

KATERFELTO,

A STORY OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER I.

DEADMAN'S ALLEY.

On the last day of April, 1788, John Wilkes, refusing to enter into his recognition to appear before the Court of Queen's Bench, was committed to the Tower by warrant of my Lords Egmont and Halifax, the Majesty's two principal Secretaries of State.

Of course, constituted authority has never wanted sympathy from that British public which entertains, nevertheless, a profound respect for law. Mr. Wilkes became a hero in consequence; and while many a jug of beer was thereafter emptied, and many a bottle of wine cracked to his health, diverse street songs, more or less execrable, were composed in honor of the so-called patriot, whose personal popularity was incontestable, notwithstanding the unprepossessing exterior, that has passed into a proverb.

Of these, none were perhaps so absurd as the following ditty, chanted by a chairman more than half drunk, under the windows of a tavern in Covent Garden, notwithstanding the protestations of some half-dozen gentlemen, who, seated at supper in an upper chamber, held that their tastes and opinions were equally outraged by the persistency of the singer below.

"King Nabuchodonosor," whined the chairman.

"Hold that cursed noise!" exclaimed one of the gentlemen from the window.

"King Nabuchodonosor," repeated the chairman in all the aggravating monotony of a minor key.

"You knave!" roared a second voice—"I'll come down and beat you to a jelly, if you speak another syllable!"

A volley of oaths succeeded this threat, but their objective stood firm manfully under the discharge, and fixing his eyes on vacancy, proceeded with his song—

"King Nabuchodonosor,
Lived in a golden palace;
He fed from a golden dish, and drank
His swipes from a golden chalice.
But John Wilkes he was for Middlesex,
And they chose him for knight of the shire;
For he made a fool of Alderman Bull,
And called Parson Tooke a liar!"

"Hurrah!" continued the vocalist, who had lost his hat, waving a scratch wig round his ear, and with an abortive attempt to cheer.

"King Nabu—Nabu—cho—donosor was a mighty man—shaking his head with unimpaired solemnity—"a mighty man, no doubt,

but John Wilkes he was for Middlesex,
And they chose him for knight of the shire."

Hip, hip—Hurrah!"

A burst of laughter rang from the party in the tavern, and a gentleman in a lined waistcoat shut down the window after throwing out a crown-piece to the singer in the street.

Night was falling, the air felt chilly, though it was summer, and the party, who had drunk several bottles of port, gathered round the fire over a steaming bowl of punch.

They were of all ages between twenty and fifty. One of them wore a wig, another powder, a third had brushed his luxuriant hair to the poll of his neck and tied it in a puny black bow. Their long-waisted coats were cut to an ampie width at skirt and sleeves, their waistcoats heavily bound with lace. Hats of ribbon adorned the knees of their breeches, their shoes were fastened with buckles, and each man carried sword and snuff-box. To drink, to fence, to "lug out" as it was called, on slight provocation, to sing a good song, tell a broad story, and spin a deal of snuff in its recital, were, at this period, the necessary accomplishments of a gentleman.

The room in which these worthies had assembled seemed more comfortable than luxurious. Its bare floor was sanded, and the chairs, long-legged, high-backed and narrow-seated, were little suggestive of repose, but the mahogany table had been rubbed till it shone like glass, the wood-fire blazed and crackled, lighting up the crimson hangings that festooned the windows, and though the candles were but tallow, there flared enough of them to bring relief the pictures with which the unpapered walls were hung. These works of art, being without exception of a sporting tendency, were treated in a realistic style, and seemed indeed to have been painted by the same master—A fighting cock, spurred, trimmed, and prepared for battle, standing on the very tip-toe of defiance. A horse with a preternaturally small head, and the shortest possible tail, galloping over Newmarket Heath, to win, as set forth in the large print below, "a match or plate of the value of fifty guineas." The portrait of a celebrated prize-fighter, armed with a broadsword, of a noted boxer in position, strapped to the waist. Lastly, an ambitious composition, consisting of scarlet frocks, and cocked hats, tired horses and bay mounds, grouped round a central figure

the toast. John Wilkes ought still to be fast by the heels in the Tower of London. If he had his deserts John Wilkes would never have come out again, alive or dead, and nobody but a d—d Jacobite, and traitor to His Majesty King George, would venture to call such a toast in this worshipful company. I stand to what I say, John Garnet. It's you to play next!"

