LORNA DOONE

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CHAPTER LXIX

NOT TO BE PUT UP WITH

The coat of arms devised for me by the Royal heralds was of great size and rich colors; and full of bright imagings. They did me the honor to consult me first, and te take no notice of my advice. For I begged that there might be a good sized cow on it, so as to stamp our pats of butter before they went to market; also a horse on the other side, and a flock snowed up at the bottom. But the gentlemen would not hear of this; and to find something more appropriate, they inquired strictly into the annals of our family. I told them, of course, all about King Alfred; upon which they settled that one-quarter should be three cakes on a bar, with a lion regardant, done upon a field of gold. Also I told them that very likely there had been a Ridd in the battle fought, not very far from Plovers Barrows, by the Earl of Devon against the Danes, when Hubba, their chief, was killed, and the sacred standard taken. As some of the Danes are said to be buried even upon land of ours, and we call their graves (if such they be) even to this day "barrows," the heralds quite agreed with me that a Ridd might have been there, or thereabouts; and if he was there, he was almost certain to have done his best, being in sight of hearth and home: and it was plain that he must have had good legs to be at the same time both there and in Athelney, and good legs are an argument for good arms; and supposing a man of this sort to have done his utmost (as the manner of the Ridds is), it was next to certain that he must have captured the standard. Moreover, the name of our farm was pure proof; a plover being a wild bird, just the same as a raven is. Upon this chain of reasoning, and without any weak misgiving, they charged my growing escutcheon with a black raven on a ground of red. And the next thing which I mentioned possessing absolute certainty, to-wit, that a pig with two heads had been born upon our farm not more than two hundred years agone (although he died within a week), my third quarter was made at once, by a two-headed boar with noble tusks, sable upon silver. All this was very fierce and fine; and so I pressed for a peaceful corner in the lower dexter, and obtained a wheat-sheaf set upright, gold upon a field of green.

Here I was inclined to pause, and admire the effect; for even De Whichehalse could not show a bearing so magnificent. But the heralds said that it looked a mere sign-board without a good motto under it; and the motto must have my name in it. They offered me first, "Ridd non ridendus;" but I said, "For God's sake, gentlemen, let me forget my Latin." Then they proposed, "Ridd readeth riddles;" but I begged them not to set down such a lie; for no Ridd ever had made, or made out, such a thing as a riddle since Exmoor itself began. Thirdly, they gave me, "Ridd never been ridden;" and fearing to make any further objections, I let them inscribe it in bronze upon blue. The heralds thought that the King would pay for this noble achievement; but His Majesty, although graciously pleased with their ingenuity, declined in the most decided manner to pay a farthing toward it; and as I had now no money left the heralds became as blue as azure, and as red as gules, until Her Majesty the Queen came forward very kindly, and said that if His Majesty gave me a coat of arms, I was not to pay for it; therefore she herself did so quite handsomely, and felt good-will toward me in consequence.

Now being in a hurry—so far, at least, as it is my nature to hurry—to get to the end of this narrative, is it likely that I would have dwelt so lone upon my coat of arms but for some good reason? And this good reason is that Lorna took the greatest pride in it, and thought (or at any rate said) that it quite threw into the shade and eclipsed all her own ancient glories. And half in fun, and half in earnest, she called me "Sir John" so continually, that at last I was almost angry with her, until her eyes were bedewed with tears; and then I was angry with myself.

Beginning to be short of money and, growing anxious about the farm, longing also to show myself and my noble escutcheon to mother, I took advantage of Lady Lorna's interest with the Queen to obtain my acquittance and full discharge from even nominal custody. It had been intended to keep me in waiting until the return of Lord Jeffreys from that awful circuit of shambles, through which his name is still used by mothers to frighten their children into bed. And right glad was I—for even London shrunk with horror at the news—to escape a man so blood-thirsty, savage, and, even to his friends (among whom I was reckoned), malignant.

