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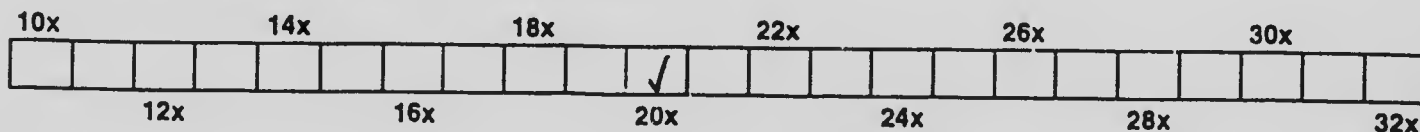
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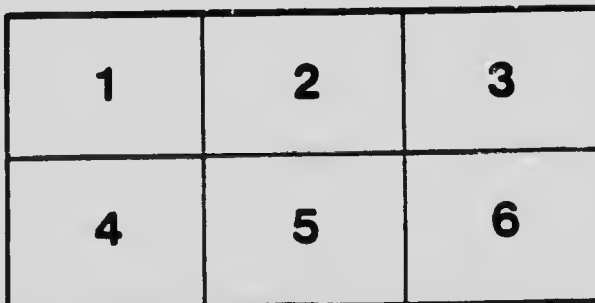
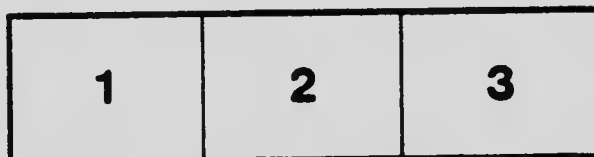
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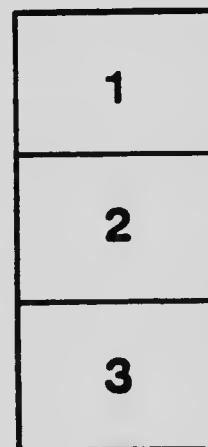
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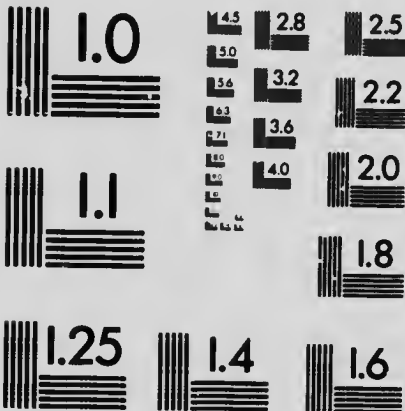
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She stood in a field corner with Marvel, who rested a moment
from his toil.

THE SECOND BOOK OF TOBIAH

By
U. L. SILBERRAD

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Drusilla the Jewess

Now Tobiah the Dissenter, that godly man of our town, had not the highest opinion of the married state. He thought with Saint Paul "it is better to marry than to burn"; but he also thought—and the apostle likewise, one may judge, though he says it not in these words—that it were best to do neither. Seeing this, and seeing the many doubtful examples of married bliss daily before men's eyes, one cannot contend that the Dissenter had no justice for his opinions of the state. But beside these opinions he also held one other—that it were sheer folly for a man, himself in the wisdom of singleness, to obtrude himself in the affairs of married folk. This, then, was a rule with him—for nothing would he thrust himself in their broils and their difficulties, nor help any two joined by the ring either to unite or to part, to make or to amend their quarrels.

Yet it befell that Tobiah was compelled to break through this rule—it is a weak man indeed who is afeared to break through his own rules when occasion demands. Occasion demanded it of Tobiah; more than once did the Lord call him to in some sort lend his hand to the concerns of married folk.

I
OF THE FOOLISH DOINGS OF HIS
WORSHIP THE MAYOR

AT this time there were many Jews in the town. They were held in great abhorrence by our people, not only for the just and worthy reasons of the Christian religion and for the hardness of their dealings, but also, and it is to be feared more especially, because of their wealth and the debts owed to them by sundry of the townsfolk. There was one, Jacob Wrench, with whom many had business. He lived in a small, small house in a side street and dealt in all things, buying or selling ought or any, beasts or gear, boot jacks, housen, flat irons, wedding rings, or, it is said, men's souls. He was a little man, wearing a cap of marten's skin drawn down on his brows and sitting all day in his shop, which was two steps below the street, so that the going in was like the going into a cave—somewhat musty smelling.

This Wrench had a daughter, Drusilla, marvellous handsome, but not of the easiest nature; of a mind cautious as well as quick, and a head wondrous long for a woman. There is no doubt the Jew would have sold her if he could; he would gladly have sold his own soul had it not long ago shrivelled up like a last year's walnut in its shell. But heretofore it had not been possible for him to sell Drusilla, partly by reason of the high value he set on her, and partly because of her

nature. But at last a chance came, and that was when Josiah Coote was mayor of the town.

Josiah had at that time reached almost more than middle age ; a grave man, and one who had all his life worked so hard as to have neither time nor inclination for light pleasure, or even those of a more serious sort. Doubtless it was owing to this that he had not found opportunity to woo and wed a wife, and so was growing grey in loneliness.

Drusilla first saw Coote on a day when her father sent her to pay a tax that the town at that time levied on the Jews. She was waiting her turn to pay when the Mayor passed through the office where the moneys were received. He was a shortish man, though strongly built, with already small lines about his mouth and eyes. He crossed the office to speak with the clerk, and as he bent to the man he caught sight of Drusilla ; and seeing her, stopped as he was, half bent, but not speaking, looking at her as if he had never seen a woman before. And in some sorts he truly had not, for there are two ways of seeing them—the one is the way a man sees women, and the other is the way he sees *the woman* ; and that last way sometimes comes early and sometimes late, sometimes often and sometimes (though rarely) but once. But when it comes for the first time it is a revelation, and, if a man is no longer young, something of a shock. It was a shock when Josiah Coote saw Drusilla.

