston.

"Then these polite rejoinders are needless," cried Anna softly, "for Sir Thomas Roe sails forthwith for the Spanish main. Come! No more idle words. Our feet are more needed than our tongues."

They raced away together, Walter thinking no harm in helping Nellie by catching hold of her slender wrist.

They found Sir Thomas Cave's house in some disorder of frightened domestics. The knight himself was raging at the garden door.

"A nice thing," he roared at the girls, "gadding about among the bushes and gilliflowers when men's lives are at stake. Here be arquebusiers by the score come from Whitehall—"

"Where is Sainton?" demanded Mowbray, wishful to cut short any discussion that threatened to waste time.

"Gone to don his suit of leather. He says he has no mind to see his mother's good homespun cut by steel bodkins. Gad! he is a proper man. But this is a bad business, Master Mowbray. I pray you demand fair trial, yet anger not the King by repartee. He is fair enough when the harpies about him leave him to his pleasure. I have some little favor at court. It shall be exerted to the utmost, and backed by my last penny if need be. Never shall it be said that I left my daughter's protectors to languish in gaol, maimed for life, without striving with all my power—"

"Never fash yourself about us, most excellent host," roared Sainton, appearing behind the distressed old gentleman. "Friend Mowbray and I can win our way out of London as we won our way into it. Methinks 'tis a place that has little liking for honest men, saving those who, like your worship, are forced to bide in it."

Seizing the cue thus unconsciously given by Roger, Walter said hurriedly—

"We bid you Godspeed, sir, worthy friend, and hope some day to see you again. Farewell, Mistress Anna. Come Roger. I think I hear the clank of steel in the distance."

"My soul, whither will you hie yourselves at this hour?" gasped Sir Thomas.

"We can strive to avoid arrest, and that is a point gained. Forgive me! Lights are dangerous."

He seized a lantern held by a serving man and blew out the flame. Instantly he clasped Eleanor Roe around the waist and kissed her on the lips. She was so taken by surprise that she resisted not at all, even lifting her pretty face, in sheer wonderment, it might be.

"Good-by, sweetheart," he whispered. "I shall see you again, if all the King's men made a cordon about you."

Then Roger and he vanished among the trees, while a loud knocking disturbed the quietude of the night in the street which adjoined the gardens.

CHAPTER IV.

"The Philistines be upon thee, Samson."
—Judges xvi. 9.

For the first time in his life Mowbray felt the tremor of a woman's kiss. Naturally, in an age when kissing was regarded, save by husbands and jealous lovers, as a mere expression of esteem, his lips had met those of many a pretty girl during a village revel or when the chestnuts exploded on the hearth of an All Hallow's Eve. Yet there was an irresistible impulse, a silent avowal, in the manner of his leave-taking of Eleanor Roe that caused the blood to tingle in his veins with the rapture of a new delight. For a few paces he trod on air.

Big Roger, recking little of these lover-like raptures, brought him back to earth with a question—

"Had we not better seek the open streets than scramble through these uncertain trees, friend Walter?"

"Forgive me. I should have told you that one awaits us here."

"Marry! Is the refuge planned already?"

"I know not. Hist, now, a moment, and we shall soon be wiser."

They stood in silence for a few seconds. They heard the clash of accoutrements and the champing of bits from the cavalcade halted outside Alderman Cave's door.

"I faith," growled Roger, "his most gracious Majesty hath sent an army to apprehend us. Yet, if you be not misled, he bids fair to be no better off than Waltham's calf, which ran nine miles to suck a bull and came home athirst."

"I pray you cease. Sir Thomas! Sir Thomas Roe!"

At the call a figure advanced from amidst the trees.

"Grant me your pardon, Master Mowbray," came the polite response. "I was not prepared to encounter a son of Anak in your company. I had grave design to climb the wall speedily when I saw your giant comrade dimly outlined. It will be a matter of no small difficulty to pilot him unobserved through the city."

