

Noel did let go, and struck out his hand to catch Clarence—or Maria—and was successful.

"Noel! by heaven I'll stab you, if you stop me!"

"You break faith with me, do you? I thought so, or I would not have changed sides to be revenged on you. But speak."

"Noel, you rush on your fate. I don't want to kill you—no, no; and I don't want to be killed. But it is one of us now, if you don't release me."

The unseen struggle continued for a moment longer; then Clarence Harvey leaped from the window, and Noel lay bathed in his blood on the floor, crying out to the men who were trampling on him that he was one of themselves—their guide!

CHAPTER XCIV. SPITALFIELDS.

Now it happened one night, when the mercer's household at Blackheath were all in bed, that a messenger arrived, and stood demanding, with great vehemence, to see Paul Arkdale. He shouted, rang, and thumped, till both Sir Richard and Paul had risen from their beds to see what the disturbance was about.

"What now?" cried Sir Richard, from the stairhead; but there was such a noise between the indignant servants and persistent visitor that his voice was not heard.

"Oh, sir—oh, dear father, will you not go down and see? Perhaps 'tis he in danger—pursued—who knows?"

"Teena!"

She had risen, and flown along the passage in her scarlet cloak and hood, her face white as a ghost's.

"Go, dear father, or let me. I am sure it is Stephen, or some messenger from him. Paul, will you not go!"

"Gently, Paul—mind who you let in," cried Sir Richard, as Paul ran down. "Devil a Jacobite shall shelter here. Plague take the whole tribe, I say—king and all. I know they'll bring us to the Tower yet."

"Hush, father—listen! 'Tis not his voice I think."

"Why, the child trembles like a leaf," said Sir Richard, supporting her as he leaned over the balustrade. "Ho, Paul! who is it beating the devil's tattoo on my door, in the dead of a dark night like this—eh? Make those fellows stop their confounded bawling—I can't hear a word."

"It's a Spitalfields weaver, sir," shouted Paul.

"And what the deuce has he spun himself here for?"

"There's a man wounded at his house wants to see me."

"Oh, father, father, listen!"

"Hush, child. Wants you, Paul! Why, you are not a doctor."

"Can't you be a little quicker than this for a dying man!" cried the weaver, gruffly.

"My poor, mad fellow, do you take us for a house full of priests?"

"Corpses," muttered the man. "You are as much trouble to wake!"

"Who is the man—do you know his name?" asked Paul.

"Yes; Gervase Noel. But look here," said the weaver, laying a pallid hand on Paul's chest, "are you a Jacobite?"

"No?" answered Paul.

"What, do you mean, you rogue!" roared Sir Richard. "How dare you ask such a question here?"

"You aint," said the weaver, fixing his eyes on Paul; "naore am I. I'd be ruined if I was suspected of harbouring 'em; and I've a family of eight. I wouldn't harbour one if he offered me a fortune. I wouldn't harbour one if he threatened to burn my house down. But to-night this chap comes to the door and drops. I knew him directly; there's a reward out for him and a description. If I'd met him in any other way, I should have gone and gave him up and got the money; but when he comes to the door and looks in and drops, I was done. I couldn't step over his body to go and tell of him. I was done—done out of the reward, my rightful reward—done into lugging him up and hiding him—done into feeding him with the children's food—done

into running here for you. Hang it!" finished the weaver, wiping his streaming brow, "it's my usual luck. I'm always done, some, o'w."

"Bless you!" said Christina, who had descended the stairs with Sir Richard. She laid her hand on the man's arm. "Heaven bless and keep you, and may you never have worse luck, good friend, than this kind act shall bring you and yours, if I live till to-morrow."

"My friend," said Sir Richard, "you have given us a lesson in hospitality. Come and profit by it. Summers, wine here."

While the poor weaver refreshed himself, Paul ran up-stairs and made ready to accompany him back to Spitalfields.

"Take my sword, Paul," said Sir Richard, when he came down.

"Nay, it may get your name mixed up in the affair."

"So may you, so may the horse; but we are done into it, as our friend here says. Now, off with you, and have your eyes on both sides the road at once."

The wounded man lay in a room at the top of a house near Spitalfields Square. Paul and his guide passed through a herring shop and up four flights of crazy stairs to come to him.

The room was in darkness till the weaver struck a light and stuck a candle in the crack of the table.

Then Paul saw the face of the sick man. It was quite strange to him—a dark face with long black lashes to the closed eyes, and finely-shaped, marble-like lids, whose expression of peace contrasted strangely with the look of passion and melancholy on the thin, small mouth. Paul thought him asleep.

While they stood, however, looking at him, he said, without opening his eyes—

"Is that you, my kind friend? Did you find the man?"

"I have brought him that calls himself Paul Arkdale, and there he stands," said the weaver; "but he says he knows not your name nor you."

"He is here on the left, is he not?"

