THE GOLDEN CRUCIFIX.

(By P. G. Smyth, in the Rosary Magazine.)

A wild midwinter night in a quaint classic, cruel old London, the London of Queen Elizabeth and of Shakespeare. The storm whirled the snow through the dark and narrow streets like foam through caves and fissures in black ocean cliffs. At long intervals, swinging oil lamps, snow-coated, vainly sought with feeble rays to pierce the gloom. In doorway recesses, under the shelter of the projecting upper stories and street-fronting gables, on which the snow outlined the criss-cross beams, the few and inefficient watchmen of the night stood with their halberts beside them and their lanterns at their feet, slapping their arms to keep their sluggish blood in circulation. To one of these dubious guardians of the peace spoke a solitary belated pedestrian, a man stalwart and snow-covered.

"Prithee, good watch, is not this the house of Master Adam Langhorne, the mercer?"

"It is not, my wandering nightbird."

The watchman picked up his lantern and scanned his questioner. He saw a bold young face, bronzed and bearded, a form clad in sailor garb.

"But he did live here—I am most certain of the house."

"Art as sure of thy sight, sir mariner, as thou art of thy memory! See here." The watchman took his halbert and tinkled its steel head against a brass basin that hung from a red and white striped pole projecting from the side of the doorway. "Is that a mercer's sign, son of Neptune, or hast thou gone so long unshorn on the brine as to have forgotten the trade emblem of the ancient and useful order of barber-surgeons? So get thee on thy way, my young sea dog."

"Methinks thou art out of humor to-night, watchman," said the sailor, taking a coin from his pouch.

"So mightest thou thyself be if thy billet was to tramp all night in the snow," said the watch, his manner softening as the lantern light showed him the glint of gold. "No, good sailor, I vow I know of no person of the name you mention living on these streets. But new I am on this post. Belike he has moved away, belike he lives in the neighborhood. A friend of yours, hey?"

"My father, friend watch, and his wife, my good mother," replied the other, with a sigh of disappointment; "and this night, after ten years' absence, fondly had I hoped to meet them. But now—"

"But now, sir mariner, best, if you value your life or lucre, or both, to give over your search for the night and to return to your ship or lodgings, for most dangerous at this hour are these streets."

"Dangerous as the Spanish Main?" queried the sailor, with a laugh. "Friend watch, I may tell thee that I have sailed with Raleigh, Drake and Hawkins."

"And friend marine, I may tell thee that where thou standest now is as dangerous as any place on land or water. And so I bid thee Godspeed."

The watchman, with his halbert and lantern, left his place of shelter and plodded off along the street. As the solemn sound of a midnight bell came floating over the peaked roofs he halted and raised his voice:

"Twelve o'clock, and all's well."

Then in a flurry of white, he disappeared round a corner.

With a sudden sense of apprehension and lonelines Lieutenant Guy Langhorne turned back the way he had come to re-seek his lodgings in the Mermaid Inn, where he had arrived an hour or two before, after his ship had cast anchor in the Thames. He crunched onward through the dark and cheerless streets, sometimes sinking to his knees in the snow, for the thoroughfares, many of which were as yet unpaved, were in part rugged and uneven, abounding in dangerous ruts and pits.

By and by, through the veil of falling flakes, he discovered three figures moving in advance of him, those of an elderly man, a youth and a maiden. Soon he reached and passed them, and just then came a glare of light that enabled him better to see their persons and faces, as the ponderous carriage of some noble rolled by, accompanied by running linkboys waving blazing torches. Langhorne saw a grave, pale face, framed in gray locks that fell from under a broad-leafed hat, a rosy-cheeked damsel whose white wimple gleamed through the opening of her hooded cape, and a stout, stolid, cudgel-bearing youth who wore the cap and jerkin of an apprentice.

"Are we far from our journey's end, my daughter?" the gray-haired man inquired as Langhorne passed.

"Not far now, father," replied the girl. "Pray take Simon's arm and we shall get along easier and faster. Your arm, Simon, Heaven grant we reach her before she dies."

"They go to a dying bed," thought the buccaneer, but with the callosity begotten of ten years' sanguinary war and rapine, he almost immediately forgot the incident; it was smothered under the press of his own mental troubles, under an oppressive feeling of uneasiness, remorse and fear that had strengely some upon him like evil spirits on this the occasion of his return after long years to his native city.

"My parents, my little sister—shall I be able to find them? Are they living or dead?" were the questions that kept restlessly singing and stinging in his mind. Was this the triumphant homecoming of his dreams, the sequel of long years of adventure, hardship, imprisonment, deeds of recklessness and bloodshed? The winter wind howled as in mockery, the snow spat coldly in his face. He drew his sea cloak close around him and hastened his pace; bitter, piercing, foreign seemed the climate of London after his prolonged sojourn in warmer climes.