"Show me the North Road and I'll make my own gait," said Roger.

"Nay, that is not my intent. I was, in foolish parlance, thinking aloud. Difficulties exist only that resolute men may surmount them. I do not decry your length of limb, good sir. Rather would I avail myself of it. Behind these bushes there is a wall of such proportions that your height alone will enable us to scale it without noise. Now, Master Mowbray, up to your friend's shoulders. I will follow suit. Between the two of us we shall hoist him after."

Roe's cool demeanor inspired them with confidence. Though it was now so dark, owing to storm-clouds having banked up from the west, that they had to grope their path through the undergrowth, they obeyed his directions. All three were seated astride a ten-foot wall without much delay.

That they had not acted an instant too soon was evident from the fact that already armed men carrying torches were spreading fan-wise across Draper's Garden from the Caves's house, and they heard a loud voice bellowing from the private doorway:—

"I call on all liege men and true to secure the arrest of two malefactors who have but now escaped from this dwelling."

Mowbray found himself wondering why the hue and cry had been raised so promptly. Some one must have indicated the exact place where he and Roger had disappeared. But Roe dropped from the wall on the other side and whispered up to them:—

"Follow! It is soft earth."

"Hold by the wall," he murmured when they stood by his side. "It leads to a wicket."

Walking in Indian-file they quickly passed into a narrow court. Thence, threading many a dark alley and tortuous by-street, stopping always at main thoroughfares until their guide signaled that the way was clear, they crossed the city towards the river. Roe knew London better than the watch. Seemingly, he could find the track blindfold, and Walter guessed that the cavalier often used this device in order to encounter Anna Cave unseen by others. It was passing strange that Nellie should be an inmate of a house where her brother was so unwelcome. However, this was no hour to push inquiries. He was now utterly lost as to locality, and he awaited, with some curiosity, the outcome of this nocturnal wandering through the most ancient part of London.

At last, the close air of alleys gave place to a fresher draft, and his quick ear caught the plash of water.

"Guard your steps here," said Roe. "The stairs are not of the best, but they will bear your weight if you proceed with caution."

He appeared to vanish through a trapdoor in a small jetty. Down in the impenetrable darkness they heard him say:—

"I have flint and steel, yet, if you give me your hand, I can dispense with a light."

Thus, with exact directions, he seated them safely in a boat, and, controlling the craft by retaining touch with the beams of the wharf, after gliding through the gloom for a few yards he was able to ply a pair of oars in the stream. Neither of the others had been on the Thames at night—and so, when the oarsman vigorously impelled the wherry straight into what looked like a row of tall houses, with lights in some of the upper windows, the North-country youths thought for sure they would collide violently with the foundations. They were minded to cry a warning, but seeing that Roe glanced frequently over his shoulder they refrained.

Thus, they shot under one of the many arches of London Bridge, covered then throughout its length by tall buildings, and, once they were speeding in midstream of the open river, they saw a forest of masts rising dimly in front.

Ere long, Sir Thomas Roe, who exercised sailor-like skill in the management of his oars, picked out one of the innumerable company of ships and lay to under the vessel's quarter.

"Defiance ahoy!" he cried softly.

"Aye, aye," replied a voice, and a rope ladder fell into the boat. Whilst Roe held it his companions clambered aloft, gaining the deck of a fair-sized merchantman where watch was kept by a number of sailors.

It chanced that Sainton mounted first, and a lantern flashed into his eyes. As he became visible, by feet at a time, for he stood nearly seven feet high, the man holding the light fell back in amazed fear.

"Avaunt thee!" he roared. "Up pikes to repel boarders! Here be the devil himself come to murther us!"

"Peace, fellow," said Roger, "when Old Nick visits thee he shall not need to come in the guise of an honest man. Yet, I warrant thee, Sir Thomas Roe shall play the devil when he comes aboard if thou makest such a row without better cause."

