

He was a wild, reckless, and ill-tempered fellow, among his friends and kindred, an allusion to that meeting would be a judicious and unwise. The gipsies were ready with their knives, their blood was heated with drinking, the comb was lonely and secluded; his horse stood tethered two hundred yards off, and he was a long way from home. He glanced respectfully, almost imperceptibly, in Walf's face, while he replied with a discretion for which he deserved some credit.

"There's many a likely lass in North Devon, my lord duke, though I won't say they come up to the beauty and wisdom of the Egyptians, but I'm no great judge of matters of that kind. They don't belong to my cloth and my calling. I know a good dog when I see him, or a game-cock; I can tell the points of a pacing nag, or the slot of a warrantable deer; but when you talk of black eyes and blue, chestnut hair and brown, I'm at fault—that's where I am. No, no, I'm a far better judge of your strong ale."

"Well said, Parson!" exclaimed the duke, "you're one of my sort, I see, and a right good fellow, too. Ah! if your Reverence and I could make the world again, wouldn't we put fewer women in it, and more drink? To your ways, my lass, he added, nodding to Walf; "you're black enough, and comely enough, to turn an older head than mine, and I guess I'm not far from a hundred. My service to you, Parson, we'll trouble no more about the petticoat. The night is young, and that cask not half empty yet."

But Walf, while she retired, bestowed on Abner Gale a glance of such deep meaning as to puzzle him exceedingly. While he passed the cup and the jest with his entertainers, discussed the past wrestling-bout, of which he was good enough to express approval, and even condescended to sing a song in praise of that manly exercise, his thoughts persistently reverted to the tawny delicate face with its mournful beauty, the large dark eyes that looked into his own so sad and wistful, yet with fierce impatient longing, like those of some wild animal from whom men have taken away its young.

CHAPTER XIX.

TEMPTED SORE.

There were few better horses in the West of England than Parson's Gale's black nag Cassock, a beast on which he had performed many surprising feats of speed and endurance for trifling wages amongst his friends. It speaks well for the favorable impression made by their clerical guest on his entertainers that the gipsies allowed him to retain possession of so valuable a steed, when nothing would have been easier than to slip its halter, and convey it secretly out of the camp while its master was engaged in his debauch. These strange people, however, respected their own peculiar principles of justice and fair-dealing, even in a life of robbery and fraud. Holding somewhat stringent notions on the laws of hospitality, they were, moreover, much fascinated by the Parson's freedom of manners and great absorbent powers. Cassock, therefore, was liberally supplied with the best forage they had to give, and when at last, in spite of the Duke's protestations and the entreaties of his court, Abner Gale declared his intention of departing at once to travel home by moonlight, a score of tawny hands were ready to adjust saddle and bridle, to hold the stirrup while he mounted, and to wave a good-speed after him as he rode away.

Only Pim Cooper, a born horse-dealer and a real stealer, regretted the scruples of his inmate. "What was the use of plying the storgoi with ale and brandy," he muttered,

and then, to the detriment of water, must devote the day to drinking his master, the drinker of ale." He knew his way home, too, and could have found it like a dog; nor would he have objected to increase the pace considerably had he received the slightest inclination that his lord was inclined for a gallop.

The Parson, however, had fallen into a meditative mood; such a mood as might possess a rough imaginative nature amongst the fairest scenes in England on a mellow autumn night. He paced along the sheep-track Cassock had selected at a walk, now stroking his horse's neck with maudlin kindness, now looking about him over the moonlight rather in affable approval, anon sighing deeply, and raising his eyes to heaven, with a meaningless smile.

Yet was his brain busy too, busy with stirring memories, morbid fancies, wild speculations—all the grotesque ideas that crowd into a man's mind when imagination is stimulated and judgment warped by the influence of strong drink. He seemed lifted, as it were, out of himself, and incorporated with that external nature of which he was perhaps a more faithful worshipper than he knew. He felt as if he could ride the moon-beam with the fairies, join in its moan with the spirit of the waterfall, shout aloud with the spirit of the fair or chase over its mountain ridges the spirit of the moor. Speaking words of encouragement to Cassock, he started at the sound of his own voice. The brushing of his horse's legs, knee deep in heather, made his blood run cold, for it seemed to him that some phantom rider was at his heels. What if the devil in person, on a coal-black steed, were to come along side and accost him, daring him to some break-neck gallop over rocks and precipices, that his own dead body and horse's might be found, crushed and mangled in their fall, when the sun rose? He had heard of such things, and said to himself he would scorn to refuse the challenge, and would defy the devil then and there, less in the confidence of a good conscience than in the evil courage of despair. He wished, though, that he had filled his flask down yonder before he left the gipsy-tents. A nip of brandy would do him a world of good just now, and keep out the night air. Then, with the inconsistency of his condition, he threw open his waistcoat and loosened the kerchief round his throat.