Each man looked at his neighbor. The punch-bowler half rose to interfere, but shortly plumped into his seat again, finding himself, it may be, not quite steady on his legs, while the young gentleman thus offensively addressed, clenched his glass, as if to hurl it in the last speaker's face. Controlling himself, however, with obvious effort, he broke into a forced laugh, glanced at his rapier, "If you desire to fasten a quarrel on me, Mr. Gale, this is neither a fitting time nor place."

"Quarrel!" exclaimed the man behind the punch-bowl; "no gentleman, drunk or sober, would be fain to quarrel on John Wilkes's behalf. Sure, he can take his own part with the best or worst of us, and Mr. Gale was only playing the ball back to your service, John Garnet. You began the jest, had or good. Be reasonable, gentlemen. Fill your glasses, and let us wash away all unkindness. Here's to you both!"

Mr. Gale, though something of a bully, was not, in the main, an ill-natured man. He squared his shoulders, filled his glass, and pledged the person he had insulted with an indifference that almost amounted to additional provocation. Confident in his personal strength and skill with his weapon, Mr. Gale, to use his own phraseology, was accustomed to consider himself Cock of the Walk in every society he frequented. Nine men out of ten are willing to accept bluster for courage, and give the wall readily enough to him who assumes it as right. The tenth is made of sterner stuff, resists the pretension, and exposes too often a white feather lurking under the fowl's wing, that crowed so lustily and strutted with so defiant a gait.

All this passed through the mind of John Garnet, completely sobered by his wrangle, while he sipped punch in silence, meditating reprisals before the night was past.

This young gentleman, whose nature and fortune seemed to have intended for better things, was at present wasting health and energy in a life of pleasure that failed egregiously to please, but that succeeded in draining the resources of a slender purse to their lowest ebb. He came of an old family, and indeed, but for the attainder that deprived his father of the lands and title, would have been the owner of large estates in the North, and addressed by tenantry or neighbors as Sir John—that father, devoted body and soul to the Stuarts, died at Rome, beggared and broken-hearted, leaving his son little besides his blessing, and an injunction never to abandon the good cause, but bequeathing to him the personal beauty and well-knit frame that Acts of Parliament were powerless to alienate. The young man's laughing eyes, rich color, dark hair, and handsome features were in keeping with a light muscular figure, a stature slightly above the average, and an easy jaunty bearing, set off by a rich dress, particularly pleasing to feminine taste. Hence, while he repudiated the title of which he had been deprived, it became a jest among his intimates to call him "plain John Garnet," a jest of which the point was perhaps more appreciated by the other sex, than by his own.

Plain John Garnet looked somewhat preoccupied now, sitting moodily over his punch, and the influence of his demeanor seemed to steal upon the company in general. Mr. Gale, indeed, held forth loudly on horse-racing, cock-fighting, and such congenial topics, but spent his breath for an inattentive audience, not to be interested even by a dissertation on West-country wrestling in all its branches—the Cornish lug, the Devonshire shoulder-grip, and the West Somerset "rough-and-tumble catch where you can."

At an earlier hour than usual the reckoning was called, and the guests, not very steady, assumed their swords and hats to pass downstairs into the street. Mr. Gale by accident, John Garnet by design, were the last to leave the room.

The latter placed himself before the door, observing in a quiet tone, that the other's reckoning was not yet wholly paid up. "How so?" asked Gale, in his loud, authoritative voice. "The oldest member has taken my half-guinea, and entered it in due course. Will you satisfy yourself, my young friend, by calling the landlord to produce his club-books? Pooh, pooh! young sir; the punch is strong, and you have drunk too much! Stand aside, I say, and let me pass!"

He did not like the set look of John Garnet's mouth; he liked less the low firm tones in which that gentleman repeated his assertion.

"You may or may not be in debt to the club—it is their affair. You owe an apology to one of the members—that is mine."

"Apology!" stormed the other. "Apology! what do you mean, sir? This is insolence. Don't attempt to bully me, sir! Again I say, at your peril, let me pass!"