Mowbray's appearance, with Roe close at his heels, quelled the excitement of the watch. A few sharp words recalled them to their duties. The ladder was hoisted in and the boat secured with a painter, whilst Roe led the newcomers to the after cabin, where, over a flagon of wine, he sought their better acquaintance.

Mowbray gave him a detailed account of all that had taken place, and Roe's finely-chiseled face flushed deeply when he heard the true extent of the outrage planned by the bandi of young gallants.

"I have no wish to defend Gondomar," he said slowly, seeming to compel reason to master rage. "He has brought the Inquisition to England. He carries our worthy King in his pocket. Yet I would fain believe that he is too wary and prudent to countenance such doings at the very gate of the city, which he fears alone in all England."

"To be just, I believe he was not present. Nevertheless, word came to Sir Thomas Cave that when tidings of the affair reached him, he rose instantly from play at Beaujeu's and hastened to Whitehall to demand our arrest."

"Ah, it is a bad business. I am much bounden to you. You know that one of these girls is my youngest sister. The other I prize dearer than life itself. Yet, unless you and Master Sainton agree to sail with me on this ship to the Amazons I fear that naught can save you from the King's wrath. I am powerless, being in ill repute at court. The city is strong, but unwilling as yet, to openly defy the thieves and adulterers who pander to James's vanity and stop his ears to the representations of God-fearing men. This cannot endure. Our people are long-suffering but mighty in their wrath. If Elizabeth ruled with a strong hand she ever strove to advance the honor of England and to safeguard the liberties of her subjects. Now our flag is trailed in the mud. We are treated with contumely abroad and our protests at home are stifled by the Star Chamber. It must end. It shall end. Monarcy itself shall rot ere England perishes!"

These were dangerous words. They lost none of their tremendous import when uttered by a man of such statesmanlike qualities that Anthony a Wood wrote of him long afterwards: "Those who knew him well have said that there was nothing wanting in him towards the accomplishment of a scholar, gentleman or courtier."

It was inevitable that the opinion of such an one should weigh deeply with young Mowbray, and impress even the less critical brains of Roger Sainton. Roe's appearance, no less than his impassioned outburst, would have won the credence of any well-bred youths in the Kingdom. In face, in figure, and indeed in many of his attributes, he resembled that gallant and high-minded adventurer of an earlier generation, Sir Walter Raleigh, who was now a close prisoner in the Tower. He had the bright, penetrating eyes, the long, aquiline nose, firm mouth, and well-molded chin which bespeak good birth and high intelligence. A mass of brown hair waved over a lofty forehead and fell in ringlets on his neck. He wore the moustaches and Vandyke tuft of beard affected by gentlemen of the period, and the natural gravity of his expression could be wholly dispelled, when occasion warranted, by a smile of rare humor.

But he was in no smiling mood just then. He leaned his head on his hands and sighed wearily. Mowbray, notwithstanding his own desperate though wholly unmerited plight, now presented to his eyes in all its sinister significance, could not help marveling how it came about that the leader of an expedition to the Spanish Main, which could scarce be undertaken without royal sanction, should avow himself so helpless in that very circle, whilst it was still more strange that Roe's position and attainments did not render him a favorite suitor in the Cave household.

Moreover, the King had knighted him, and Nellie Roe had said, during their walk in the garden, that her brother was a great friend of Prince Henry, and declared laughingly that Anna should think herself highly flattered, for the gossip ran that Princess Elizabeth was much attached to "Honest Tom," as she called him.

Roe's disturbed reflections and Mowbray's bewilderment alike were put an end to by Roger.

"Ecod!" he cried, thumping the stout table screwed to the floor of the cabin and making the tankards dance under the blow, "Walter and I can ask no better fate than to voyage with you to the Indies. We are in quest of fortune, and folk say that the Spaniards have gold for the taking. Here's to you, Sir Thomas Roe, and here's to all of us! May we never want nowt, none of us!"