Earl Brandir was greatly pleased with me, not only for having saved his life, but for saving that which he valued more, the wealth laid by for Lord Alan. And he introduced me to many great people, who quite kindly encouraged me, and promised to help me in every way, when they heard how the King had spoken. As for the furrier, he could never have enough of my society; and this worthy man, praying my commendation, demanded of me one thing only—to speak of him as I found him. As I had found him many a Sunday furbishing up old furs for new, with a glaze to conceal the moths' ravages, I begged him to reconsider the point, and not to demand such accuracy. He said, "Well, well; all trades had tricks, especially the trick of business; and I must take him—if I were his true friend according to his own description." This I was glad enough to do; because it saved so much trouble, and I had no money to spend with him. But still he requested the use of my name; and I begged him to do the best with it, as I never had kept a banker. And the "John Ridd cuffs," and the "Sir John mantles," and the "holly-staff capes" he put into his window, as the winter was coming on, ay, and sold (for everybody was burning with gossip about me), must have made this good man's fortune; since the excess of price over value is the true test of success in life.

To come away from all this stuff, which grieves a man in London—when the brisk air of the autumn cleared its way to Ludgate Hill and clever 'prentices ran out, and sniffed at it and fed upon it (having little else to eat); and when the horses from the country were a goodly sight to see, with rasp of winter bristles rising through and among the soft summer-coat; and when the new straw began to come in, golden with the harvest gloss, and smelling most divinely at those strange livery-stables where the nags are put quite tail to tail; and when all the London folk themselves were asking about white frost (from recollections of childhood); then, I say, such a yearing seized me for moory cray, and for dewy blade, and even the grunting of our sheep (when the sun goes down), that nothing but the new wisps of Samson could have held me in London town.

Lorna was moved with equal longing toward the country and country ways; and she spoke quite as much of the glistening dew as she did of the smell of our oven. And here let me mention—although the two are quite distinct and different—that both the dew and the bread of Exmoor may be sought, whether high or low, but never found elsewhere. The dew is so crisp, and pure, and pearly, and in such abundance; and the bread is so sweet, so kind, and homely, you can eat a loaf, and then another.

Now while I was walking daily in and out great crowds of men (few of whom had any freedom from the cares of money, and many of whom were even morbid with a worst pest called "politics"), I could not be quit of thinking how we jostle one another. God has made the earth quite large, with a spread of land enough for all to live on, without fighting; also a mighty spread of water, laying hands on sand and cliff with a solemn voice in storm-time, and in the gentle weather moving men to thoughts of equity. This, as well, is full of food; being two-thirds of the world, and reserve for devouring knowledge, by the time the sons of men have fed away the dry land. Yet before the land itself has acknowledged touch of man upon one in a hundred acres, and before one mile in ten thousand of the exhaustless ocean has ever felt the plunge of hook, or combing of the haul-nets, lo, we crawl, in flocks together, upon hot ground that stings us, even as the black grubs crowd upon the harried nettle! Surely we are too much given to follow the tracks of each other.

However, for a moralist I never set up, and never shall, while common sense abides with me. Such a man must be very wretched, in this pure dearth of morality; like a fisherman where no fish be; and most of us have enough to do to attend to our own morals. Enough that I resolved to go; and as Lorna could not come with me, it was even worse than stopping. Nearly everybody vowed that I was a great fool indeed to neglect so rudely—which was the proper word, they said—the pushing of my fortunes. But I answered that to push was rude; and I left it to the people who had no room, and thought that my fortune must be heavy, if it would not move without pushing.

Lorna cried when I came away (which gave me great satisfaction), and she sent a whole trunkful of things for mother and Annie, and even Lizzie. And she seemed to think, though she said it not, that I made my own occasion for going, and might have stayed on till the winter. Whereas I knew well that my mother would think (and every one on the farm the same) that here I had been in London, lagging and taking my pleasure, and looking at shops, upon pretense of King's business, and leaving the harvest to reap itself, not to mention the spending of money; while all the time there was nothing whatever, except my own love of adventure and sport, to keep me from coming home again. But I knew that my coat-of-arms and title would turn every bit of this grumbling into fine admiration.

And so it fell out, to a greater extent than even I desired; for all the parishes round about united in a sumptuous dinner at the Mother Melldrum inn—for now that good lady was dead, and her name and face set on a sign-post—to which I was invited, so that it was as good as a summons. And if my health was no better next day, it was not from want of good wishes, any more than from stint of the liquor.

