

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

(Continued from p. 271.)

CHAPTER XXI.

PARTING.

“Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;  
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;  
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.”

*Tennyson.*

**K**ING CHARLES was sadly changed since the days when he and the Queen held their court at Oxford. His face was pale and care-worn, and his hair and beard were grey; he was carelessly dressed, too, having had no good attendance since his own servants had been taken from him, more than a year before. But he greeted his friends cheerfully, and Dorothy saw that he still moved and spoke with the calm dignity she remembered so well. She stood behind Lady Newbury, looking curiously at the strange faces, the troopers thronging outside, and Colonel Harrison with the King, dry and stern, with his dark fanatical face and strict soldierly manner.

Lady Newbury led the King immediately into the parlour, and told him aside, as quickly as she could, of the accident which had befallen Whiteleg, saying, that there were still good horses in the stable, if his Majesty would be pleased to make use of one of them, and still carry out his plan. But the King shook his head.

“Nay, my Lady Kate,” he said, “the fate of Whiteleg has decided me. And to speak truly, I saw as I rode along to-day that such a plan could scarce be carried through. I ride encompassed by a hundred horse, every man, officer and soldier, having a loaded pistol in his hand. It would only be dying a little before my time. I may as well wait.”

Lady Newbury turned away to wipe her eyes.

“Your Majesty will pardon me,” she said; “but truly I had set my heart upon the plan. And here was Colonel Frank Audley, your true servant, ready prepared to ride with you to the coast.”

“There is a service that Colonel Audley

may do me, though not this. I have letters to send to my nephew, Rupert, at Helvoetsluis; he has scarcely yet sailed for Ireland.”

Frank had just entered the room, and came towards them, in answer to Lady Newbury’s sign. The King took out a little packet, and gave it into his hand.

“Will you do your King so much service, sir, as to carry these, without any great delay, to the Prince Rupert, at Helvoetsluis?”

“Most surely, your Majesty,” answered Frank: “I am but now come from the Hague.”

“Ha! and how are matters there? What cheer with my son and his friends?”

“Much grieved at the news from England, and at the sad state of the cause, so plainly shewn in your Majesty’s letter to the Prince of Wales. Your Majesty knows that Monsieur Pau has been sent by the States to remonstrate with these traitors, and desire them to enter into terms of accommodation, instead of this unlawful and wicked prosecution.”

“Ah, ’tis very well,” said Charles, smiling sadly. “This Parliament, I doubt me, will listen to no ambassadors: they will carry out their work to the end. Well, be it as God wills! You, my friends, may live to see this kingdom once more established in peace. The English are by nature a sober people, and will not for ever continue in these fanatic humours.”

So talked the King and his friends before dinner. After he had dined, they passed into another room, and thence through several apartments of his old Lodge; not suffered to remain anywhere without soldiers at the door, so that any private conversation had to be carried on in the lowest tones. They were grateful to Colonel Harrison, who did not intrude himself or his officers into the King’s presence.

As for Dorothy Lyne, she watched and listened with the deepest interest. There was no such hero in the world as this royal