"Do you refuse it?" asked John Garnet.

The waiter, fresh on the town, and unused to such brawls, ran down to summon his master, who was busy over the house accounts in a small parlor below. Till the landlord had added up one column and carried it's balance to the next, he paid no attention, though his astonished servant stood pale and trembling before him, with a cork-screw in his mouth and a bottle under his arm. Then both rushed upstairs in a prodigious hurry, just too late to prevent mischief.

While yet in the passage they could hear a scuffle of feet, a clink of steel, a smothered oath, and a groan; but as they reached the door it was opened from inside, and John Garnet stood before them, panting, excited, his waistcoat torn, his dress away, with the candle in his hand.

"There is a gentleman badly hurt in that room," said he. "Better send for a surgeon at once, and get a coach to take him home." Then he blew out the candle, slipped down stairs in the dark, and so into the street.

The gentleman was indeed so badly hurt that all the energies of the household were concentrated on the sufferer. Nobody had a thought to spare for the assailant till long after pursuit would have been too late. Mr. Gale was wounded in the fore-arm, and had received a sword-thrust through the lungs. With the landlord's assistance he made shift to walk into a bedchamber, where they undressed and laid him carefully down; but before a surgeon could arrive there was obviously no hope, and he only lived long enough to assure a doctor, in the presence of his own making, and was fought out according to the usual rules of fair-play.

"I was a fool not to close with him," murmured the dying man, reflecting ruefully on the personal strength he had misapplied. "But the rogue is a pretty swordsman; quick, well-taught, supple as an eel, and—I forgive him!"

Then he turned on his side, as the landlord subsequently stated, and thereafter spoke never a word more, good or bad.

John Garnet, meanwhile, made the best of his way into the street, with the intention of proceeding straight to his lodgings, and riding out of London next morning at break of day. Duels, though of no rare occurrence, were serious matters even in a time when every man carried a small sword, by his breeches-pocket; and to be taken red-handed, as it were, from the slaughter of an adversary, would have entailed unpleasant consequences to liberty, if not to life. While it had been established that a gentleman was bound to defend his honor with cold steel, it seemed also understood that in such encounters every victory might be purchased at too dear a price. Nevertheless, so riotous were the habits of the day, encouraging to the utmost card-playing and the free use of wine, so lax was the administration of the law, and so stringent the code of public opinion, that scarcely a week passed without an encounter, more or less bloody, between men of education and intellect, who would have considered themselves dishonored had they not been ready at any moment to support a jest, an argument, or an insult, with naked steel. John Garnet, therefore, observing an ancient watchman pacing his sluggish rounds, turned aside into a by-street rather than confront this guardian of the peace; and hastening on as he became less certain of the locality, was aware that his strength began to fail, and his shirt clinging to his body, wet and clammy with something that must be blood.

For an instant he thought of turning back into the more frequented thoroughfare; but the hum of voices, and increasing tread of feet, seemed too suggestive of discovery, and he stumbled onwards, in faint hope of reaching the dwelling of some obscure barber-surgeon who might staunch his wounds, and send for a coach to take him home.

Twice he recoiled against the wall of a certain dark passage, called Deadman's Alley, down which he staggered with uneven steps, and had almost decided that he must sink into the gutter, and lie where he fell till a passer-by should pick him up, when he descried a red lamp in a window ahead, and summoned all his strength to make for it as his last hope. Half blind, half stupefied, he groped and blundered on, with a dull, strange fancy that he was on deck of a ship, laboring in a heavy sea while she made for a harbor-light, that seemed continually to dip and disappear behind the waves. The illusion, though not so vivid, was similar to a dream, and the languor that accompanied it something akin to sleep; till in a moment, while through his brain there came a whirr as in the works of a watch when it runs down, the light widened, broke into a hundred shafts of fire, went out and all was dark.

CHAPTER II.

PORLOCK BAY.

High-water in Porlock Bay. The tide upon the turn—sand-pipers, great and small dipping, nodding, stalking to and fro, or flitting along its margin waiting for the ebb; a gull riding smoothly outside on an un-

the wet grassy plains of Exmoor. Traveling over that distance, the sense of sight could not but weary for very gladness, and turned well pleased to rest itself on the white cliffs of the Welsh coast opposite, and the faint blue of the intervening waters, calm and still, like the eyes of a girl, whose being has never yet been stirred into passion by the storm.