It must be remembered that she was more than common beautiful, even the bitterest enemies of the Jews allowed her that. She was, moreover, very proud ; not bold at all, yet looking a man squarely in the face, disdaining to fear in a way not common. Also, too, she was no fool, and something of it showed

in her face. So maybe Josiah had reason for the strange things he felt, if man ever wants reason for this, which is unlikely.

But Drusilla, though she saw his face and the look it wore, failed to interpret it fully. She supposed he found her fair as many others did, and as she put no value on the tribute men's eyes paid her, she went home thinking little of it. Three days later she saw Coote again. It was Saturday, the Jew's Sabbath, and she was walking in the High Street with her father when the Mayor came riding by on some official business bent. It was a fine day and there were many folk about, so that he progressed but slowly and had full time to see who was on either side the way. He saw Drusilla, and, in spite of his years, the colour glowed dully under his skin; his lips set tight as if he would keep something back, but for a second his eyes told a tale. Then he turned away and looked steadfastly before him. But Wrench saw him and seeing mended his pace, leading his daughter with him till he came to a part where the street narrowed and the people were too thick to allow horse and rider to pass easily. Here he stopped and would have thrust his daughter forward. But she, never obedient to word or gesture when she had no mind, avoided him, and turning on her heel slipped out of the throng and so home. Jacob, in anger, had no choice but to follow.

That evening in the room behind the shop there was reading from the Scriptures. Wrench brought forth a clasped book having in Hebrew the words of the prophets and the doings of kings and others. From this, contrary to his wont, he read to his daughter; and the story of Esther was what he chose.

When he had done she said with contempt—"Surely,

my father, there is little need for you and me to deal with gloves on ? ”

Wrench clasped his book and put it away ; then he shuffled back to his seat : “ This man has power,” said he as if answering some other question ; “ he is, for all the plain figure he cuts, the Mayor of the town. He could get us liberties that we have not, and could prevent the persecution and derision and foul abuse from which we now suffer, contrary to all law and without hope of redress. We have suffered it long enough—insulted we have answered nothing, smitten we have turned our back to the smiter, spit upon, blasphemed, bespattered with the filth of the street, we have suffered and made no return, but for long enough ! The time is ripe for change, and you, daughter, like Queen Esther, shall bring it.”

But Drusilla’s lips were curled scornfully. “ And all this,” she said, “ because a man chanced to look upon me in the street ! Verily it is a fine structure, a very temple of Solomon that is founded upon a small pebble.”

“ He cast the eyes of desire upon you,” Wrench answered. “ I saw it, I know it. Oh, he is a righteous man, very straight in his dealings, very clean in his appearances ; and he lives, moreover, among a people of clean appearances and monstrous curious eyes. He cannot come after you like any gallant, he, mayor of the town, a godly, chaste and sober man ; he must make pretence, so he looked straight before. But I know, I saw, the lust of the flesh was in his eyes. It is but opportunity he wants, opportunity and decent secrecy, he will find some way, and when he does it will be your fault if you do not win great things for your people.”

"And what do you look to gain for yourself?" Drusilla asked.

"I profit when my people profit," Wrench made answer. "When you are once in power ways will be revealed by which you can serve me. Sundry may be in need of money—I can lend it. There may be trouble between certain who dwell here; I name no names, but you know who are my enemies and true enemies of our race—with the Mayor ours and he the chief magistrate of the town, much can be done, and there is much that might well be done," and he grinned so that a yellow tooth showed over his lips.

Drusilla made no answer and her face told no tales. Wrench doubtless, would have liked to know her mind, but he forebore to say more. He had the wisdom of his father the devil, and knew when to press a point and when to leave well—or ill—alone.

It is possible Drusilla thought the opportunity for any or all of these doings would not be given her, privately she hardly looked to see Coote again near or far off; but in this matter chance favoured the Jew, and that no later than the next day, the Christian Sunday.

Coote did not seek the meeting; indeed he knew not even where Drusilla dwelt, and it was by chance he so much as found himself in the street. But there he was, and when it was quiet, with the quiet of a Sunday afternoon. As he was coming along suddenly a door somewhat ahead of him opened sharply and a youth shot out into the road almost as if he had been fired from a catapult. It was well done, with no unnecessary noise from the person within—only a swift neat jerk that was more knack than strength, and the young man was sent up from below and out into the street.

The door clapped to, it was even hard to tell which one had opened ; Coote hastening up the street looking from one to the other could not judge.

He in the road did not seem to have received any hurt, he began to pick himself up slowly ; he was no more than on his feet when the door was opened again as suddenly as before and a second youth was revealed. By this time his worship was level with them, and looking forward, perceived that the person who would have ejected the second one was a woman. He did not see her face, only that she struggled unaided.

"Nay, Mistress Spitfire," cried the gay intruder, "not so easy this time !" It seemed her trick had failed, and he, not taken unawares, had his foot against the step down which one must go to enter and so could not be moved and even perhaps had her at his mercy. "I'll have a kiss for my pains," he said. "Oh, yes, clasp me tight, my pretty, 'tis rough hugging, but I like it !"

So he said gaily, and would have no doubt suited action to his words, had not the Mayor at that moment caught him from behind and flung him far out into the roadway. The throw was good and he landed upon the other youth, so that both came down upon the cobbles where they lay swearing very profusely. Coote turned upon them, his cane grasped in his hand ; it is to be feared he had forgotten that he was no longer young and that dignity becomes the first magistrate of the town. But if he had forgotten the offenders had not, for no sooner did one sit up than he recognized him and stopped in the midst of his words. He nudged his companion and he stopped also, and both sat in the street staring and chapfallen.

