

"NIL DESPERANDUM;" OR, THE FORTUNES OF A LOYAL HOUSE.

(Continued from p. 133.)

CHAPTER XI.

OXFORD.

"He came—he pass'd—a heedless gaze,
As o'er some stranger glancing."

Scott.

HIS journey was over at last: they had passed the gates of Oxford, and were in the long splendid High-street, with its moving throng of soldiers, students, townsmen, and wondering country-folks, and the grey buildings towering up above them all into the evening sky. They were in Oxford; they were safe: so Dorothy repeated to herself, but she felt terribly lonely, nevertheless, in the midst of all that crowd, and looked in vain for a friendly face. She was very tired, too; for the troopers who came upon them at the farmhouse had pressed their horses into the king's service, and had led them off, in spite of Jasper's angry remonstrances; so that he and Dorothy had been obliged to walk the rest of the way into Oxford. She was weak and worn, and almost fainting; she leaned heavily on her old servant's arm, and could scarcely answer him when he spoke to her.

"What's to do now, madam?" said Jasper, drawing her aside into the shadow of a college gateway, out of the noisy crowd. "Shall we make a shift to find Captain Frank's lodgings? We must have a place of rest for you, the sooner the better."

"Nay—I know not," said Dorothy, faintly. "I have a friend here, who will commend me to the Queen's care. Once under her majesty's protection, I am safe."

"Where is your friend, madam?" said Jasper, wonderingly.

"I do not justly know," hesitated Dorothy; and then she added with sudden decision: "In any case I must rest a moment. I cannot go another step. I will sit me down on this bench, and when I am a little rested, we will go and enquire for her majesty."

Old Jasper looked gravely down into the pale young face. He said nothing, however, and while Dorothy sat on the stone

bench just inside the archway, and with eager eyes scanned the faces of the crowd, he stood like a faithful watchman a little in advance, so that no one should come too near his charge. Presently a party of gaily-dressed ladies and gentlemen, mounted on spirited horses, came pacing along the street, and turned in under the archway where he and Dorothy had taken refuge. The party were riding two and two, with three armed servants behind; they were all talking and laughing merrily, and the silver bells on the horses jingled in chorus. The first lady rode a beautiful white horse; she was very handsome, and richly dressed, and the cavalier in attendance upon her, who evidently had not a look or a thought to spare for anyone else, was Mr. Henry Corbet.

"There is a pretty face, but it looks sadly distraught," said the lady, as they clanked in over the paving-stones, past where Dorothy was sitting.

"There are hundreds of them," said Mr. Corbet; "a bed in the street here is better than a burning house out in the country: so they fly hither for refuge."

As he spoke, he turned a little in his saddle, and looked at Dorothy. He saw, though his companion did not, the flash of recognition in her eyes, and the sudden colour that sprang into her face; and with a momentary glance he turned his head away, and rode on with his friends through the open gates, into the green quadrangle beyond. Jasper had not been quick enough to recognise him; he failed to see in this gay and splendid cavalier the poor wounded fugitive who had been sheltered at Dering; neither did he see the change in his mistress's face. But after the little company had passed he looked at her, and saw that she had fainted away upon her seat, and was lying back, white and motionless, against the rough grey stones. Two or three of the passers-by stopped to see what was going on, as the old man lifted the maiden tenderly in his arms.