It is needless to say that the real gentry for a long time treated my new honors with contempt and ridicule; but gradually as they found that I was not such a fool as to claim any equality with them, but went about my farmwork, and threw another man at wrestling, and touched my hat to the magistrates just the same as ever, some gentlemen of the highest blood— of which we think a great deal more than of gold around our neighborhood—actually expressed to desire to make my acquaintance. And when, in a manner quite straightforward, and wholly free from bitterness, I thanked them for this (which appeared to me the highest honor yet offered me), but declined to go into their company because it would make me uncomfortable, and themselves as well in a different way, they did what nearly all Englishmen do, when a thing is right and sensible. They shook hands with me, and said that they could not deny but that there was reason in my view of the matter. And although they themselves must be the losers— which was a handsome thing to say—they would wait until I was a little older, and more aware of my own value.

Now this reminds me how it is that an English gentleman is so far in front of foreign noblemen and princes. I have seen at times a little, both of one and of the other; and making more than due allowance for the difficulties of language, and the difference of training, upon the whole the balance is in favor of our people. And this because we have two weights, solid, and (even if the scale of manners) outweighing all light complaisance; to-wit, the inborn love of justice, and the power of abiding.

Yet some people may be surprised that men with any love of justice, whether inborn or otherwise, could continue to abide the arrogance, and rapacity, and tyranny of the Doones.

For now as the winter passed, the Doones were not keeping themselves at home, as in honor they were bound to do. Twenty sheep a week, and one fat ox, and two stout red deer (for wholesome change of diet), as well as threescore bushels of flour, and two hogsheads and a half of cider, and a hundred-weight of candles, not to mention other things of almost every variety, which they got by insisting upon it—surely these might have sufficed to keep the people in their place, with no outburst of waniness. Nevertheless, it was not so; they had made complaint about something—too much ewe-mutton, I think it was—and in spite of all the pledges given, they had ridden forth, and carried away two maidens of our neighborhood.

Now these two maidens were known, because they had served the beer at an ale-house; and many men who had looked at them over a pint or a quart vessel (especially as they were comely girls) thought it was very hard for them to go in that way, and perhaps themselves unwilling. And their mother (although she had taken some money, which the Doones were always full of) declared that it was a robbery; and though it increased for a while the custom, that must soon fall off again. And who would have her two girls now, clever as they were and good?

Before we had finished meditating upon this loose outrage—for so I, at least would call it, though people accustomed to the law may take a different view of it—we had news of a thing far worse, which turned the hearts of our women sick. This I will tell in most careful language, so as to give offense to none, if skill of words may help it.

Mistress Margery Badcock, a healthy and upright young woman, with a good rich color, and one of the finest henroosts anywhere around our neighborhood, was nursing her child about six of the clock, and looking out for her husband.

Christopher Badcock was a tenant farmer in the parish of Martinhoe, renting some fifty acres of land, with a right of common attached to them; and at this particular time, being now the month of February, and fine open weather, he was hard at work plowing and preparing for spring corn. Therefore his wife was not surprised, although the dusk was falling, that Farmer Christopher should be at work in a "blind man's holiday," as we call it.

But she was surprised, nay, astonished, when by the light of the kitchen fire (brightened up for her husband) she saw six or seven great armed men burst into the room upon her; and she screamed so that the maid in the back kitchen heard her, but was afraid to come to help. Two of the strongest and fiercest men at once seized poor young Margery; and though she fought for her child and home, she was but an infant herself in their hands. In spite of tears, and shrieks, and struggles, they tore the babe from the mother's arms, and cast it on the lime-ash floor; then they bore her away to their horses (for by this time she was senseless), and telling the others to sack the house, rode off with their prize to the valley. And from the description of one of those two who carried off the poor woman, I knew beyond all doubt that it was Carver Doone himself.

The other Doones being left behind, and grieved, perhaps, in some respects, set to with a will to scour the house, and to bring away all that was good to eat. And being a little vexed herein (for the Badcocks were not a rich couple), and finding no more than bacon, and eggs, and cheese, and little items; and nothing to drink but water; in a word, their taste being offended, they came back to the kitchen, and stamped, and there was the baby lying.