Coote thus suddenly reminded of his office straight-

ened himself and slackening a little his angry grip upon the stick said—

“I am ashamed for you both, sons of honest and respected fathers as you are! Is there no better and more profitable way for you to spend the afternoon of the Sabbath? I shall look into this matter myself.”

He turned from them to the woman in the doorway, and then he stopped, for it was Drusilla the Jewess.

“I owe thanks to your worship,” said she, filling the pause for him.

“I am glad to have served you,” he answered briefly, not knowing quite what he said.

The two in the roadway had picked themselves up and were starting homeward sheepishly enough. Coote did not pay any heed to them, he still stood with Drusilla and now spoke to her judicially. “How did the affair begin?” he asked.

She moved her shoulders. “My father is out,” she said, “doubtless they knew it before they came in.”

“They would have——” Coote said; “he would have——” the words stuck to his tongue.

But she answered composedly: “Kissed me? He would have tried, but a man does not that easily. Your help was timely, sir, but without it I might yet have found a way.” And looking he saw that she held a flat iron, small but heavy. “I keep it at hand,” she said; “a man whose fingers are rapped with it loses his immediate appetite for kissing.”

“Have these youths been here before?” Coote asked, “or have others that you are prepared?”

“They have been before, but will not come again since they have seen you, still——”

“Still?” he asked when she stopped.

She was standing on the threshold with the door in her hand, more as if she were bent on closing it than on carrying out any part of her father's plan.

But Coote took the matter into his own hands. "I must know all of this," he said, "I must hear how and in what manner you are persecuted and by whom. Yes, doubtless it were better said within doors."

And acting as if he had been invited he entered. And Drusilla, not being able to say him no, let him come within. Then she set herself to tell somewhat of the troubles of her nation.

The Mayor listened, growing slowly angry as he heard of the hundred petty annoyances which made life burdensome. It was unjust, he said, a scandal, and an open shame that such things should be done with impunity. He promised that it should be looked to and justice dealt fairly. With that he went away, but without asking any return for his kindness, even without exacting, as he well might considering his dignity and age, the courtesy of a kiss.

Drusilla watched him go, and afterwards sat a long time with her chin propped on her two hands. When old Wrench returned she was still sitting so, looking straight before her.

"His worship the Mayor has but left," she said.

"Ah, ha!" cried her father, "what did I tell you but yesterday?"

Drusilla's lip curled. "He came by the veriest chance," she said, but indifferently, as if she cared not whether or no she were believed.

Wrench did not believe and his eyes showed it.

"He is convinced that we do not meet with justice," his daughter went on. "He was angered to hear of

the way in which we suffer, and he has said that he will see to it that the thing is amended."

Old Wrench nodded. "You have done well," he said.

But Drusilla did not seem to hear. "For this," she said, "he required no return."

"No return?" her father said uneasily. "No return?" Then he crooked his arm and bent forward to her, leering as in tenderness. "This and this, ha? Is that it, no more? Just a beginning?" and he nodded laughing.

"He came no nearer to me," Drusilla answered, "than if I were his bench of aldermen. It is a strange thing, doubtless, my father, but I have seen it, to-day I have seen what seems to be an honest man."

Old Wrench snapped his fingers so that the dry joints cracked again: "A hypocrite," he said, "living among spying hypocrites! He must go softly, he will make no plunge, we shall see, we shall see. Daughter," and he licked his lips like some animal that relishes, "if he gives this for nothing, just for a footing, we shall do well by and by, very well. Eh? Not come again, you say? Oh, he'll come sure enough, you'll see, you'll see."

And in time she saw, for he did come. Then she hardened her heart, for it seemed no one was better than his fellow; and in a world where all are evil, what is there but to bend to the common sin and win what one can for one's own?

II

OF THE STILL MORE FOOLISH DOINGS OF HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR

IT happened on a night about this season that Tobiah the Dissenter was returning late to his home. The nights were warm and still, though April was not yet out, but the good man walked briskly ; he did not approve of loitering for himself or another. If by chance he saw any that lingered at the corners, he was not slow to ask him his business and admonish him to keep better hours. In this manner he went till he came to a poor part of the town, where it seemed that all the folk were in bed and asleep. Well pleased by the sober emptiness of the streets, he went on to the bridge that here crosses a small canal ; there he came upon a man who stood in the shadow. Instantly he stopped.

“Ha, friend !” said he. “What do you at this indecorous hour ?”

The man stepped out of the shadow, and Tobiah to his surprise, saw that it was none other than the Mayor. “Your worship walks late,” said he ; a mayor, no more than other men, should be lurking at street corners after midnight.

“Yes, friend,” the other answered, “as you do.”

“My business keeps me late,” Tobiah retorted.

“A most unusual press,” the Mayor said. “There

are some of our townsmen who would rejoice to hear that you have so much business of your own on hand."

"The Lord's business is my business," Tobiah answered, and the other nodded as one who would say, "I see, I see."

The Dissenters were peaceable folk in the main, Tobiah not approving of any affrays save such as were necessary, and so of his own making, and these he was able to conduct without help or hindrance from the arm of the law or other outside persons. For this reason the Mayor thought well enough of the persuasion, and so did not treat Tobiah with the scant courtesy of some; even, being in stress of mind, something drew him towards the good man.

"Shall we," said he, "take our way together? Then would each be assured the other was doing no wrong."

Tobiah snorted, he scorned to give any such assurance; still he came, wondering somewhat as to what had brought the other forth so late.

They walked the empty streets in silence until Tobiah remarked on their decorous appearance. "The town sleeps," said he.

"Yes," Coote made answer, "yes, the town sleeps; it is the Mayor that cannot."

"Ha?" cried Tobiah inquiringly. But getting no answer he said: "Curtains of silk cannot give sleep, nor basins of soup woo it. It is not for the rich to buy it, nor the great to seize upon it. An easy mind, Master Mayor, and a conscience void of offence, that is what a man needs."