A sudden shriek for help brought him to a halt; then he turned back on the run. A scuffle was going on in the street. The girl that Langhorne had just passed was struggling in the grasp of a cutpurse, one of the numerous human wolves with which the city by the Thames was cursed. The gray-haired man was already prostrate at the mercy of another. As for the stout apprentice with the stolid face and the cudgel, he had taken to his heels.

"Clear the decks, lubbers!" cried Lieutenant Langhorne. With a powerful buffet he sent one footpad tumbling heels over head in the snow. He swiftly drew his Spanish bilbo and thrust it into the fleshy part of the other. The pair of ruffians floundered and limped away, snarling like wounded beasts of prey.

"Thank you, sir, oh, a thousand thanks for saving us!" exclaimed the girl. "How fortunate that a brave and true man was so near!"

"Oh, that miserable poltroon, Simon Stokes, to abandon us so!" she continued. "The fellow has not the courage of a mouse."

"And who is Simon?" amusedly inquired the rescuer.

"My father's apprentice," was the reply. "Silly, indeed to have trusted to the gallantry of such a creature, but no other choice had I. Out upon him for a runaway!"

"Then, mistress, pray trust in me for a change of convoy."

"Sir, we will gladly and thankfully accept your escort. We have not far to go, and our way seems to lie in your direction."

"Important must be the business that takes you out so late and makes you run a night gauntlet of thieves and murderers," remarked Langhorne, in perfunctionary effort at conversation.

"Of extreme importance, my good friend," said the elderly man, still panting from the effects of his fall; business of sad yet extreme and sovereign importance. And now go in peace, brave young sailor man, and God bless you."

Ous bucaneer bade them good-bye at one of the low-browed houses, in the diamond-paned windows of whose projecting upper story there was a faint glimmer of light. There was no attempt at further acquaintance or introduction, no offer, beyond a few sincere words of gratitude on the part of the rescued, to dispel a marked sense of reserve and secrecy, but to this the rover of a thousand adventures paid small regard. To him the incident had closed with the closing of the house door, when, on turning away to resume his journey, his foot struck against a hard, metallic object. Groping in the snow, he picked up what the dim light from the window showed to be a golden crucifix.

"It belongs to either the old man or the girl," he thought. His first impulse was to knock on the closed portal; his second that he should come next day and return the emblem to whom it might belong, and to this end he took sharp mental note of the house and its neighborhood: his third, and most natural, acquired after long practice, to adopt for the occasion the buccaneering motto: "To strive, to seek to find, and not to yield." The article was of gold, and therefore valuable. Crucifixes? He had seen scores of them taken with other loot from churches and convents sacked and burnt along the coast from St. Augustine to the Orinoco mouth, and sent to the melting pot to increase the reward of the plunderers. A crucifix more or less would not make much difference, no matter how obtained. So he dropped this one into his wallet.

"At night, let the wind blow high or low, it is the same merry old London," he thought, as he approached the lighted windows of his inn and entered beneath the swinging sign of the Mermaid, when he was greeted by a scene of lively concourse and carouse.

Despite the lateness, or rather earliness, of the hour there was still a noisy gathering of gossips, revelers and roysterers in the tap room; dissipated young scions of nobility and their hangers on; carousing army and naval officers; swaggering bravoes from Alsatia, with swords and souls for sale; witty but licentious playwrights, discussing the latest drama at the Globe or Blackfriars; players in the scarlet doublets and hose which the law compelled them to wear—even reckless and depraved apprentices who had stolen out of their masters' homes, with, perhaps, some of their masters' hoardings, to plunge in what they considered manly wickedness.

Guy Langhorne found himself a seat at a small table and gave order for a quart of burnt sack. Celebreties, or those whom the future would make celebrities, were nigh him. There, exchanging quips and jokes, sat shrewd Will Shakespeare—or 'Shakes-scene,' as some of his drama producers sarcastically dubbed him—prosperous joint owner in two theatres, with his boon companions, "rare Ben Jonson," poet Michael Drayton, author of -"The Shepherd's Garland," and the great actor, Richard Burbage, the original Macbeth and Romeo, Lear, Shylock and Othello. Yonder, indulging in his characteristic satire and blasphemy, was the playwright, Kit Marlowe, doomed to draw his last breath in some such scene as this, slain in loathsome quarters by a vulgar groom. Here, whispering and nodding, were a knot of the spies and informers of Lord Treasurer Burleigh, at whose beck they had helped to consign many of the best and noblest of the land to torture and the scaffold. And there, relating with gloat and swagger the ghastly doings of the day at Tyburn or in the Tower dungeons, was the notorious priest hunter, torturer and executioner, Richard Topcliffe, who had made many a victim of religious persecution at many a horrible scene of hanging, drawing and quartering.