By evil luck, this child began to squeal about his mother, having been petted hitherto, and wont to get all he wanted by raising his voice but a little. Now the mark of the floor was upon his head; as the maid (who had stolen to look at him when the rough men were swearing upstairs) gave evidence. And she put a dish-cloth under his head and kissed him, and ran away again. Her name was Honor Jose, and she meant what was right by her master and mistress, but could not help being frightened. And many women have blamed her, and as I think unduly, for her mode of forsaking baby so. If it had been her own baby, instinct rather than reason might have had the day with her; but the child being borne of her mistress, she wished him good luck, and left him, as the fierce men came downstairs. And being alarmed by their power of language (because they had found no silver), she crept away in a breathless hurry, and afraid how her breath might come back to her. For oftentime she had hiccoughs.

While this good maid was in the oven, by side of back-kitchen fire-place, with a fagot of wood drawn over her, and lying so that her own heart beat worse than if she were baking, the men (as I said before) came down-stairs, and stamped around the baby.

"Rowland, is the bacon good?" one of them asked, with an oath or two. "It is too bad of Carver to go off with the only prize, and leave us in a starving cottage, and not enough to eat for two of us. Fetch down the staves of the rack, my boy. What was farmer to have for supper?"

"Naught but an onion or two, and a loaf, and a rasher of rusty bacon. These poor devils live so badly, they are not worth robbing."

"No game! Then let us have a game of loriot with the baby! It will be the best thing that could befall a lusty infant heretic. Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross. Byby, baby Bunting; toss him up, and let me see if my wrist be steady."

The cruelty of this man is a thing it makes me sick to speak of; enough that when the poor baby fell (without attempt at cry or scream, thinking it part of his usual play, when they tossed him up, to come down again), the maid in the oven of the back kitchen, not being any door between, heard them say as follows:

"If any man asketh who killed thee,
Say 'twas the Doones of Bagworthy."

Now I think that when we heard this story, and poor Kit Badcock came all around in a sort of half-crazy manner, not looking up at any one, but dropping his eyes, and asking whether we thought he had been well treated, and seeming void of regard for life, if this were all the style of it; then, having known him a lusty man, and a fine singer in an ale-house, and much inclined to lay down the law, and show a high hand about women, I really think that it moved us more than if he had gone about ranting, and raving, and vowing revenge upon every one.

CHAPTER LXX.

COMPELLED TO VOLUNTEER

There had been some trouble in our own home during the previous autumn, while yet I was in London. For certain noted fugitives from the army of King Monmouth (which he himself had deserted in a low and currish manner,) having failed to obtain free shipment from the coast near Watersmouth, had returned into the wilds of Exmoor, trusting to lurk, and be comforted, among the common people. Neither were they disappointed for a certain length of time, nor, in the end, was their disappointment caused by fault on our part. Major Wade was one of them; an active and well meaning man, but prone to fail in courage upon lasting trial, although in a moment ready. Squire John Whichehalse (not the baron) and Parson Powell (Not our Parson Bowden, nor any more a friend of his. Our Parson Bowden never had naught whatever to do with it, and never smoked a pipe with Parson Powell after it.—J. R.) caught him (two or three months before my return) in Farley farm-house near Brendon. He had been up at our house several times, and Lizzie thought a great deal of him. And well I know that if at that time I had been in the neighborhood, he should not have been taken so easily.

John Birch, the farmer who had sheltered him, was so fearful of punishment that he hanged himself in a few days' time, and even before he was apprehended. But nothing was done to Grace Howe, of Bridgeball, who had been Wade's greatest comforter, neither was anything done to us; although Eliza added greatly to mother's alarm and danger by failing upon Rector Powell and most soundly rating him for his meanness, and his cruelty, and cowardice, as she called it, in setting men with fire-arms upon a poor helpless fugitive, and robbing all our neighborhood of its fame for hospitality. However, by means of Sergeant Bloxham, and his good report of us, as well as by virtue of Wade's confession (which proved of use to the Government,) my mother escaped all penalties.

It is likely enough that good folk will think it hard upon our neighborhood to be threatened and sometimes heavily punished, for kindness and humanity, and yet to be left to help ourselves against tyranny and base rapine. And now, at last, our gorge was risen, and our hearts in tumult. We had borne our troubles long, as a wise and wholesome chastisement, quite content to have some few things of our own unmeddled with. But what could a man dare to call his own, or what right could he have to wish for it, while he left his wife and children at the pleasure of any stranger?