"And how shall we get it, friend Tobiah?"

"The conscience——" Tobiah began right readily, but the other cut him short.

"Not to-night," he said; "doubtless you can dis-

course with much eloquence on the subject, but let us not have it to-night. My conscience is not more burdened than most men's, and my mind.—It is no matter of the mind."

Tobiah doubted but that the Lord meant him to look into this business. "Explain," said he, "confession sometimes—that is, to the right sort—is good for the soul."

But the Mayor thought otherwise. "Confession is not for my sort ; concerning that I do not think twice—it is another matter. I cannot tell what to do"—he spoke slowly and with pauses. "I burn," he said. "I, who am no longer young, and a plain man and busy ; it is always with me like a gnawing hunger within me."

Tobiah pursed up his lips. "The letting of blood," said he, "that and a low diet, with the superfluities of the table given to the poor—and deserving."

"It were perhaps a good cure for youth," the Mayor allowed ; "but I am no youth, friend Tobiah, I fear it would not help me at all. 'Tis a mistake to grow old with no knowledge of women."

Now Tobiah did not know what was in his mind ; he thought he would say it were sad for a man to be sick with no wife to tend him, a thing in which the worthy man did not concur, so he said :

"Were I sick I would sooner an apothecary than a wife and soonest neither. There's no woman worth her victuals, or very few, and they doubtful."

The Mayor nodded and was silent for a time ; at last he said :

"You would, then, think but poorly of a man who, having passed his first youth in loneliness, craved for a woman in his late years ? "

Tobiah would so think, and said it with great plainness.

"So do I," said the Mayor ; "yet for all that I am not sure the man will not have his way."

Soon after this they came to the great bridge, the pride of the town, that spanned the main river. The Mayor would remain on this side, for his house abutted on to the water here, but Tobiah must cross and go further ; they stood for a moment at parting. Tobiah looked down at the hurrying water. "The tide runs out fast to-night," he said.

"It were ill work to stem it," the Mayor answered ; "it is hard for you to stand against the course of nature."

"Tut !" said Tobiah, contemptuous.

But then the thing was not in his blood, in his heart and brain, in his very bones almost. He went home and slept the sleep of the just (and weary), but his worship the Mayor lay all night with the vision of a woman before his eyes.

It was on the morrow that he ended the matter. Early in the morning, indeed, while he was dressing himself for the day, he determined to withstand no longer, but to give place to this thing and that day put fate to the test. Having so decided, he set about his business as usual ; all through the day it filled his time, business of his counting house and of his civic office too ; it was not till evening that he was free. But in the evening, when the air was very sweet with the smell of new leaves and the dusk was beginning to fall soft and green, he set out. To the narrow street where Jacob Wrench lived he went, to the dark little shop ; whence, it must be said, the owner departed hastily when he saw the grave figure coming down the twilight street.

Out by the back went Jacob, with such precipitous haste that Drusilla above stairs thought he must be chasing some vagabond boy ; she went down to the shop thinking she had better secure it from the run-away's confederates, and wait till her father returned. But when she got there all was quiet and dim ; she found no confederate and heard no sound in the street, but the measured tread of well-shod feet that approached. For a second she listened, then some instinct made her divine whose feet they were. She stood like one who waits for its foe or for its prey, which it is hard to say.

Josiah Coote, Mayor of the town, pushed open the door and looked in. Drusilla gave him no welcome, but he entered and closed the door.

"Would you speak with my father, worshipful sir ?" said she.

"No, mistress," he answered. "I would speak with you."

She looked round at the wares that crowded the shelves and dangled from the ceiling and obstructed the way. She had a thought to show him somewhat, and pretend that it were for buying that he had come. But she changed her mind, she would not make his way easier for him, so she only prayed him to be seated.

He pushed aside something that leaned against an old chest, but he did not sit down. "Mistress," he said, with simplicity and no beating about, "I love you. I have loved you from the time I saw you first."

The thing was ill done, the man was either a novice, or else very sure of his welcome ; but it was done, and she must play her ugly part. She stood so that the dim light did not fall upon her face, with down-

cast eyes and modest looks. "I am honoured, worshipful sir," she said, making her voice soft.

But he, in his ignorance, was not sure what this bashful appearance might mean. "I am not refused?" he asked. "You will hear me speak?"

"I ought not," she said coyly, "it is not wise; but—but how shall I say no?"

She drooped a little nearer, so that she was well within hand reach, and lifted her face for a moment, sure that the dusk would hide its bitter contempt.

But he made no movement towards her, but stood quite upright, looking very grave and gray in the twilight. "You, too, think it not wise?" he asked, with some anxiousness. "I am old, yes, I know it; not an old man, perhaps, but years older than you. Not of your faith nor of your people either; the ways would be strange to you, perhaps distasteful, and I have grown old in them. I have money, it is true, and a great house, and there would be servants to your call, but it would be a cage to you, think you? A gilded cage?"

"One might bear it perhaps," she said, as with shy fearfulness, her hands the while playing with three rings that lay in a box before her.

"You might?" he asked eagerly, he had forgotten that he was mayor of the town and she but a Jewess honoured by his regard, "You will marry me, Mistress; you will be my wife?"

"Your wife?" The hands that played coyly became suddenly still, gripping the box edge so that it tilted and its rings rolled out.

Two fell to the floor, rolling into dark corners, and Drusilla stooped groping to find them, her face hidden. Coote would have helped, but she told him they were

her side the barrier. So he waited, wondering a little what her sudden exclaiming "your wife" might mean.

"I have hopes, Mistress," he said, while she still bent down; "you have given me hopes that you will be my wife, if you dare face the gilded cage and will marry me."

