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THE FLIGHT FROM CUMNOR, page 283.

CHAPTER.I.

I am an innkeeper, and know my grounds,
And study them; brain o' man, I study them.
I must have jovial guests to drive my ploughs,
And whistling boys to bring my harvests home,
Or I shall hear no flails thwack.

THE NEW INN.

It is the privilege of tale-tellers to open their story in an inn, the free rendezvous of all travellers, and where the humour of each displays itself without ceremony or restraint. This is especially suitable when the scene is laid during the old days of merry England, when the guests were in some sort not merely the inmates, but the messmates and temporary companions of mine host, who was usually a personage of privileged freedom, comely presence, and good humour. Patronized by him, the characters of the company were placed in ready contrast; and they seldom failed, during the emptying of a six-hooped pot, to throw off reserve, and present themselves to each other, and to their landlord, with the freedom of old acquaintance.

The village of Cumnor, within three or four miles of Oxford, boasted, during the eighteenth year of Queen Elizabeth, an excellent inn of the old stamp, conducted, or rather ruled, by Giles Gosling, a man of goodly person, and of somewhat round belly; fifty years of age and upwards, moderate in his reckonings, prompt in his payments, having a cellar of sound liquor, a ready wit, and a pretty daughter. Since the days of old Harry Baillie of the Tabbard in Southwark, no one had excelled Giles Gosling in the power of pleasing his guests of every description; and so great was his fame, that to have been in Cumnor, without wetting a cup at the bonnie Black Bear, would have been to avouch one's self utterly indifferent to reputation as a traveller. A country fellow might as well return from London without looking in the face of majesty. The men of Cumnor were proud of

their host, and their host was proud of his house, his liquor, his daughter, and himself.

It was in the court-yard of the inn which called this honest fellow landlord, that a traveller alighted in the close of the evening, gave his horse, which seemed to have made a long journey, to the hostler, and made some inquiry, which produced the following dialogue betwixt the myrmidons of the bonnie Black Bear.

'What ho! John Tapster.'

'At hand, Will Hostler,' replied the man of the spigot, showing himself in his costume of loose jacket, linen breeches, and green apron, half within and half without a door, which appeared to descend to an outer cellar.

'Here is a gentleman asks if you draw good ale,' continued the hostler.

'Beshrew my heart else,' answered the tapster, 'since there are but four miles betwixt us and Oxford.—Marry, if my ale did not convince the heads of the scholars, they would soon convince my pate with the pewter flagon.'

'Call you that Oxford logic?' said the stranger, who had now quitted the rein of his horse, and was advancing towards the inn door, when he was encountered by the goodly form of Giles Gosling himself.

'Is it logic you talk of, Sir Guest?' said the host; 'why, then, have at you with a downright consequence—'

"The horse to the rack,
And to fire with the sack."

'Amen! with all my heart, my good host,' said the stranger; 'let it be a quart of your