The people came flocking all around me at the blacksmith's forge and the Brendon ale-house, and I could scarce come out of church but they got me among the tombstones. They all agreed that I was bound to take command and management. I bade them go to the magistrates, but they said they had been too often. Then I told them that I had no wits for armament, although I could find fault enough with the one which had not succeeded. But they would harken to none of this. All they said was, "Try to lead us, and we will try not to run away."

This seemed to me to be common sense and good stuff, instead of mere bragging; moreover, I myself was moved by the bitter wrongs of Margery, having known her at the Sunday-school ere ever I went to Tiverton, and having, in those days, serious thoughts of making her my sweetheart, although she was three years my elder. But now I felt this difficulty—the Doones had behaved very well to our farm, and to mother, and all of us, while I was away in London; therefore would it not be shabby and mean for me to attack them now?

Yet being pressed still harder and harder, as day by day the excitement grew, with more and more talking about it, and no one else coming forward to undertake the business, I agreed at last to this: that if the Doones, upon fair challenge, would not endeavor to make amends by giving up Mistress Margery, as well as the man who had slain the babe, then I would lead the expedition and do my best to subdue them. All our men were content with this, being thoroughly well assured, from experience, that the haughty robbers would only shoot any man who durst approach them with such proposal.

And then arose a difficult question—who was to take the risk of making overtures so unpleasant? I waited for the rest to offer; and as none was ready, the burden fell on me, and seemed to be of my own inviting. Hence I undertook the task, sooner than reason about it; for to give the cause for everything is worse than to go through with it.

It may have been three of the afternoon, when, leaving my witnesses behind (for they preferred the background,) I appeared with our Lizzie's white handkerchief upon a kidney-bean stick at the entrance to the robber's dwelling. Scarce knowing what might come of it, I had taken the wise precaution of fastening a Bible over my heart, and another across my spinal column, in case of having to run away, with rude men shooting after me. For my mother said that the Word of God would stop a two-inch bullet with three ounces of powder behind it. Now, I took no weapons, save those of the Spirit, for fear of being misunderstood. But I could not bring myself to think that any of honorable birth would take advantage of an unarmed man coming in guise of peace to them.

And this conclusion of mine held good, at least for a certain length of time, inasmuch as two decent Doones appeared, and hearing of my purpose offered, without violence, to go and fetch the Captain if I would stop where I was and not begin to spy about anything. To this, of course, I agreed at once, for I wanted no more spying, because I had thorough knowledge of all ins and outs already. Therefore, I stood waiting steadily with one hand in my pocket feeling a sample of corn for market, and the other against the rock, while I wondered to see it so brown already.

Those men came back in a little while, with a sharp short message that Captain Carver would come out and speak to me by-and-by when his pipe was finished. Accordingly, I waited long, and we talked about the signs of bloom for the coming apple season, and the rain that had fallen last Wednesday night, and the principal dearth of Devonshire, that it will not grow many cowslips—which we quite agreed to be the prettiest of spring flowers; and all the time I was wondering how many black and deadly deeds these two innocent youths had committed even since last Christmas.

At length a heavy and haughty step sounded along the stone roof of the way; and then the great Carver Doone drew up, and looked at me rather scornfully. Not with any spoken scorn, no flash of strong contumely, but with that air of thinking little, and praying not to be troubled, which always vexes a man who feels that he ought not to be despised so, and yet knows not how to help it.

"What is it you want, young man?" he asked, as if he had never seen me before.

In spite of that strong loathing which I always felt at sight of him, I commanded my temper moderately, and told him that I was come for his good, and that of his worshipful company, far more that for my own. That a general feeling of indignation had arisen among us at the recent behavior of certain young men, for which he might not be answerable, and for which we would not condemn him without knowing the rights of the question. But I begged him clearly to understand that a vile and inhuman wrong had been done, and such as we could not put up with; but that if he would make what amends he could by restoring the poor woman, and giving up that odious brute who had slain the harmless infant, we would take no further motion, and things should go on as usual. As I put this in the fewest words that would meet my purpose, I was grieved to see a disdainful smile spread on his sallow countenance. Then he made me a bow of mock courtesy, and replied as follows:

"Sir John, your new honors have turned your poor head, as might have been expected. We are not in the habit of deserting anything that belongs to us, far less our sacred relatives. The insolence of your demand well-nigh outdoes the ingratitude. If there be a man upon Exmoor who has grossly ill-used us, kidnapped our young women, and slain half a dozen of our young men, you are that outrageous rogue, Sir John. And after all this, how have we behaved? We have laid no hand upon your farm, we have not carried off your women, we have even allowed you to take our Queen, by creeping and crawling treachery; and we have given you leave of absence to help your cousin, the highwayman, and to come home with a title. And now, how do you requite us? By inflaming the boorish indignation at a little frolic of our young men, and by coming with insolent demands, to yield to which would ruin us. Ah, you ungrateful viper!"