She straightened herself and faced him fully, becoming once more the composed woman he had first known, and not the bashful flutterer one who had seemed strange a minute gone.

"I cannot marry you," she said; "from my soul I thank you, but it must not be."

"But, but!" he said, in perplexed amazement, "how is this? A moment past you did not send me away, you would think of it. I had it, I thought from your lips—that it might possibly be!"

"I did not understand you aright," she said.

A faint flush stained her cheeks, but in the dusk he did not see it, and at no time would he have guessed its cause.

"Will you not go?" she entreated him. "I am honoured, indeed, that you should have so spoken to me—nay, I am humbled by it; I shall never forget, neither you nor the honour you have done me."

He looked at her in puzzle and surprise, at a loss to understand, though the dull pain in her voice set his heart thumping.

"Tell me," he said, "why will you not be my wife?"

"Because," she answered, "you are an honest man."

He laughed aloud. "Is that all? Though if that is a reason, it is one I must own, I am honest according to my lights. But why would you not wed an honest man?"

"Because I am dishonest; I am a rogue and a double dealer, and of rogues and double dealers I come; did you make me your wife I would disgrace and deceive you."

"Nay, mistress," Coote answered in spirits. "Are you not undeceiving me now? At least one would say you strove to do so did not your face tell a tale other than your lips. I have seen honest men and rogues, and I can make some guess as to which is which. Women, I take it, follow the same rule."

"Women follow no rule," she answered. "I follow none, I obey none either. Were I your wife I would not obey yours."

He became grave and gentle. "I would not lade you with grievous burdens," he said.

But she shook her head. "It were better if you were to go," was all she would say.

But he did not go, he was a man persistent and somewhat slow. After wrestling he had determined to wed Drusilla; there had been obstacles to overcome; prudence and wisdom, and other sober things were all against it, but in the end they were trampled down; he had thrown all to the winds, and he was not now to be balked. She might be hard to win, he had feared so much, forgetting that he had a deal to offer and she nothing to give. But he would strive to win her, and in the end he would succeed.

And in the end, it would seem, he was right, for, either by reason of his persistence or pressure from her father or something working within herself, Drusilla gave way after days.

"Though," as she warned him, "you will repent it, yea, more than I."

But he did not believe her, being well satisfied.

Wrench also was satisfied, even more so, and went to bed with plans already buzzing in his head like bees at swarming time.

Thus it befell, before the month of May was half way passed, that Josiah Coote had married Drusilla the Jewess, and taken her home to his sober house which overhangs the river. There was much talk at the happening ; it was thought by some to be something of a scandal that a wealthy and a worthy man, and one, moreover, past the hot time of youth, should do such a thing. But Coote cared nothing for the opinions of the burghers, and still less for those of their wives ; and Drusilla most certainly did likewise. Indeed, it early became clear that she would well hold her own with the dames and damsels of the town. She met coldness with coldness, and condescension with more condescension, and thrust with counterthrust yet sharper. A method, it is true, not advocated in the Holy Gospel, but somewhat practised by cats and women, often very successfully and with serious damage to noses.

But Tobiah the Dissenter thought very ill of the whole matter. His opinion of most marriages was poor, and of this one it was low indeed ; he had thought better things of Master Coote, and he took an early opportunity of telling him so. Indeed, he came to the great house one evening but a week after the wedding day especially for that purpose. It chanced that at the time of his coming the Mayor and his wife sat together in their crimson parlour very comfortable. That Drusilla was present did not abash Tobiah ; rather seemed to him but the better occasion as he was fain to see she who had bewitched so sober a man, and also, if need be, to speak a word in season to her.

"Ha!" said he. "Have we here the Canaanitish woman?"

"Nay," Drusilla answered, "no Canaanite, an Israelite of the seed of Abraham. 'Tis you who are of the bondwoman, a Canaanite indeed."

Tobiah snorted in disgust: "A clapper tongue," he cried, "over ready of speech! You have gone far in your choice, Master Mayor, and it seems fared but badly. I fear me you will find it is but ill company you have got for your bed and board."

"Do you sup and lodge with us, good sir?" Drusilla asked.

"Nay, mistress," Tobiah retorted, "not while you rule the roast, as undoubtedly you already do in this house."

But here Josiah cut in, demanding that the Dissenter should either state his business briefly and civilly or else begone.

"My business," said Tobiah, "is admonition."

"Then," replied the other, "it may keep till the morrow."

"It will not keep, it shall be said now, for now, before my eyes, do I see the saying fulfilled 'there is no fool like an old fool.'"

Coote's wrath was aroused. "You go too far!" he cried.

But Drusilla prevented him: "Stay, husband," said she, "if it pleases the good man to confess himself do not you hinder him. You and I, people in the prime of life, could not so abuse his age, but if he likes——"

"He would like, madame, to do with you as should be done with all such crowing hens!" So cried Tobiah, somewhat put about for he was but a few

years older than Coote, and moreover unused to one who took him up in this way. After that he began to tell her of the duty of women and other matters with plainness.

But Coote did not let him go on. "You will speak, if you please, with less freedom and offence," said he. "Indeed, it is already in my mind to have you turned from the house ; it shall be done unless you can keep a more civil tongue in your head.

Drusilla laughed silently. "Why should his tongue be civil if his heart is not ?" she asked. "He is an honest man, I would as soon have honest uncivilness as the dishonest civility that comes smiling to me of a day."

Tobiah was not mollified by this. "Woman," said he, returning to his theme, "why made you this marriage ?"

Coote rose to his feet. "Friend Tobiah," he said, "will you speak with us peaceably, or will you go hence ?"

"I will go," Tobiah replied, and stalked to the door.