Presently the man within the man, the working partner in the firm, who never sleeps, never gets drunk, never loses his consciousness nor his identity, even when contusions or alcohol have numbered to insensibility his associate's weaker brain; the man who reproves us when we are wined, who laughs at us when we are fools; to whom we make apologies for weakness, and excuses for crime, began to separate himself, as it were, from the corporeal Parson Gale, and take him to task with half-indulgent cynicism, for the shortcomings of which both inner and outer man were fully conscious. Said the one to the other, "See now, I know how it would be! You are at your old tricks again, Abner Gale, though you promised me yourself, only last week after Mounsey Revel, it should be the last time till Martinmas! You're not ashamed of it—not a bit! You're a good fellow, you say, and cannot refuse a cup when its offered in good fellowship. All very well, my friend, but *respects sich!* There's Latin for you. Ah! you know a bit of Latin once; I don't think it ever did you much good; but keep your eye forward! You can do that still when you ride to hounds across the moor. Look to the result. Already your hand has begun to shake; you can scarce button the knees of your breeches till you've had your morning draught, and you couldn't tie a fly to save your life. Already you know what it is to hear a buzzing in your ears, and feel a shooting pain in your joints. The last time you wrestled a fall with little Tremaine, he threw you easily with a cross-buttock, and

ready loved this come-by-chance, and that he, Parson Gale, must be worsted in the one object of his life; must run second in the race he would barter his very soul to win?

And now, had the devil been, indeed, following on his track, had he ridden alongside, stirrup to stirrup, and offered him his fiendish assistance, the evil spirit could not have more fully possessed the man than while he ground a savage curse between his teeth, on himself, his horse, his fellows, the brute creation, all nature, animate and inanimate, to think that he should have lost Nelly Carew, the girl he had coveted from her childhood, to an unknown stranger, the acquaintance of a day. Somebody must pay for it. There should be no mistake about that! Perhaps it was less Nelly's fault than her new friend's, this young springgold, who came into the West forsooth, with his town-bred manners and his town-made clothes, to rob honest men of their own. But town or country, the best of them should not peach on Parson Gale's moor without hearing of it. He only wished he could find out something more about him, that was all. If the devil himself offered to back him up now, he would drive no hard bargain, but pay fair market price for his help!

Cassock started violently, with a loud and prolonged snort. A more sober rider might have been both alarmed and unsteady, so suddenly did the animal swerve aside from a dusky figure that rose against the sky out of its very path; but a good horseman's balance seems little influenced by unsteadiness of brain, and the Parson felt a thrill of triumph rather than fear, in the wild fancy that his awful wish had been granted, and the powers of evil had consented to afford him the assistance he required.

"Spoken up!" he exclaimed in a fierce and threatening voice, the more angry, perhaps that he felt his flesh creep with superstitious dread. "If you come straight from hell, I'll have a word with you before you go back. Steady, Cassock, my lad! What, you know her, do ye? and it's only the little gipsy-lass after all!"

The figure, dim and phantom-like as it stood there beneath the moon, threw back its scarlet hood, and revealed to the Parson's excited senses, no spirit from below, but Walf's tangible beauty, pale indeed, and careworn, yet strangely attractive still, with its wild, sad eyes, and wealth of raven hair.

She laid her hand on Cassock's neck, and the horse tolerated her caress, though his restless, backward-moving ear showed he was only half reassured.

"I know you," said Walf. "I've seen you before. I watched you from our tents, and waited here to make sure, Parson Gale, I can tell you something you would give ten years of your life to know."

She had waylaid him purposely at the bend of the combe, that he could not but pass to reach the level moor, arriving by a path only accessible to an active hill-climber on foot, so thus even had he come round at a gallop, she must have been here before him.

"Can you tell me my fortune, pretty lass?" returned Gale, with a forced attempt at gallantry. "Give me hold of that slender little hand, and I'll put a silver groat in it, if I have one left in the world."

He leaned over his horse's shoulder while he spoke, preserving his balance with some difficulty. Walf, keep well out of reach, gave no encouragement to his assumed familiarity.

"Forget," she said, "for the time, that I am a gipsy, and that you are a priest. Parson-Gale, I know the wish that is nearest your heart this very moment. You look for health, ease, happiness, and a good name like your neighbors, but you would give the soul out of your body for revenge!"

He started; the certainty with which she had fathomed his desire, and named its price, recalled the speculations of a few minutes back. Again some nameless fear of the supernatural crept over him, and he shud-

dered unconsciously, here and there, with smooth mechanical gait, like one who walks abroad, having mind and senses fettered in the thralldom of a dream.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CO'S SHOULDER.

Lady Bellinger at least was pleased. When her lord, reflecting that the robbery he had sustained would render abortive his journey to the West, ordered the horse's heads to be turned for London, his wife accepted this alteration in their plans with a fervor of gratitude that sufficiently indicated her dread of a prolonged tete-a-tete with her husband. Nor was his lordship unwilling to resume the dissipations of the town, though entertaining shrewd misgivings as to the reception he was likely to meet with from the sovereign and his ministers. In war, in politics, or in love—in public affairs, as in private, there is no excuse for failure! Success does not necessarily imply merit; but merit, in the eyes of mankind, is a less valuable quality than success. There has been shrewd and prosperous managers of the world's most important matters, who have gone so far as to lay down the practical rule: "Never employ an unlucky man!"