As he turned away in sorrow from me, shaking his head at my badness, I became so overcome (never having been quite assured, even by people's praises, about my own goodness), moreover, the light which he threw upon things differed so greatly from my own, that, in a word—not to be too long—I feared that I was a villian. And with many bitter pangs—for I have bad things to repent of—I began at my leisure to ask myself whether or not this bill of indictment against John Ridd was true. Some of it I knew to be (however much I condemned myself) altogether out of reason; for instance, about my going away with Lorna very quietly over the snow, and to save my love from being starved away from me. In this there was no creeping, neither crawling teachery, for all was done with sliding; and yet I was so out of training for being charged by other people beyond mine own conscience, that Carver Doone's harsh words came on me like prickly spinach sown with raking. Therefore, I replied, and said:

"It is true that I owe you gratitude, sir, for a certain time of forbearance; and it is to prove my gratitude that I am here now. I do not think that my evil deeds can be set against your own, although I cannot speak flowingly upon my good deeds as you can. I took your Queen because you starved her, having stolen her long before, and killed her mother and brother. This is not for me to dwell upon now, any more that I would say much about your murdering of my father. But how the balance hangs between us, God knows better than thou or I, thou low miscreant, Carver Doone."

I had worked myself up, as I always do, in the manner of heavy men, growing hot like an ill-washered wheel revolving, though I start with a cool axle; and I felt ashamed of myself for heat, and ready to ask pardon. But Carver Doone regarded me with a noble and fearless grandeur.

"I have given thee thy choice, John Ridd," he said, in a lofty manner, which made me drop away under him; "I always wish to do my best with the worst people who come near me. And of all I have ever met with, thou art the very worst, Sir John, and the most dishonest."

Now after my laboring to pay every man to a penny, and to allow the women over, when among the couch-grass (which is a sad thing for their gowns), to be charged like this, I say, so amazed me that I stood, with my legs quite open, and ready for an earthquake. And the scornful way in which he said "Sir John" went to my very heart, reminding me of my littleness. But seeing no use in bandying words, nay, rather the chance of mischief, I did my best to look calmly at him, and to say with a quiet voice, "Farewell, Carver Doone, this time; our day of reckoning is nigh."

"Thou fool, it is come," he cried, leaping aside into the niche of rock by the door-way: "Fire!"

Save for the quickness of spring, and readiness, learned in many a wrestling bout, that knavish trick must have ended me; but scarce was the word "fire!" out of his mouth ere I was out of fire by a single bound behind the rocky pillar of the opening. In this jump I was so brisk, at impulse of the love for life (for I saw muzzles set upon me from the darkness of the cavern), that the men who had trained their guns upon me with good-will and daintiness could not check their fingers crooked upon the heavy triggers; and the volley sung with a roar behind it down the avenue of crags.

With one thing and another, and most of all the treachery of this dastard scheme, I was so amazed that I turned and run, at the very top of my speed, away from these vile fellows; and luckily for me they had not another charge to send after me. And thus by good fortune I escaped, but with a bitter heart and mind at their treacherous usage.

Without any further hesitation, I agreed to take command of the honest men who were burning to punish, ay, and destroy those outlaws, as now beyond all bearing. One condition, however, I made, namely, that the Counselor should be spared, if possible; not because he was less a villian than any of the others, but that he seemed less violent, and above all, had been good to Annie. And I found hard work to make them listen to my wish upon this point; for of all the Doones, Sir Counselor had made himself most hated, by his love of law and reason.

We arranged that all our men should come and fall into order, with pike and musket, over against our dunghill, and we settled early in the day that their wives might come and look at them. For most of these men had good wives; quite different from sweethearts, such as the militia had; women, indeed, who could hold to a man, and see to him, and bury him—if his luck were evil—and perhaps have no one afterward. And all these women pressed their rights upon their precious husbands, and brought so many children with them, and made such a fuss, and hugging, and racing after little legs, that our farm yard might be taken for an out-door school for babies rather than a review-ground.