He drained his own tankard and caused a gleam of amusement to flicker on Roe's face.

"Had you lost your right hand for brawling, Master Sainton," he said, "you would now lose the left if the King heard your sentiments. Harry a Spaniard, i' faith! That is rankest heresy nowadays. Yet there is no telling what may befall when we set our course west by south of the Canaries. And now, let me see to your comfort for the night."

He called a young negro from the depths of the ship; the sudden appearance of the boy's shining black face in the cabin caused Roger Sainton to start so violently that Roe and Mowbray laughed, while the negro himself displayed all his teeth in a huge grin. Mowbray, during an earlier visit to London, had seen many a dark-skinned man; it was becoming the fashion to have one or more of these ebony-hued servitors in each household with any pretensions to grandeur. But Roger had never before set eyes on the like, and the apparition was unexpected.

"Gad," said he, reaching for the flagon again, "no wonder the sailor-man thought he saw the devil. 'Tis clear he fancied that this worthy had fallen overboard."

He stood up, to follow Roe, whereupon the negro's astonishment was even greater than Roger's, for the cock's feathers in the Yorkshireman's hat swept the ceiling of the cabin, and his belt was nearly on a level with the other's chin.

"Where him one dam big fighting-man lie, sir?" said the black to Roe. "Dere am no bunk in the ship will hold him half."

Indeed, this was a minor difficulty which had not been foreseen. In his own cabin, which Roe intended to place temporarily at their service, there were two bunks, but each was a full twelve inches too short for Sainton. They were stoutly built, too, of solid oak and abutting on strong lockers. The only way in which one of them could be made to serve his needs was to cut away the partition, and it was now a very late hour to seek the services of the ship's carpenter.

"If that is the only drawback, it is solved most readily," said Roger, and with his clenched fist, guarded only by a leather glove, he smashed a strong oaken panel out of its dovetailed joints.

The negro's eyes nearly fell out with amazement, and, indeed, Sir Thomas Roe was not prepared for this simple yet very unusual feat of sheer strength.

"That blow would have felled an ox," he cried, and Mowbray told him how Roger once, in the market square of Richmond, had, for a wager, brought down an old bull with a straight punch between the eyes.

Now, the negro not only saw and heard, but he talked of these things to the watch, and they, in their turn, related them to others of the ship's company in the early morning. It chanced that a half-caste Spanish cook, hired because of his knowledge of the dialects of Guiana, was among the auditory, and he stole to the cabin wherein the two Englishmen lay sleeping soundly. Mere idle curiosity impelled him to gaze at the man who could perform such prodigies, and, having gaped sufficiently, he went ashore for a farewell carouse with certain cronies in Alsatia.

Not the great men of the world, but their petty myrmidons, are of the mainspring of the events which shape the destinies not alone of individuals but of nations. Even Pedro, the half-caste, might have dispensed with the day's drinking bout had his cup been fashioned of the magic crystal which enables credulous people to see future events in its shadowy mirror! Assuredly, some of the sights therein would have sated his desire for stimulant.

Mowbray and Sainton were aroused by an unusual movement. At first they hardly knew where they were, and it was passing strange that the floor should heave and the walls creak.

Mowbray sprang from his bunk quickly and looked through the open door to see if it were possible that the ship had cast off from her moorings during the night. The frowning battlements of the Tower, dimly visible through a pelting rain, showed that his first surmise was incorrect. The Defiance was anchored securely enough, but a high wind had lashed the river into turbulence, and the storm which threatened over night had burst with fury over London.

Roe, too, awoke.

"Gad," he cried, "I dreamt I was being hanged as a cutpurse, and I felt the branch of an oak-tree swaying as I swung in the wind."