But of all or any of these noted personages the returned buccaneer knew or cared but little. His prevailing obsessing thoughts were ten years old and more, dwelling on the days ere a hot and final quarrel with his father caused him to flee in anger from home, when his young blood fired by thrilling tales of glorious fame and fortune won on the Spanish Main, he sought and found service on a departing privateer and with defiant heart faced the mysterious ocean. In the old home life he had been a Catholic, his parents being devout and staunch adherents of the proscribed and persecuted faith of the olden times, of the England of Alfred and the Crusaders and William of Wykeham. The Catholic priests and layman whom he had seen drawn on hurdles or sledges through the mud of the streets to execution he had piously regarded as martyrs. It had been a dear and coveted privelege of his to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, secretly celebrated, when the merest incautious word or deed or treacherous whisper might have brought ruin and woe to the priest and congregation. Ay, in those dear and often dreadful days he had been a Catholic, and since then he had been nothing—nothing but a buccaneer, pursuing fickle fortune, facing for the sake of plunder death by sea or sword, a being without God to love or soul to save.

"By the doom of Robin Rover and all the brave fellows that ever swung at yard-arm or walked the plank, it was all hardly worth while," he muttered, and with a draught of the hot sack he sought to drown the queerly awakened voice of a long dormant conscience.

"Save you, sir captian, and what cheer from the high seas?"

Rousing from his maze, Langhorne wearily turned his eyes on the speaker and saw a stout apprentice.

"Brave and good cheer, my good prentice, for all true hearts that love the blue water. Ho, tapster, fetch this lad a goblet."

"And, tapster, prithee, put no lime in it to give thy wine a false sparkle," enjoined the youth, proud to display his tavern knowledge. "And, tapster, pray tell me if good Master Topcliffe, that true friend of the Queen and of the Queen's religion, and chief terror of her enemies the Papists, has as yet departed to his home?"

"Master Topcliffe has but just set out for his quarters in the gatehouse of the Tower," replied the aproned knight of the spigot, after a glance towards where late had sat the man of rack, cord and gibbet.

"Too bad, too bad," commented the apprentice. "Now I shall have to follow him in haste. Your health my brave captain." In further proof of his experience the apprentice drained his goblet to the dregs. "Drat the long journey through the snow, but glad shall be my welcome and golden my reward, for the good information I bear," he continued in a burst of confidence. "Aha, nothing pleases Master Topcliffe so much as to be told where he may swiftly and surely lay his rough hands on a Popish priest."

"Soho, so it is blood money you seek?" contemptuously inquired Langhorne.

"Perhaps it is no more blood money than are the doubloons and pistoles which you have taken, my scandalized master mariner, from the dead Spaniards," retorted the apprentice. "Yet seek I more than blood money; I covet sweet revenge on a tyrant master who whipped me naked till the blood ran down, my only offense going to the playhouse and remaining out all night despite his sovereign command. Master of mine he shall be no more, but the gibbet shall be his when it gets its own. It's a piece of rank treason, you know, and a hanging matter," continued the fellow, with a vindictive grin, "for a man to receive a priest of Rome into his house."

The buccaneer's eyes flashed with recognition. "Already have I seen thee this night, sirrah. Thy name is Simon."

"Simon Stokes, at your fair and honorable service."

"A runaway poltroon, who in danger abandoned his master's daughter?"

"Small chance, bold sailor, had my poor cudgel against two robbers' swords."

"And who would now bring trouble to the bed of his dying mistress?"

"She was kind to me, 'tis true, but—well, by this time, belike, the old lady is dead."

"Out, reptile of infamy!" cried Langhorne in anger and disgust. "Curs and traitors such as thou are too vile to be let breathe and pollute the air. Ho, tapster, the score, for fain would I forget in sleep this tale of choicest villainy." As he opened his wallet to pay he inadvertently drew forth the crucifix he had ound. It was of rich ornamentation, peculiar make. At sight of it the malignant apprentice uttered an exclamation of surprise and sarcasm.

"Save me, I have seen that emblem of idolatry before—ay, a score a hundred times! So, virtuous master mariner, thour hast ceased buccaneering on the Spanish Main to become a cutpurse in London. That golden article is the property of my master's daughter—my late master's daughter—stolen from her, as I sweae I know how, even this very night."

"Who is thy mistress, viper?"

"Mistress Cicely Langhorne, daughter of Adam Langhorne, the mercer."

