

'And thine, I suppose,' said Varney, 'has had its edge blunted long since?'

'I cannot remember, sir, that its edge was ever over keen,' replied Lambourne. 'When I was a youth, I had some few whimsies, but I rubbed them partly out of my recollection on the rough grindstone of the wars, and what remained I washed out in the broad waves of the Atlantic.'

'Thou hast served, then, in the Indies?'

'In both East and West,' replied the candidate for court service, 'by both sea and land; I have served both the Portugal and the Spaniard—both the Dutchman and the Frenchman, and have made war on our own account with a crew of jolly fellows, who held there was no peace beyond the Line.'

'Thou mayest do me, and my lord, and thyself, good service,' said Varney, after a pause. 'But observe, I know the world—and answer me truly, canst thou be faithful?'

'Did you not know the world,' answered Lambourne, 'it were my duty to say ay, without further circumstance, and to swear it with life and honour, and so forth. But as it seems to me that your worship is one who desires rather honest truth than politic falsehood—I reply to you, that I can be faithful to the gallows foot; ay, to the loop that dangles from it, if I am well used and well recompensed;—not otherwise.'

'To thy other virtues thou canst add, no doubt,' said Varney, in a jeering tone, 'the knack of seeming serious and religious when the moment demands it?'

'It would cost me nothing,' said Lambourne, 'to say yes—but, to speak on the square, I must needs say no. If you want a hypocrite, you may take Anthony Foster, who, from his childhood, had some sort of phantom haunting him, which he called religion, though it was that sort of godliness which always ended in being great gain. But I have no such knack of it.'

'Well,' replied Varney, 'if thou hast no hypocrisy, hast thou not a nag here in the stable?'

'Ay, sir,' said Lambourne, 'that shall take hedge and ditch with my lord duke's best hunters. When I made a little mistake on Shooter's Hill, and stopped an ancient grazier whose ponches were better lined than his brain-par., the bonnie bay nag carried me sheer off in spite of the whole lue and cry.'

'Saddle him, then, instantly, and attend me,' said Varney. 'Leave thy clothes and baggage under charge of mine host, and I will conduct thee to a service, in which, if thou do not better thyself, the fault shall not be fortune's, but thine own.'

'Brave and hearty!' said Lambourne, 'and I am mounted in an instant.—Knave hostler, saddle my nag without the loss of one instant, as thou dost value the safety of thy noddle.—Pretty Cicely, take half this purse to comfort thee for my sudden departure.'

'Gogsnoons!' replied the father, 'Cicely wants no such token from thee.—Go away, Mike, and gather grace if thou canst, though I think thou goest not to the land where it grows.'

* Sir Francis Drake, Morgan, and many a bold buccanier of those days, were, in fact, little better than pirates.

'Let me look at this Cicely of thine, mine host,' said Varney; 'I have heard much talk of her beauty.'

'It is a sunburnt beauty,' said mine host, 'well qualified to stand out rain and wind, but little calculated to please such critical gallants as yourself. She keeps her chamber, and cannot encounter the glance of such sunny-day courtiers as my noble guest.'

'Well, peace be with her, my good host,' answered Varney; 'our horses are impatient—we bid you good day.'

'Does my nephew go with you, so please you?' said Gosling.

'Ay, such is his purpose,' answered Richard Varney.

'You are right—fully right,' replied mine host—'you are, I say, fully right, my kinsman. Thou hast got a gay horse, see thou light not unaware upon a halter—or, if thou wilt needs be made immortal by means of a rope, which thy purpose of following this gentleman renders not unlikely, I charge thee to find a gallows as far from Cummor as thou conveniently mayest, and so I commend you to your saddle.'

The master of the horse and his new retainer mounted accordingly, leaving the landlord to conclude his ill-omened farewell to himself and at leisure, and set off together at a rapid pace, which prevented conversation until the ascent of a steep sandy hill permitted them to resume it.

'You are contented, then,' said Varney to his companion, 'to take court service?'

'Ay, worshipful sir, if you like my terms as well as I like yours.'

'And what are your terms?' demanded Varney. 'If I am to have a quick eye for my patron's interest, he must have a dull one towards my faults,' said Lambourne.

'Ay,' said Varney, 'so they lie not so grossly open that he must needs break his shins over them.'

'Agreed,' said Lambourne. 'Next, if I run down game, I must have the picking of the houses.'

'That is but reason,' replied Varney, 'so that your betters are served before you.'

'Good,' said Lambourne; 'and it only remains to be said, that if the law and I quarrel, my patron must bear me out, for that is a chief point.'

'Reason again,' said Varney, 'if the quarrel hath happened in your master's service.'

'For the wage and so forth, I say nothing,' proceeded Lambourne; 'it is the secret guerdon that I must live by.'

'Never fear,' said Varney; 'thou shalt have clothes and spending money to ruffle it with the best of thy degree, for thou goest to a household where you have gold, as they say, by the eye.'

'That jumps all with my humour,' replied Michael Lambourne; 'and it only remains that you tell me my master's name.'

'My name is Master Richard Varney,' answered his companion.

'But I mean,' said Lambourne, 'the name of the noble lord to whose service you are to prefer me.'

'How, knave, art thou too good to call me master?' said Varney hastily; 'I would have thee bold to others, but not saucy to me.'