Above, below, around, Porlock Bay was decked in her fairest garb. Earth, air, and water seemed holding jubilee; but the loveliest object in earth, air, or water was a maiden seated on a point of rock, washed by the drowsy lap and murmur of the tide, who seemed pondering deeply yet in simple happy thought—a maiden of comely features and gracious presence, the sweetest lass from Boscington Point to Bidford Bay, nimble with needle, tongue and finger, courteous, quick-witted, brave, tender-hearted, the light of a household, the darling of a hamlet, the toast of three counties,—and her name was Nelly Carew.

She had sat the best part of an hour without moving from her place, therefore she could not be waiting for an expected arrival. She swung her straw hat backwards and forwards by its broad blue ribbon, with the regularity of a pendulum; therefore her meditations could have been of no agitating kind, and she looked straight into the horizon, neither upward like those who live in the future, nor downwards like those who ponder on the past. Nevertheless, her reflections must have been of an engrossing nature, for she started at a man's footstep on the shingle, and the healthy color mantled in her cheek, while she rose and put out her hand to be grasped in that of a square-shouldered, rough-looking personage, whose greeting, though perfectly respectful, seemed more cordial than polite.

"Good even, Mistress Nelly," said the new comer, in a deep sonorous voice; "and a penny for your thoughts. If I may be so bold; for thinking you were, my pretty lass, I'll wager a bodkin, of something very nigh your heart."

She turned her blue eyes—and Nelly Carew's blue eyes made fools of the opposite sex at short notice—full in the speaker's face.

"Indeed, Parson," she answered, "you never spoke a truer word in the pulpit, nor out of it. I've turned it over in my mind till I'm dazed with thinking, and I can't get her to sit, do what I will."

"Sit!" exclaimed the other. "Where and how?"

"Why, the speckled hen to be sure!" answered Nelly, rather impatiently. "If she adds all these as she added the last hatch, I'll forswear keeping fowls, that I will—it puts me past my patience. How do you contrive with yours, Mr. Gale? though to be sure, if I was a parson, like you, I wouldn't keep game-cocks. I couldn't have the heart see the poor thing fight!"

Parson Gale made no attempt to justify this secular amusement. He was one of those ecclesiastics, too common a hundred years ago, who looked upon his preferment and his parish as a layman of the present day looks on a sporting manor and a hunting-box. Burly, middle-aged, and athletic, there were few men between Bodmin and Barnstaple who could vie with the parson in tying a fly, setting a trimmer, tailing an otter, handling a game-cock, using fists and cudgel, wrestling a tall, and on occasion emptying a gallon of cider or a jack of double ale. Nay, he knew how to harbor a stag, and ride the moor after him when the pack were laid on, with the keenest sportsman of the West, and if to these accomplishments are added no little skill in cattle doctoring, and some practical knowledge of natural history, it is not to be supposed that the Reverend Abner Gale found much leisure for those classical and theological studies, to which he had never shown the slightest inclination.

"It is but their nature," said the parson, reverting to the game-cocks, of which he owned a choice and undefeated breed. "It comes as natural for them to fight, as for me to drink when I'm dry, or for your old grandfather to sit and nod over the fire. Or for yourself, Mistress Nelly,"—here the parson hesitated and tapped his heavy riding boots with his heavier whip—"to bloom here in the fresh air of the Channel, like a rose in a bow-pot. There's a many would fain gather the rose, only they durstn't ask for fear of being denied."

The latter part of the sentence was spoken low enough for Nelly, even if she heard it, to ignore.

"And what brought you here this afternoon?" she inquired in her frankest tones. "It's a long ride across the moor, Parson, even for you, and not much of a place when you get to it. If it had been Bridgewater now, or Barnstaple, sure you would have seen a score of neighbors, men and women, to tell you the news, and wind up the night with a junket or may be a dance. But here" and Nelly burst into a merry laugh, "our only news is that the speckled hen seems as obstinate as a mule, and Farmer Veal brought a roan nag home this morning from Exeter. I daresay you've seen it already. As to dancing, if you must needs dance, Parson Gale, it will have to be with grandfather or me."

certain reckless good humor that often accompanies laxity of principle and habits of self-indulgence. Many women would have seen something attractive even now in his burly strength and manly bearing; would have thought it worth while, perhaps, to wean him from his game-cocks and his boon companions, to tempt him back into the paths of sobriety, good government, and moderation. Among such reformers he would fain have counted Nelly Carew.