"You will have many such visions if you mix Brown Devon and Alicant with the wines of Burgundy in your midnight revels," said Walter, cheerfully. To his ordered senses had come the memory of the garden and Nellie Roe's kiss. He hailed the bad weather with glee. Men would be loth to stir abroad, and, if Sir Thomas Roe's arrangements permitted, he could foresee another meeting with Eleanor that evening.

"At times you talk but scurvy sense," grumbled Sainton, pulling on his huge boots. "'Tis the lack of a nasty, washed down by one of the good liquors you name, that hath disordered my stomach and sent its fasting vapors to my brain. By the cross of Osmotherly, I could eat the haunch of a horse."

"Without there!" shouted Mowbray. "Where is the black summoned by Sir Thomas to wait on us?"

The negro came at the call. He told them that his master had gone ashore at daybreak, with intent to return before noon, but that breakfast awaited their lordships' pleasure in the cabin.

The hours passed all too slowly until Roe put in an appearance. He was ferried to the ship in some state, in a boat with six rowers. He had learnt that the city was scoured for them all night, and the rumor ran that they had escaped towards Barnet, this canard having been put about by some friendly disposed person.

"I cannot understand the rancor displayed in this matter," he said. "King James must have been stirred most powerfully against you, yet it is idle to think that you have earned the hatred of some court favorite already. Perhaps Lord Dereham is seeking revenge for being thrown into the glass-house, though, if rumor be true, his Lordship dwells in one, being a perfect knave. In any event, youu must not be seen, and I shall warn my men to forget your very existence. We sail with to-morrow morning's tide, and, if this wind holds, shall be clear of the Downs by night."

Thinking this speech augured badly for his hopes, Mowbray said nothing of his plans to visit Cave's house after dusk.

The sailors, under Roe's directions, began to warp the ship alongside a wharf, where bales of merchandise and barrels of flour, salt beef, dried fish, preserved fruit for scurvy, wine, beer, and the mixed collection of stores needed for a long voyage, were piled in readiness to be placed in her hold.

Walter, and Roger especially, were warned to remain hidden in the after cabin, where none save the ship's officers had business, and Roe felt that he could trust his subordinates, if for no better reason than self-interest, for two such recruits were valuable additions to the ship's company.

Walter found in a cupboard a ship's journal of a voyage to Virginia, and entertained Roger with extracts therefrom, whilst the latter, at times, stretched his huge limbs and hummed a verse or two of that old song of Percy and Douglas, which, as Sir Philip Sydney used to say, had the power to stir the heart as a trumpet.

The rain ceased with the decline of day. The monotonous clank of the windlass and the cries of stevedores and sailors gave place to the swish of water as the watch washed the deck. For convenience's sake, a supply of fresh water being the last thing to be taken aboard next morning, the vessel was tied up to the wharf. When the tide fell she was left high and dry on the mud.

Roe was much occupied ashore with those city merchants who helped him in his venture, but he undertook privily to warn Anna Cave as to the whereabouts of the two young men to whom she was so greatly indebted, and they might leave to her contriving the transfer of their baggage to the ship at a late hour.

"You shall not see her again, then?" asked Walter, with a faint hope that her lover would strain every nerve in that direction, when he might accompany him.

"No," was the determined answer. "Such a course would be fraught with risk to you. I might be seen and followed. Her father's serving-men, coming hither by night, will pass unnoticed."

"Do not consider me in that respect, I pray you."

Roe shook his head and sighed.

"I am resolved," he said. "We may not meet until I return, if God wills it. I told her as much last night. We said 'farewell'; let it rest at that."

So Walter's heart sank into his boots, for the case between him and Nellie rested on as doubtful a basis as that between Roe and Anna.

He sat down to indite a letter to his mother, which Sir Thomas would entrust to one of his friends having affairs in the north. Roger could not write, but he sent a loving message to Mistress Sainton, with many quaint instructions as to the management of the garth and homestead.

"Tell her," quoth he, "that I be going across seas to reive the Dons, and that I shall bring back to her a gold drinking cup worthy of her oldest brew."