"There is repentance in store for you," he said, stopping upon the threshold to shake a big finger at them. "Repentance and regret and a black time to come. The blessing of the Lord is not upon it, has He not commanded 'be ye separate from the unclean thing ?' "

All this happened in the spring of the year.

III

OF THE SCANDALOUS DOINGS OF DRUSILLA THE JEWESS

IT befell in the autumn of that year that there was trouble in the Jewish community. During the summer months, and even later, things had gone well with these people ; they had received both justice and protection. Not, perhaps, other than they deserved, the Mayor was a wise man and Drusilla a woman of much discretion and but little affection, neither asking nor wanting outrageous boons for the people from whence she sprang. Jacob Wrench, perhaps, had not profited quite as he looked to ; but he was not ill-satisfied, for he was left in peace, and a lack of interference is often as good as a chance of profit to those who do not court inquiry.

But in the autumn of the year a calamity befell. So great a calamity, that when the news came to Jacob he was for a moment in a maze, and though he was usually quick as a rat to see ways of escape he twisted and turned the thing in his mind and could not at first see a sure way out. The month was November, and though it was not late in the day, the light in his shop was very dim. It was dim, too, in his mind, but he thought and thought, until at last he was able to hit upon some device.

It was Gunpowder Plot day, a festival very loyally

kept in these parts ; some folks were already building fires against the evening's celebrations when Jacob Wrench came forth from his shop. He saw them, and it grieved him inly to see this wanton waste of fuel ; he also saw certain youths who were commemorating the day by carrying to the houses of the townsfolk effigies, not only of Guy Fawkes of execrable memory ; but also some bearing a wondrous resemblance to the Jew. Jacob walked quickly, with shuffling steps and little peering eyes cast down. But he did not go far, all at once he turned about, a thought had come to him. It were better that he showed little in this business—he would write to Drusilla, not seek her out at the Mayor's great house. So he turned him about and went home again, and set speedily to work to inscribe a long letter, in a hand not the easiest to read.

Drusilla sat alone in her crimson parlour with her books and embroidery, like a fine lady, dressed in a gown of sarsnet, green and lustrous as the beetles sailor men bring home from the tropics. The day was not really waning yet, but there was a mist, chilly with the hint of frost after long rains, but having a pleasant smell of cold and clean woodiness. It had already begun to obscure the light when Jacob's messenger brought the letter.

Drusilla did not ask from whom it came, she knew her father's hand as soon as she saw the superscription. She opened it at once, guessing that the news would not be all of the best. Within she found, besides the sheet of the old man's inscribing, a formal document also ; it was short, but it set forth with the pomp dear to the hearts of our town councillors this matter.

That one, Amos, now imprisoned in the gaol, would be removed to the round house in the market street. This to be done presently, this very evening ; for the better and more convenient lodging of the same till further advice could be taken of him and the charges concerning him.

Drusilla read this quickly and did not fail to observe that, though it was all in order, it as yet lacked the official seal of the town. With this omission, however, she did not concern herself ; rather she was interested in the name of Amos and in wondering with what he stood charged. The young man had been known to her in the past ; she had not then esteemed him too highly ; but her father, she knew, ever thought otherwise, and had more than once been joined with him in business of sorts. She turned to the letter, that doubtless would explain all.

It began curtly, after but a perfunctory greeting : " My daughter, I address you being in a place of difficulty. Amos is apprehended. The charge is of counterfeiting and uttering false coin ; the apprehension but a little while gone. I do not persuade myself that you will be moved by these news, but, be it known to you, I am, for as much as my fortunes are in some sort bound up with Amos. As yet, much cannot be known to busybodies, etc., over and above the suspicion upon which he was apprehended. These would not have up to the present included me, else I should not be left unmolested now. But shortly, when Amos is examined and further evidence ta'en, matters will become known. Of what sort it is bootless to write ; but suffice it to say they are like, nay, bound—to bring me to the gallows. Escape is impossible, I know these men and their laws and prejudices ; I cannot fly the

town, my living is here, also I have much stuff which cannot be speedily moved, and sundry moneys out at usury which cannot be collected to-day ; no, nor yet to-morrow, or to-morrow se'nnight, or long after. It lies with you, daughter, to provide a way of escape ; even as did Esther for Mordecai, who had brought her up as a father and from whom she had her living. It is a simple matter that is required of you, holding no risk nor danger of suspicion either for you or me. I send herewith an order ; to this same, affix privately the seal of the town. That done, yourself bring it back to me with all speed ; it will be for me to see afterwards that it does not miscarry or fall short of its aim.

“ I pray you to hasten, my neck depends upon your coming speedily.”

So Drusilla read standing by the misty window. For a full minute she stood holding the letter, afterwards she turned about to the fireplace, there to sink down in a great winged chair and sit, a hand stretched out on either arm and eyes staring straight before her into the gloom. “ My neck depends upon your coming speedily.” Those were the words in her mind, and before her eyes the vision of her father, dancing on nothing, that last dance with the hangman's daughter.

Truly now was Drusilla in great straits, for though she might not bear the strongest affection for her father—who was not, indeed, one to win every heart—yet as he her father, and to know that he stood within shadow of a shameful death was not to be endured. She must save him, yet she was fain it should not be this way. She did not wink to herself about the way, telling herself it was nothing—a trifle that she was to do. She was not a good woman, in sooth it appears in

some sorts that she was a bad one, yet she was no dealer in sophistries. She did not, like Eve and certain of her progeny, say "the serpent beguiled me," or, "is it not a little one?" when she dwelt upon iniquity. She saw that the thing she was to do was a forgery and a deceit; a putting of the sign of assent to a lie and a false warrant which was to cozen a gaoler, and by some means let a gaol bird free. And so, as to do it she was to steal from her husband (for five minutes truly) his seal of office; but also, and that for a much greater time, something of his honour. She was to abuse his trust and outrage his love of her—would that he did not love, did not trust, was less the simple honest man! It were an easy thing to have the seal, no difficulty stood in the way, yet there were a dozen barriers between. A dozen? Nay, perhaps there was but one, an honest plain-favoured man who trusted; who had, all unwittingly, led her to love the honest way, per-adventure even to love him.

