

who passes by, to see what thou shouldst keep secret even from the sun and air.'

'Ay! ay! this is a court-like requital of my service to you, Master Richard Varney,' replied Foster. 'Diddst thou not charge me to seek out for thee a fellow who had a good sword, and an unscrupulous conscience? and was I not busy-ing myself to find a fit man—for, thank Heaven, my acquaintance lies not amongst such companions—when, as Heaven would have it, this tall fellow, who is in all his qualities the very flashing knave thou didst wish, came hither to fix acquaintance upon me in the plenitude of his impudence, and I admitted his claim, thinking to do you a pleasure—and now see what thanks I get for disgracing myself by converse with him!'

'And did he,' said Varney, 'being such a fellow as thyself, only lacking, I suppose, thy present humour of hypocrisy, which lies as thin over thy hard ruffianly heart as gold lacquer upon rusty iron—did he, I say, bring the sautly, sighing Tressilian in his train?'

'They came together, by Heaven!' said Foster; 'and Tressilian—to speak Heaven's truth—obtained a moment's interview with our pretty moppet, while I was talking apart with Lambourne.'

'Improvident villain! we are both undone,' said Varney. 'She has of late been casting many a backward look to her father's halls, whenever her lordly lover leaves her alone. Should this preaching fool whistle her back to her old perch, we were but lost men.'

'No fear of that, my master,' replied Anthony Foster; 'she is in no mood to stoop to his lure, for she yelled out on seeing him as if an adder had stung her.'

'That is good.—Canst thou not get from thy daughter an inkling of what passed between them, good Foster?'

'I tell you plain, Master Varney,' said Foster, 'my daughter shall not enter our purposes, or walk in our paths. They may snit me well enough, who know how to repent of my misdoings; but I will not have my child's soul committed to peril either for your pleasure or my lord's. I may walk among snares and pitfalls myself, because I have discretion, but I will not trust the poor lamb among them.'

'Why, thou suspicious fool, I were as averse as thou art that thy baby-faced girl should enter into my plans, or walk to hell at her father's elbow. But indirectly thou mightst gain some intelligence of her.'

'And so I did, Master Varney,' answered Foster; 'and she said her lady called out upon the sickness of her father.'

'Good!' replied Varney; 'that is a hint worth catching, and I will work upon it. But the country must be rid of this Tressilian—I would have cumbered no man about the matter, for I hate him like strong poison—his presence is hemlock to me—and this day I had been rid of him, but that my foot slipped, when, to speak truth, had not thy comrade yonder come to my aid, and held his hand, I should have known by this time whether you and I have been treading the path to heaven or hell.'

'And you can speak thus of such a risk!' said Foster. 'You keep a stout heart, Master

Varney—for me, if I did not hope to live many years, and to have time for the great work of repentance, I would not go forward with you.'

'O, thou shalt live as long as Methuselah,' said Varney, 'and amass as much wealth as Solomon; and thou shalt repent so devoutly, that thy repentance shall be more famous than thy villainy,—and that is a bold word. But for all this, Tressilian must be looked after. Thy ruffian yonder is gone to dog him. It concerns our fortunes, Anthony.'

'Ay, ay,' said Foster sullenly, 'this it is to be leagued with one who knows not even so much of Scripture, as that the labourer is worthy of his hire. I must, as usual, take all the trouble and risk.'

'Risk! and what is the mighty risk, I pray you?' answered Varney. 'This fellow will come prowling again about your demesne or into your house, and if you take him for a house-breaker, or a park-breaker, is it not most natural you should welcome him with cold steel or hot lead? Even a mastiff will pull down those who come near his kennel; and who will blame him?'

'Ay, I have mastiff's work and mastiff's wage among you,' said Foster. 'Here have you, Master Varney, secured a good freehold estate out of this old superstitious foundation; and I have but a poor lease of this mansion under you, voidable at your honour's pleasure.'

'Ay, and thou wouldst fain convert thy leasehold into a copyhold—the thing may chance to happen, Anthony Foster, if thou dost good service for it. But softly, good Anthony—it is not the lending a room or two of this old house for keeping my lord's pretty parrot—nay, it is not the shutting thy doors and windows to keep her from flying off, that may deserve it. Remember, the manor and tithes are rated at the clear annual value of seventy-nine pounds five shillings and fivepence halfpenny, besides the value of the wood. Come, come, thou must be conscionable; great and secret service may deserve both this and a better thing.—And now let thy knave come and pluck off my boots.—Get us some dinner and a cup of thy best wine.—I must visit this mavis, brave in apparel, unruffled in aspect, and gay in temper.'

They parted, and at the hour of noon, which was then that of dinner, they again met at their meal, Varney gaily dressed like a courtier of the time, and even Anthony Foster improved in appearance as far as dress could amend an exterior so unfavourable.

This alteration did not escape Varney. When the meal was finished, the cloth removed, and they were left to their private discourse.—'Thou art gay as a goldfinch, Anthony,' said Varney, looking at his host; 'methinks, thou wilt whistle a jig anon—but I crave your pardon, that would secure your ejection from the congregation of the zealous botchers, the pure-hearted weavers, and the sanctified bakers of Abingdon, who let their ovens cool while their brains get heated.'

'To answer you in the spirit, Master Varney,' said Foster, 'were—excuse the parable—to fling sacred and precious things before swine. So I will speak to thee in the language of the world, which he who is King of the World hath