

'I crave your worship's pardon,' said Lambourne; 'but you seemed familiar with Anthony Foster; now I am familiar with Anthony myself.'

'Thou art a shrewd knave, I see,' replied Varney. 'Mark me—I do indeed propose to introduce thee into a nobleman's household; but it is upon my person thou wilt chiefly wait, and upon my countenance that thou wilt depend. I am his master of horse—Thou wilt soon know his name—it is one that shakes the council and yields the state.'

'By this light, a brave spell to conjure with,' said Lambourne, 'if a man would discover hidden treasures!'

'Used with discretion, it may prove so,' replied Varney; 'but mark—if thou conjure with it at thine own hand, it may raise a devil who will tear thee in fragments.'

'Enough said,' replied Lambourne; 'I will not exceed my limits.'

The travellers then resumed the rapid rate of travelling which their discourse had interrupted, and soon arrived at the royal park of Woodstock. This ancient possession of the crown of England was then very different from what it had been when it was the residence of the fair Rosamond, and the scene of Henry the Second's secret and illicit amours; and yet more unlike to the scene which it exhibits in the present day, when Blenheim House commemorates the victory of Marlborough, and no less the genius of Vanbrugh, though decried in his own time by persons of taste far inferior to his own. It was, in Elizabeth's time, an ancient mansion in bad repair, which had long ceased to be honoured with the royal residence, to the great impoverishment of the adjacent village. The inhabitants, however, had made several petitions to the queen to have the favour of the sovereign's countenance occasionally bestowed upon them; and upon this very business, ostensibly at least, was the noble lord, whom we have already introduced to our readers, a visitor at Woodstock.

Varney and Lambourne galloped without ceremony into the court-yard of the ancient and dilapidated mansion, which presented on that morning a scene of bustle which it had not exhibited for two reigns. Officers of the earl's household, liverymen and retainers, went and came with all the insolent fracas which attaches to their profession. The neigh of horses and the baying of hounds were heard; for my lord, in his occupation of inspecting and surveying the manor and demesne, was of course provided with the means of following his pleasure in the chase or park, said to have been the earliest that was enclosed in England, and which was well stocked with deer, that had long roamed there unmolested. Several of the inhabitants of the village, in anxious hope of a favourable result from this unwonted visit, loitered about the court-yard, and awaited the great man's coming forth. Their attention was excited by the hasty arrival of Varney, and a murmur ran amongst them, 'The Earl's master of the horse!' while they hurried to bespeak favour by hastily unbonnetting, and proffering to hold the bridle and stirrup of the favoured retainer and his attendant.

'Stand somewhat aloof, my masters!' said

Varney haughtily, 'and let the domestics do their office.'

The mortified citizens and peasants fell back at the signal; while Lambourne, who had his eye upon his superior's deportment, repelled the services of those who offered to assist him with yet more discourtesy—'Stand back, Jack peasant, with a murrain to you, and let these knave footmen do their duty!'

While they gave their nags to the attendants of the household, and walked into the mansion with an air of superiority which long practice and consciousness of birth rendered natural to Varney, and which Lambourne endeavoured to imitate as well as he could, the poor inhabitants of Woodstock whispered to each other, 'Well-a-day—God save us from all such misproud princes! An the master be like the men, why, the fiend may take all, and yet have no more than his due.'

'Silence, good neighbours!' said the bailiff, 'keep tongue betwixt teeth—we shall know more by and by.—But never will a lord come to Woodstock so welcome as bluff old King Harry! He would horsewhip a fellow one day with his own royal hand, and then fling him an handful of silver groats, with his own broad face on them, to 'noint the sore withal.'

'Ay, rest be with him!' echoed the auditors; 'it will be long ere this Lady Elizabeth horsewhip any of us.'

'There is no saying,' answered the bailiff. 'Meanwhile, patience, good neighbours, and let us comfort ourselves by thinking that we deserve such notice at her Grace's hands.'

Meanwhile, Varney, closely followed by his new dependant, made his way to the hall, where men of more note and consequence than those left in the court-yard awaited the appearance of the earl, who as yet kept his chamber. All paid court to Varney, with more or less deference, as suited their own rank, or the urgency of the business which brought them to his lord's levee. To the general question of 'When comes my lord forth, Master Varney?' he gave brief answers, as, 'See you not my boots? I am just returned from Oxford, and know nothing of it,' and the like, until the same query was put in a higher tone by a personage of more importance. 'I will inquire of the chamberlain, Sir Thomas Copely,' was the reply. The chamberlain, distinguished by his silver key, answered, that the earl only waited Master Varney's return to come down, but that he would first speak with him in his private chamber. Varney, therefore, bowed to the company, and took leave, to enter his lord's apartment.

There was a murmur of expectation which lasted a few minutes, and was at length hushed by the opening of the folding-doors at the upper end of the apartment, through which the earl made his entrance, marshalled by his chamberlain and the steward of his family, and followed by Richard Varney. In his noble mien and princely features, men read nothing of that insolence which was practised by his dependants. His courtesies were, indeed, measured by the rank of those to whom they were addressed, but even the meanest person present had a share of his gracious notice. The inquiries which he