She had moved in her chair and leaned now so that she could look into the fire, as if there she would find inspiration or see some other way. But there was none. Jacob, she knew, would not fly the town; even for his neck he would not leave his goods. He would know that, did he refuse, she would save him. Moreover, it was by no means clear that flight would help him; there were many who did not love him and some who did not love her, and so could well endure to see her humbled through him. And it is wonderful how such things quicken justice and spur men to the hunt of a wrongdoer who has made off. Amos must go free, unquestioned and unexamined, that was the only way, and it could be procured but by a real order or a counterfeit. A real one must proceed from the mayor

—must be won from him by subtilty and guile. The counterfeit must owe its power to the falseness of his wife and her abuse of his trust. Jacob had not thought the first expedient a chance worth taking, but Drusilla knew differently. In such matters there is an unholy knowledge given to woman (at whose creation it is thought the Devil had a finger—that is, after the Lord God made her, and before Adam took her in hand. How else should she have so diabolic a knowledge of a man's weakness and that without experience?). Drusilla knew that her husband might be beguiled by her in some fashion so that she could win the thing from him, for she had rare skill, she could hold him long enough for her purpose. It could be done, but afterwards, when he came to himself, how would he feel? How did King Ahasuerus feel in the morning, when the fumes from the banquet of wine were no longer in his head, and the seductions of Esther's beauty were veiled from his gaze? When he remembered that he had hanged Haman, his friend and favourite, and given murderous power to an alien people?

Drusilla asked herself these questions and then rose to her feet. Her mind was made up, two should not fall to save her father from the gallows; one must, two need not. She must take from Josiah his faith and high thoughts of her, but she could yet leave him his integrity if she alone were the sinner. She turned to the door; there were preparations to make.

But before she could go, Coote entered. It was earlier than she had looked for him, but she was not sorry to see him, although she was about to do him a wrong. She observed, though to herself alone, that he seemed tired and oppressed in spirits. He, for his part, observed nothing strange about her, only per-

haps that she was a little more gentle than her wont, and even that he did not remember to note till afterwards.

"What!" said he with an affectation of cheerfulness. "Still keeping blind man's holiday? It is long past candle time."

"Yes," she answered, "is it not good husbandry to save the candle ends?"

"Or bad to waste the hours?" he asked. "But perhaps you did not waste them, you had good thoughts for company."

"Perhaps," said she, and in the light of the candles he had kindled he might have seen—but he did not—a bitter smile on her lips. But the look was gone almost as soon as it was there and her face was as clear as a shore washed by the tide. Master Coote did not sit him down by the fire, clearly he was in haste and preoccupied. Briefly he said he must be gone again and would be late in his return. Drusilla listened and, for all that Tobiah had called her a crowing hen, she could listen wisely, asking no foolish questions, nor pressing untimely whims. Afterwards he went above stairs to make some change in his dress. She sat still after he had left her, looking into the fire; she sat until she heard his step in the hallway, then she went out to him. He was wrapping himself in his cloak, and either by reason of that or the preoccupation of his mind did not hear her approach.

"Husband," said she, "you have somewhat upon your mind?"

"Eh?" he answered startled, "I? Oh, no, nothing, nothing, it is naught, a trifling matter of business, perhaps."

There was little of the traffic of kissing and the like

between these two ; he was too shy to demand what he feared she would have little pleasure to give ; and she, knowing how she had purposed in her heart to buy him and her own dishonour with such merchandise, was loth to use it now. Therefore, on this day she did not kiss him, only as she helped to array him in his cloak let her hand linger a moment on the collar of his coat.

“Husband,” said she, looking him in the eyes, “this, business on your mind has nought to do with me ? ”

He struggled himself into the great folds. “No, no,” he said, “how should it ? ”

Truly if ever the Devil wills to have a good man fall from the estate of honesty and truth, he plumps a woman down in the way !

Master Coote, our Mayor, went out late in that afternoon. He had matters of business, he said, that would keep him busy until the hour when he must go to sup with sundry of the guildsmen. One way and another he would not enter his house again till late that night. Drusilla watched him start, even watched him till the mist swallowed him up. Afterwards she went back to the red parlour. There she stooped down before the fire and carefully burnt Jacob’s letter, powdering the ash that remained. Next she went upstairs to her chamber and set about her preparations without fluttered haste or trembling, and without any mistake. It seems she did evil well when she had set her mind to it ; which, doubtless, proves her to be a bad woman indeed, for a good one surely would have been possessed by nervous and groundless fears, children of a guilty conscience. She showed none and did all she purposed to do. Afterwards she took off her sarsnet gown and quilted petticoat, putting on plainer attire. Then she

went downstairs again, having with her a cloak and hood, very nomely. To a room which lay at the back of the house she went, quietly but openly, with the sure knowledge of one who understands that that which is least hid is best concealed.