"A man may catch inks if the heavens fail," commented Walter in Rabelais's phrase.

"Or if he lime a twig he may e'en obtain a sparrow. My auld mother will be pleased enough to see me if the cup be pewter. Write, man, and cheer her. I'll warrant you have vexed Mistress Mowbray with a screed about you wench you were sparking in the garden last night."

Indeed, it was true. Walter bent to the table to hide a blush. His letter dealt, in suspicious detail, with the charms and graces of Nellie Roe.

At last the missive was addressed and sealed. It was nearly ten o'clock, and London was quieting down for the night, when the two quitted their cabin and walked to the larger saloon where Sir Thomas Roe with Captain Davis, the commander of the Defiance, was busy with many documents.

They talked there a little while. Suddenly they heard the watch hailed by a boat alongside.

"What ship is that?"

"Who hails?"

"The King's officer."

Roe sprang to his feet and rushed out, for the cabin was in the poop, and the door was level with the main deck. The others followed. In the river, separated from the vessel by a few feet of mud, was an eight-oared barge filled with soldiers.

"'Fore God!" he whispered to Mowbray, "they have found your retreat."

They turned towards the wharf. A company of halberdiers and arquebusiers had surrounded it and already an officer was advancing towards the gangway.

"Bid Sainton offer no resistance," said Roe, instantly. "At least you can demand fair hearing, and I will try what a bold front can do. Remember, you are sworn volunteers for my mission to Guiana."

As well strive to stem the water then rushing up from the Nore towards London Bridge as endeavor to withstand the King's warrant. The officer was civil, but inflexible. Sorely against the grain, both Mowbray and Sainton were manacled and led ashore.

"Tell me, at least, whither you take them," demanded Roe. "The King hath been misled in this matter and my friends will seek prompt justice at his Majesty's hands."

"My orders are to deliver them to the Tower," was the reply.

"Were you bidden come straight to this ship?"

There was no answer. The officer signified by a blunt gesture that he obeyed orders, but could give no information.

Surrounded by armed men and torch-bearers the unlucky youths were about to be marched off through the crowd of quay-side loiterers which had gathered owing to the presence of the soldiers—Roe was bidding them be of good cheer and all should yet go well with them—when an unexpected diversion took place.

Standing somewhat aloof from the mob were several men carrying bags and boxes. With them were two closely cloaked females, and this little party, arriving late on the scene, were apparently anxious not to attract attention. But the glare of the flambeaux fell on Roger's tall form and revealed Mowbray by his side.

"Oh, Ann," wailed a despairing voice, "they have taken him."

Walter heard the cry, and so did Roe. They knew who it was that spoke. Roe, with a parting pressure of Mowbray's shoulders, strode off to comfort his sister, whilst Mowbray himself, though unable to use his hands, hustled a halberdier out of the way and cried:—

"Farewell, Mistress Roe. Though the cordon of King's men be here, yet have I seen you, and, God willing, I shall not part from you so speedily when next we meet."

He knew that the girls, greatly daring, had slipped out with the men who carried his goods and those of Sainton. Though his heart beat with apprehension of an ignominious fate, yet it swelled with pride, too, at the thought that Eleanor had come to see him.

The guard, seeming to dread an attempted rescue, gathered nearer to their prisoners. A slight altercation took place between Roe and the officer anent the disposition of the prisoner's effects. Finally, Sir Thomas had his way, and their goods were handed over to the soldiers to be taken with them.

Then, a sharp command was given, the front rank lowered their halberds, the crowd gave way, and the party marched off towards the Tower.

Roger, by means of his great height, could see clear over the heads of the escort.

"That lass must be mightily smitten with thee, Walter," he said gruffly. "She would have fallen like a stone had not mistress Cave caught her in her arms."

CHAPTER V.