"Judgment of heaven—my sister."

Guy Langhorne sprang to his feet with livid face and blazing eyes, at sight of whose dreadful glare, in which was concentrated a decade of buccaneering ferocity, the malignant craven Simon Stokes with a cry of alarm fled out into the night. Quickly after the apprentice, without waiting to pick up hat or cloak, plunged Langhorne.

But for a few moments did the incident cause the customers of the Mermaid to suspend their drinking and chatter, only an ordinary brawl they considered, that had best end in bloodshed, if there were to be any, on the outside.

Terror lent speed to the apprentice who almost immediately disappeared in the darkness and the whirling snow. The pursuer, baffled, bewildered, with despair gnawing at his vitals and his bosom chilly and shuddering with greater fear than he had felt in all his fights on sea and land, rushed blindly, wildly, hither and thither, his eager gaze vainly trying to pierce the black shroud of night for a flying form, his voice frantically calling with threats and pleadings on the invisible fugitive to stop. At length he stood defeated, tense with despairful thought of the immediate grim shadow of ruin and death that hovered over those he held dearest on earth. His mother dying, his father in peril of the gibbet! A gentle old clergyman doomed to inhuman butchery! He ground his teeth with impotent rage, while the snow fell on his uncovered head and beat with cold fingers on his burning temples.

"I shall go and warn them," he thought. "Heaven grant I get there before the bloodhounds of the penal law."

But where to find the house? Where lived his father, the mercer, Adam Langhorne? He had taken imperfect note of the location, and now he might not be able to find it until—too late!

Anxiously he hurried through street after street, looking eagerly to right and left, but to no avail. How was it, he asked himself bitterly, that he had not recognized his only and fondly loved sister Cicely on meeting her, nor Cicely him? He felt accurst. A deep-voiced clock struck three. It sounded to him like a knell of doom.

At length he met two guardians of the night. Adam Langhorne? Yes, they well knew the worthy merchant and his dwelling, and they showed the house and thankfully received largesse. A girl's voice challenged when he knocked.

"Open, Cicely, open—it is I, your brother Guy, from over the sea."

Small time was there for words of greeting, either warm, cold or indifferent.

"Father, get the priest away from here at once, or you and he are lost. Your apprentice Simon has gone to spy on you to Topcliffe. Get the Father hence quickly—anywhere! Where is he?"

"He is still here, my son. Welcome be the shelter of our humble roof to the name of God."

"More welcome than safe, father; hasten him forth, for the bloodhounds are coming. How fares my mother?"

"She has returned from the valley of the shadow, Guy. Great has been her improvement this night, with her mind eased by her happy receiving of the last sacraments."

In a few moments Guy Langhorne was kneeling by his mother's bedside, filled with poignant emotion, yet rejoicing at the great happiness beaming on her face as with her worn hand she fondly stroked his dark, wet hair.

"Guy, Guy, after all those years of weary waiting! Oh, my son, my own and only boy, I knew you would come!"

"Yes, mother, to the bygone life never to return. Pardon me, mother, for a while. All is lost," he thought, as he descended the stairs.

For at the front door of the house there was a loud and peremptory knocking. Downstairs, the mercer and the gray-haired priest stood cloaked and prepared for departure when came that blood-chilling summons.

"Ho, within there, open the door, open at once to officers of the law," commanded a loud voice, and the knocking was repeated.

Guy stepped to the front and drew his Spanish blade. "Fly by the back way," he said; "I'll keep them at bay till you escape."

But now the door, which, by accident, had been left unfastened, swung open. Four of the night watch walked in, bearing a burthen which they deposited in the passage. It was the body of a stout young man, with blood clotting the hair and streaking the white face.

"It is one of your apprentices, Master Langhorne," explained the leader.

"Yes, it is Simon Stokes," said the mercer.

"We found him on the street leading to the Tower, lying unconscious in a deep and dangerous pit, into which, storm-blinded, he stumbled and fell. His skull is seriously fractured and it will take him many weeks to recover, if he ever does."

"The unfortunate youth shall be duly attended to," said the mercer. "Cecily, wine for the faithful nightwatch."

Great, even to the point of exhilaration, was the scene of relief and joy that asserted itself in the household when the watch, refreshed, departed.

"Verily, the Lord is kind to-night to this good home," remarked the old priest. "The prodigal son has returned, and the angel of death has passed us by."

While the ex-buccaneer made an impulsive and fervent act of faith by taking out and kissing a golden crucifix

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It will be a clock suitable in every way to be a part of the tallest permanent structure in the world, as the new tower will be. The tower will be forty-eight stories, 658 feet above the street, and the clock will occupy part of the twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth, and twenty-seventh stories.