"You must tell it me in the house then," said she, rising hastily, and looking up at the sky, as if in dread of a coming shower. "It's time I was back with grandfather to give him his posset—I left it simmering on the hob more than an hour ago. Poor grandfather! He never complains, but I fear he frets if I keep away from him long. It must be dull for him sure, after the life he led once, dukes and princes and counts of the empire and what not—why, his very snuff-box belonged to Prince Eugene; and now he has nobody to speak to but me! Come in, Mr. Gale, and welcome; it will freshen him up a bit to see a new face, for I think he seems poorly this morning; you may walk straight into the parlor; you know your way well enough—while I go and look after supper. You'll eat a morsel with us, won't you, before your ride across the moor?"

Thus staying off any further explanation of the parson's hint, Nelly Carew led the way to the pretty and commodious cottage she called her home, stopping at the door to prune a broken twig from the myrtle that flourished by the porch as luxuriously as though North Devon were the South of France. Parson Gale, noting the trim garden, the well-ordered flower-beds, the newly-thatched roof, and general air of cleanliness and decency that pervaded the establishment, could not repress a strong desire to own the treasure thus comfortably bestowed. There was the casket. Would he ever succeed in carrying off its jewel to make the light of his own heart the ornament on his breast?

It seemed but yesterday she came here a smiling little lass of nine or ten, the darling of that worn-out soldier, whose life had commenced so eventfully, to dribble out its remaining sands in so quiet and obscure a retreat. Of old Carew's history he only knew thus much, that the veteran had passed a wild unbridled youth, a stormy and reckless manhood; that he had been tried for rebellion in '15, and risked his head, already gray, once more in '45, escaping imprisonment and even death on both occasions by the interposition of powerful friends and in consideration of his services on the continent during the war. Even John, Duke of Marlborough, spoke out for the man he had seen at Malplaquet, holding his own with a pike against three of the Black Musketeers, and who carried his weapon in a cool salute to his commander the instant he had beaten them off. But Carew never prospered, despite his dauntless courage and military skill. Now some fatal duel, now some wild outrage on discipline and propriety brought him into disgrace with the authorities, and men who were unborn when he first smelt powder, commanded regiments and brigades, while he remained a simple lieutenant, with a slender income, a handsome person, and a reputation for daring alone.

Such characters marry hastily and imprudently. Carew's wife died when her first child was born, a handsome little rogue, who grew to man's estate the very counterpart in person and disposition of his graceless sire. He, too, married early and in defiance of prudential considerations, gambled, drank, quarrelled with his father, and lost his life in a duel before they had made friends. Old Carew's hair turned gray, and his proud form began to stoop soon after his son's death, for he loved the boy dearly, none the less perhaps because of those very qualities he thought it right to reprove. Then he took the widow and her little girl to live with him at a small freehold he inherited near Porlock; but young Mistress Carew did not long survive her husband, and the old man found himself at threescore years and ten the sole companion of a demure little damsel not yet in her teens, whose every look, word and gesture reminded him cruelly of the son he had loved and lost.

These two became inseparable. The child's mother had imparted to her a few simple accomplishments—needlework, housekeeping, a little singing, a little music, the French language—as she had herself acquired it in a convent abroad; above all, those womanly ways that not one woman in ten really possesses, and that make the charm of what is called society no less than the happiness of home.

Little Nelly was still in her black frock when, taking a Sunday walk hand-in-hand with her grandfather, she looked up in his face, and thus accosted him:—

"When I'm big," said she, "I'll have a little girl of my own. I shall take her out-a-walking, and be kind to her, as you are to me. You won't like her better than me, grandfather, will you?"

"You may be sure of that, Nelly," was his answer, while he marvelled how this blue-eyed mite had come to be dearer to him