I myself was to and fro among the children continually; for if I love anything in the world, foremost I love children. They warm, and yet they cool our hearts, as we think of what we were, and what in young clothes we hoped to be, and how many things have come across. And to see our motives moving in the little things that know not what their aim or object is, must almost, or ought at least, to lead us home and soften us. For either end of life is home, both source and issue being God.

Nevertheless, I must confess that the children were a plague sometimes. They never could have enough of me—being a hundred to one, you might say—but I had more than enough of them, and yet was not contented. For they had so many ways of talking, and of tugging at my hair, and of sitting upon my neck (not even two with their legs alike), and they forced me to jump so vehemently, seeming to court the peril of my coming down neck-and-crop with them, and urging me still to go faster, however fast I might go with them, I assure you that they were sometimes so hard and tyrannical over me, that I might almost as well have been among the very Doones themselves.

Nevertheless, the way in which the children made me useful proved also of some use to me; for their mothers were so pleased by the exertions of the "great Ges-gee"—as all the small ones entitled me—that they gave me unlimited power and authority over their husbands; moreover, they did their utmost among their relatives round about, to fetch recruits for our little band. And by such means, several of the yeomanry from Barnstaple and from Tiverton were added to our number; and inasmuch as these were armed with heavy swords and short carbines, their appearance was truly formidable.

Tom Faggus also joined us heartily, being now quite healed of his wound, except at times when the wind was easterly. He was made second in command to me; and I would gladly have had him first, as more fertile in expedients; but he declined such rank, on the plea that I knew most of the seat of war; besides, that I might be held in some measure to draw authority from the king. Also from Uncle Ben came over to help us with his advice and presence, as well as with a band of stout warehousemen, whom he brought from Dulverton. For he had never forgiven the old outrage put upon him; and though it had been to his interest to keep quiet during the last attack under Commander Stickles—for the sake of this secret gold mine—yet now he was in a position to give full vent to his feelings. For he and his partners, when fully assured of the value of their diggings, had obtained from the Crown a license to adventure in search of minerals by payment of a heavy fine and a yearly royalty. Therefore they had now no longer any cause for secrecy, neither for dread of the outlaws, having so added to their force as to be a match for them. And although Uncle Ben was not the man to keep his miners idle an hour more than might be helped, he promised that when we had fixed the moment for an assault on the valley, a score of them should come to aid us, headed by Simon Carfax, and armed with the guns which they always kept for the protection of their gold.

Now whether it were Uncle Ben, or whether it were Tom Faggus, or even my own self—for all three of us claimed the sole honor—is more than I think fair to settle without allowing them a voice. But at any rate a clever thing was devised among us; and perhaps it would be the fairest thing to say that this bright stratagem (worthy of the great Duke himself) was contributed, little by little, among the entire three of us, all having pipes, and schnapps-and-water in the chimney-corner. However, the world, which always judges according to reputation, vowed that so fine a stroke of war could only come from a highwayman; and so Tom Faggus got all the honor, at less, perhaps, than a third of the cost.

Not to attempt to rob him of it—for robbers, more than any other, contend for rights of property—let me try to describe this grand artifice. It was known that the Doones were fond of money, as well as strong drink, and other things; and more especially fond of gold, when they could get it pure and fine. Therefore it was agreed that in this way we should tempt them, for we knew that they looked with ridicule upon our rustic preparations; after repulsing king's troopers, and the militia of two counties, was it likely that they should yield their fortress to a set of plowboys? We, for our part, felt, of course, the power of this reasoning, and that where regular troops had failed, half-armed countrymen must fail, except by superior judgment and harmony of action. Though perhaps the militia would have sufficed if they had only fought against the foe, instead of each other. From these things we took warning: having failed through overconfidence, was it not possible now to make the enemy fail through the selfsame cause?