"This is the time—heaven's maiden sentinel
Hath quitted her high watch—the lesser spangles
Are paling one by one."

To understand the mixed feelings of anger and dread which filled the minds of the prisoners as they marched through the narrow streets on their way to the Tower, it is necessary to remember how the gross corruption of the court of the first Stuart had inspired Englishmen with a scandalized disbelief in the wisdom of their soveeign. The Tudors reigned over a people who regarded even their mad temper with a half idolatrous reverence. The great poet of the splendid epoch closed by the reign of Elizabeth fittingly expressed the popular sentiment when he spoke of "the divinity that doth hedge a King." But James, a slobbering monstrosity, at once shallow and bombastic, claiming by day monarchial privileges of the most despotic nature, and by night over drunken revels of the most outrageous license, had torn beyond repair the imperial mantle with which a chivalrous nation had been proud to clothe its ruler.

In the Puritan north especially was he regarded with fear and loathing. Hence, Mowbray and Sainton, though prepared to face with a jest any odds in defense of their honor or their country, could now only look forward to an ignominious punishment, fraught with disablement if not with death itself because they had dared to cross the path of one of the King's favorites. It was a dismal prospect for two high-spirited youths.

"We have brought our eggs to a bad market, I trow," muttered Sainton, as the gates of the Tower clanged behind them and they halted in front of the guardroom, whilst the leader of their escort was formally handing them over to the captain of the guard.

"I fear me you were ill advised to throw in your lot with mine, Roger," was all that Walter could find to say.

"Nay, nay, lad, I meant no reproach. Sink or swim, we are tied by the same band. Nevertheless, 'tis a pity I am parted from my staff and you from your sword."

"Here, they would but speed our end."

"Like enough, yet some should go with us."

He looked about him with such an air that the halberdiers nearest to him shrank away. Though fettered, he inspired terror. From a safer distance they surveyed him with the admiration which soldiers know how to yield to a redoubtable adversary.

The troops from Whitehall quickly gave place to a number of warders, and the two men were marched off, expecting no other lot for the hour than a cold cell and a plank bed. They saw, to their surprise, that some of the men carried their belongings. This trivial fact argued a certain degree of consideration in their treatment, and their hopes rose high when they were halted a second time near the Water Gate. Soon, the sentinel stationed on the projecting bastion shouted a challenge, the chief warder hurried to his side, and, after some parley, the gate was thrown open to admit the identical boat which they had seen lying alongside the Defiance. Moreover, in the light of the torches carried by those on board, they now perceived that the soldiers and rowers were not King's men but Spaniards.

The galley was brought close to the flight of steps leading down to the dark water beneath the arch, and the prisoners were bidden go aboard.

Walter hung back. The slight hope which had cheered him was dispelled by the sight of the Spanish uniforms.

"I demand fair trial by men of my own race," he cried. "Why should we be handed over to our enemies?"

He was vouchsafed no answer. Sullenly, but without delay, the warders hustled him and Roger towards the boat. They could offer no resistance. Their wrists were manacled, and, as a further precaution, a heavy chain bound their arms to their waists. It was more dignified to submit; they and their packages were stowed in the centre of the galley; the heavy gates were swung open once more, and the boat shot out into the river. For nearly three hours they were pulled down stream. They could make nothing of the jargon of talk that went on around them. Evidently there was some joke toward anent Roger's size, and one Spaniard prodded his ribs lightly with the butt end of his halberd, saying in broken English:—

"Roas' bif; good, eh?"

By reason of his bulk, Sainton seemed to be clumsy, though he was endowed with the agility of a deer. Suddenly lifting a foot, he planted it so violently in the stomach that the humorist turned a somersault over a seat. His comrades laughed, but the man himself was enraged. He regained his feet, lifted his halberd, and would have brained Roger then and there had not another interposed his pike.

An officer interfered, and there was much furious gesticulation before the discomfited joker lowered his weapon. He shot a vengeful glance at