Lady Bellinger was not obliged to have recourse to her drops more than half-a-dozen times between Hounslow and London on the return journey. She contradicted my lord hardly twice as often, and was good enough to express a qualified approval of the scenery, the weather, even the roads, which last were execrable. Mistress Rachel, too, seemed pleased to think she was on her way back to civilized life, fresh from an adventure that made her a heroine in her own eyes. The champion with the bland-rhuss was already reinstated in her favor; the other servants, by dint of frequent excuses for their poltroonery, and by talking the matter over till they had multiplied a hundred-fold the number and weapons of their assailants, were assured they had shown a fair amount of courage; and the whole party, with the exception of its chief, drove back in the highest spirits through the leafy glades of Kensington, to their town residence in Leicester square. But Lord Bellinger's heart sank as he approached his home. Even for a man of pleasure there is something exceedingly fascinating in a political career, and here had he failed the very first time he was put to trial! It is hard to fall and break one's neck from the very lowest round of the ladder! Had he managed his business discreetly and well, no doubt his name would have been entered on that mysterious roll which prime ministers are supposed to keep, for the advancement of their friends and supporters, apportioning rewards for service, as an animal's food is regulated by its work. To support in many divisions, a baronetcy; for one timely change of opinion, an earldom; and so on. But it seemed to Lord Bellinger that he had played his stake in the great game—and lost!

No sooner did he arrive at home, than sending for a modish barber to powder and arrange his hair, he dressed with exceeding splendor—a ceremony his lordship never neglected, and to which he owed much of his social success, assum'd cane, sword, and snuff-box, called a chair, and caused himself to be carried straightway to the Cocoa Tree Club and Coffee-house. It was early in the afternoon, and several gentlemen were absent at their country seats, yet this resort of loungers and idlers seemed sufficiently full. With the self-consciousness of human nature, an instinct, that years of worldly training cannot wholly eradicate, Lord Bellinger believed that his recent failure had made him a marked

man in the country! What, in the name of all that is innocent, should take you to the country? You who have never slept a night out of town since you came of age. Think of the risks! You might have caught the milk-fever or chicken-pox! We must believe it, my Lord, because your lordship says so."

"It only shows how little a fellow is missed!" replied Lord Bellinger, not too well pleased to find his absence had been unnoticed by those among whom he considered himself a man of mark. "Did you never hear of my coach being robbed; money and papers carried off; myself, my lady, and my servants made prisoners on parole by a band of gipsies, and a highwayman riding a gray horse? On my honor, gentlemen, I believe not one of you cares a brass farthing for any earthly thing that takes place beyond ten miles from London, or two from Newmarket!"

He spoke bitterly, and with an energy so unlike his usual careless manner, and the man in the plum colored coat gazed at him in undisguised astonishment.

"A gray horse!" repeated this nobleman, tapping his snuff-box. "The best-actioned horse I ever saw in my life was a gray, and belonged to a highwayman—a fellow they called Galloping Jack. It must have been the very man!"

"Two to one against him!" interrupted a bystander. "Ten guineas to five, my lord, that no gentleman of the road would show such bad taste as to rob Bellinger, or such deplorable ignorance as to suppose his purse was worth taking."

"I'll go you halves," said a tall youth. "I remember the gray horse, and the man in the mask who rode him; what became of the horse I never heard, but the man was hanged at Tyburn last November!"

In the confusion of tongues created by this statement, offering, as it did, a wide field of speculation, and originating many wagers on the personal identity of the robber in the mask, Bellinger felt an arm thrust under his own to withdraw him from the noisy circle into the recess of a bay-window fronting the street, while a friendly voice whispered in his ear: "Welcome back, my lord. I knew you had left the town, if no one else did. I wish from my soul these gipsies and robbers, and other scoundrels had turned you back before you reached Kensington!"

It was Harry St. Leger who spoke, his comrade and associate in many a scene of pleasure and dissipation little removed from vice, yet a staunch friend nevertheless—not to be detached by misfortune, nor daunted by disgrace. Such cases are less rare than those who hold by the laws of ethics might suppose. The growth of the bog-myrtle is fresh and fair, its fibres are tough and clinging, though it takes root in the blackest and miriest of swamps. Harry St. Leger would have offered him his last guinea ungrudging and with no less flippant a jest, than he would have shed his last drop of blood in a duel, to share his friend's quarrel, as principal or second, or anything he pleased.

"Why so, Harry?" asked Lord Bellinger. "Have you seen the minister? What have you heard?"

"They're in a devil of a stew down there," answered the other, intimating with a jerk of his head the locality in which his Majesty's Council conducted their deliberations. "They've had an enemy in the camp, it seems, ever since the late king's death. Our gracious himself has been sitting on a powder barrel, only he does not believe it; and would care very little if he did. They're plenty of courage, that family, I must admit; can't say as much for the others. Well, the Scotchman is in a fearful state!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

English sportsmen are introducing cor-morant fishing and hawk hunting.