Hence what we devised was this: to delude from home a part of the robbers, and fall by surprise on the other part. We caused it to be spread abroad that a large heap of gold was now collected at the mine of the Wizard Slough. And when this rumor must have reached them, through women who came to and fro, as some entirely faithful to them were allowed to do, we sent Captain Simon Carfax, the father of little Gwenny, to demand an interview with the Counselor by night, and, as it were, secretly. Then he was to set forth a list of imaginary grievances, against the owners of the mine, and to offer, partly through resentment, partly through the hope of gain, to betray into their hands upon the Friday night by far the greatest weight of gold as yet sent up for refining. He was to have one-quarter part, and they to take the residue. But inasmuch as the convoy across the moors under his command would be strong, and strongly armed, the Doones must be sure to send not less than a score of men, if possible. He himself, at a place agreed upon, and fit for an ambuscade, would call a halt, and contrive in the darkness to pour a little water into the priming of his company's guns.

It cost us some trouble and a great deal of money to bring the sturdy Cornishman into this deceitful part; and perhaps he never would have consented but for his obligation to me, and the wrongs (as he said) of his daughter. However, as he was the man for the task, both from his coolness and courage, and being known to have charge of the mine, I pressed him, until he undertook to tell all the lies we required. And right well he did it too, having once made up his mind to it, and perceiving that his own interests called for the destruction of the robbers.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A LONG ACCOUNT SETTLED

Having resolved on a night assault (as our undisciplined men, three-fourths of whom had never been shot at, could not fairly be expected to march up to musket mouths), we cared not much about drilling our forces, only to teach them to hold a musket, so far as we could supply that weapon those with the cleverest eyes, and to give them familiarity with the noise it made in exploding. And we fixed upon Friday night for our venture, because the moon would be at the full, and our powder was coming from Delverton on the Friday afternoon.

Uncle Reuben did not mean to expose himself to shooting, his time of life for risk of life being now well over, and the residue too valuable. But his counsels, and his influence, and above all his warehousemen, well practiced in beating carpets, were of true service to us. His miners also did great wonders, having a grudge against the Doones; as indeed who had not for thirty miles round their valley?

It was settled that the yeomen, having good horses under them, should give account (with the miners' help) of as many Doones as might be dispatched to plunder the pretended gold. And as soon as we knew that this party of robbers, be it more or less, was out of hearing from the valley, we were to fall to, ostensibly at the Doone-gate (which was impregnable now,) but in reality upon their rear, by means of my old water-slide. For I had chosen twenty young fellows, partly miners, and partly warehousemen, and sheep farmers, and some of other vocations, but all to be relied upon for spirit and power of climbing. And with proper tools to aid us, and myself to lead the way, I felt no doubt whatever but that we could all attain the crest, where first I had met with Lorna.

Upon the whole, I rejoiced that Lorna was not present now. It must have been irksome to her feelings to have all her kindred and old associates (much as she kept aloof from them) put to death without ceremony, or else putting all of us to death. For all of us were resolved this time to have no more shilly-shallying, but to go through with a nasty business to the style of honest Englishmen, when the question comes to "Your life, or mine."

There was hardly a man among us who had not suffered bitterly from the miscreants now before us. One had lost his wife perhaps, another had lost a daughter — according to their ages; another had lost his favorite cow; in a word, there was scarcely any one who had not to complain of a hay-rick; and what surprised me then, not now, was that the men least injured made the greatest push concerning it. But be the wrong too great to speak of, or too small to swear about, from poor Kit Badcock to rich Master Huckaback, there was not one but went heart and soul for stamping out these fire-brands.

The moon was lifting well above the shoulder of the uplands when we, the chosen band, set forth, having the short, cut along the valleys to foot of the Bagworthy water, and therefore having allowed the rest an hour to fetch round the moors and hills; we were not to begin our climb until we heard a musket fired from the heights on the left-hand side, where John Fry himself was stationed, upon his own and his wife's request, so as so keep out of action. And that was the place where I had been used to sit, and to watch for Lorna. And John Fry was to fire his gun, with a ball of wood inside it, so soon as he heard the hurly-burly at the Doone-gate beginning; which we, by reason of waterfall, could not hear down in the meadows there.

We waited a very long time, with the moon marching up heaven steadfastly, and the white fog trembling in chords and columns, like a silver harp of the meadows. And then the moon drew up the fogs, and scarfed herself in white with them; and so being proud, gleamed upon the water like a bride at her looking-glass; and yet there was no sound of either John Fry or his blunderbuss