"Yes," answered Paul, kindly laying his hand on the sick man's shoulder, "I am here, Gervase Noel."

The still face winced.

"Master weaver," said the feeble voice, "tell him to take his hand off me. He must keep near, because I can't speak loud; but let him not touch me again."

"Well, you are the queerish fish!" said the weaver; "after my going all the way to Blackheath for this gentleman, that's the way you treat him."

"I am not afraid of him; I should like to be alone with him, if you would not mind."

"Not I," said the weaver; then added to Paul, "I know a barber round by the market as I think would come and look at him in a friendly way, being a little in his line himself. I'll run round and fetch him."

"Has your wound not been attended to?" asked Paul, when they were alone.

"It wants no attention; it will not trouble me long. Are you near enough to hear me?"

"I hear you quite well."

"I'm afraid I don't speak humbly enough for a man who asks a great—a very great favour."

Paul was perplexed and silent.

"You are there, still?"

"Yes."

"And hear me?"

"Quite plainly."

"I have a wife."

"I understand," said Paul; "you want us to bring her here?"

"A wife," said Noel, faintly, "and a little child of two years old."

"You want to see them?"

"My little one I shall never see. We put her in the Foundling Hospital."

"Then it is your wife you wish to see?"

For the first time since Paul came in, the sick man opened his large dark eyes, and fixed them on Paul's face. The sight seemed to make him forget what he had intended to say, for he continued to gaze at it with a look of passionate revulsion, which agitated Paul strangely, he could not tell why.

"Come," said he, thinking that the man's mind was failing; "you were going to tell me how I could find your wife, was not that it? Did you think I could bring her?"

The dark eyes slowly filled, the damp hand clutched Paul's sleeve.

"Bring her—bring her to me! that's all I ask. She struck the blow I die of, but tell her one sight of her before I die will—will—"

"Hush! Pray quiet yourself," said Paul.

"Bring her!" cried Noel, grasping Paul's arm more tightly, and drawing himself up near him till the passionate lips almost touched his ear.

"Bring her here before my eyes—bring her and with my last breath I will bless you—you, her lover—you, who I know can find her, curse you!"

He fell back and hid himself from Paul with helpless loathing.

While Paul sat mute, feeling convinced the poor Jacobite was raving, Noel looked up and said, very quietly and patiently—

"I beg your pardon; I forgot myself—forgot my helplessness, forgot that it is on you I depend for the last—last bit of comfort of my life. Sir, I believe that my wife kept all this from you; I believe it possible that you may be ignorant of whom I speak."

"Assuredly I am," said Paul.

Noel hesitated a moment, then gave a short, strange laugh.

"I don't know," said he, in a voice so bitter it made Paul's blood run curdle, "I don't know exactly whether a husband is expected to study the feelings of his wife's lover, and try to soften the blow when he has to break the news to him that she has a husband. Perhaps the best way will be for you to look at something you will find in a pocket-book in that corner, if it please you, among my clothes there. Ay, you'll find it in the coat lappet."

Paul, kneeling on one knee, took out the pocket-book, and gave it to Noel.

Noel's trembling clammy fingers gave him back a folded paper; and then, falling back, he watched him as he opened it.

He could not see Paul's face, for by some instinct he had turned half round; rested his elbow on his knee, and shaded his eyes with one hand as he prepared to read the paper he had opened.

It was a certificate of marriage between Gervase Noel and Maria Clementina Preston.

Paul remained so long in the same position that the sick man grew weary, and stretched out his hand, and touched him.

"Don't waste time. I am very ill," he murmured, fretfully. "I am going fast—fast."

Paul put back the paper, and stood up with his eyes fixed on the floor.

Noel scanned him with restless curiosity.

"You did not know or guess?" asked he.

Paul's honest eyes looked straight into his dying ones. Noel moved his hand, as if to say he believed him.

"I knew she would not love a rogue," said he, faintly, and began to weep.

"Gervase Noel," said Paul, without moving or lifting his eyes, "there is but one thing I can do for you. I will do that thing, if it be in mortal man's power to do. I can say no more than this. I swear most solemnly I have not seen your wife for many days—know not where to seek her; yet seek her I will, as if my honour and life hung on the finding her."

Noel held out his hand.

"Let me thank you, Paul Arkdale, lest I be gone when you come back."

CHAPTER XCV.—PALL MALL.

On the morning of the following day, Clarence Harvey, then secreted with Lord Langton in a fresh place of lodging, was making his usual investigation in his master's pockets, when he lighted on a piece of paper that much interested him. It ran thus:—

Look to your servant. He is not what he seems to be.

A FRIEND.

"Thanks, sir friend; 'tis a piece of courtesy I will remember," said the amiable youth, as he stuffed the papers back into the pockets.

He stood still for a minute or two looking down, with his effeminate hand to his brow.