In this room, which looked on to the river, Coote conducted private business and kept ancient ledgers and sundry things connected with his official post. Drusilla knew the room well, it was in the dwelling house itself, but it also adjoined the counting house, and from the window one could, in the day time, see the wharf beside the river and the bustling business conducted there. Now all was quiet, there was no creaking of cordage or hoarse shouting of men who moved bales of merchandise ! The warehouse doors were fast shut and the boats and barges lay dark and silent on the water where the white mist crept. Drusilla looked out and, though she saw no one, she carefully closed the shutters before she set candles alight. There was a bureau which stood in a corner, a cumbersome thing, but having many holes and drawers and a cupboard in the midst fastened with as strong a lock as one would wish to see. But the lock offered no protection now, Josiah had left his great bunch of keys behind him when he set out awhile gone. Soon Drusilla had open not only the cupboard, but also the strong box within. There lay the seal of the town, for at that time the Mayor kept it where he would, not at the court house as now. Drusilla took it out, took wax from the desk, and then and there sealed the forgery which Jacob Wrench had sent to her. And the seal was as firmly and finely set as any Josiah Coote appended in all the time of his mayoralty. Then she locked away the seal, blew out the light, and having

set all in the room as it was before, went upstairs again with the keys. And never once did she falter nor shrink as if repentant. Only just before she left the upper chamber where she had gone with the keys did she halt. For one moment she looked round the room almost as if to limn it on her mind, and when she started to go she turned about quickly and came back. The old coat that Josiah had taken off before he went out, lay upon a chair ; she took it up as if to put it in its place. But she did not do so, instead, all on a sudden, she bent her head and kissed it, then dropped it as if it had burnt her and went out.

When afterwards Master Coote came to question his servants as to the doings of their lady that night, he learnt that at a certain hour she had summoned William to the hall. She was wrapped about in a cloak, the fellow said, but the light was poor and he could not see particularly what she wore. She told him she was going forth on foot, but did not need his attendance. She should not return till late and when she did his worship would give her his escort ; from this William judged she was for some friends where Master Coote had appointed to meet her. He scarcely thought it strange she did not bid himself to attend her now. Although the dames and damsels of condition in the town—the plain favoured yet more than the fair—were mighty particular not to look out o' doors after candle time unattended, she was never of their mind and would bow to no custom she did not fancy. Thus she went out alone and, the mist being now thick, she was hidden almost before the door was shut upon her.

Many in the town were astir that evening, bonfires blazed in open spaces and boys ran hither and thither

with lighted brands. In the market place there was Greek fire burned and a fine pile where a great effigy, with gunpowder to its guts, was roasted. The noise of the shouting could be heard from afar, and now and then, between houses and from street ends one could see a glow that turned the fog rosy. But there was no need to pass near these gatherings did one but know the town, and Drusilla knew it well. So by by-ways and dark alleys she sped unseen and fearless. Once in an ill place some knave stopped her, as he would have stopped any in a petticoat even were it an oyster wench. But if he looked to molest her he met more than his bargain, for with never a word or a sound she struck out at his forehead, a blow sharp and heavy with a little staff she carried hid. It sent him reeling against the wall, and before he was fairly himself she had gone from sight, for she knew the ways and their turnings fully as well as he.

In time she came to her father's house. She rapped on the door once and softly ; instantly it was opened to her and without a word she stepped down and within. A candle burned far back in the musty shop. It was stuck fast by its own grease to the high desk where Jacob kept his books ; it guttered and flickered in some draught unseen, making the crowded shadows to wink and wag evilly among the gear that hung on the smoky beam. Jacob had stayed to fasten the door, now he followed her, but stopped to set up some of the merchandise she had overturned by the unheeding sweep of her cloak. He still wore his cap of marten skin and the caped coat he had put on when he had gone out earlier. The shop was closed ; close and musty, it is true, but yet more raw than the river mist, for he grudged the waste of a fire.

"Well, my daughter, well," said he, rubbing his hands. "You are in fair time, I see."

For answer she took out the order he had forged. Eagerly he seized it and held it close to the candle flame to see that the seal was fairly set.

"Good, good," he said, "'tis well done, no mistake, squarely in the midst of the wax." Then he rubbed his hands again. "It were a good plan, ingenious," he said with admiration of his own cunning. "Do you scent it, daughter? Your nose should be keen enough."

"I neither know nor desire to know what trick you will play," Drusilla made answer.

But Jacob did not heed her reply, he had shuffled to his desk. "I have a letter here," he said fumbling it forth. "'Tis fairly writ, I think." He peered at it then, still holding it fast, offered it so that she could see the writing in the light—"What, dost know the hand?" he asked when she started.

She could have sworn the writing was that of her husband, and her face betrayed as much. The old man laughed that inward laugh which screws the eyes without stretching the mouth. "Is it good, is it well done?" he asked. "Ah, ha, I think we will have Amos yet. This letter purports to be from the mayor to him who has the prisoner in safe keeping. It is to notify that his worship has taken private counsel concerning the prisoner and the matter whereof he is charged—a charge not before known in the town, mark you. In accordance with this counsel and in consideration of large securities made by some of the town. See their names are set here, men of substance all, and of our race or known friendly to it, it was wisest to be explicit, one must stop every hole. In considera-

tion, I say, of all this, it is thought wisest to remove the prisoner from the pestilential common gaol to the round house in the market street. This is to be done no later than the evening, the man to go under the guardianship of Thomas Puddock." Jacob smoothed the letter tenderly before he put it away—"There, there," he said, "the bait is good, I think there will be a bite; he at the gaol is of the sort that is mighty anxious not to transgress the law. Here is law and the will of the mayor plainly put. Amos will set out for the round house——"

"And not get there?"

Drusilla's voice held no compliment for the fine scheme, but Jacob was not wounded, he hunched his shoulders and spread out his hands as one who says, "How can I tell?" and "What would you?"

Drusilla moved as if to go, "What, going?" the old man asked, and shuffling to the door began to unfasten it. "Well, well, perhaps it is better so," he said, getting it open.

"I have done my part," she answered. "I have betrayed the man who trusted me, set his seal fraudulently to a lie, and given my soul for your neck, there is nothing more wanted of me." She stepped out as she spoke. "Good-night," she said, and went out into the dark.

IV

OF THE WRONG DOINGS OF SEVERAL

ON that evening of the fifth of November there came another to Jacob Wrench's door. Drusilla was some time gone when the second knocking was heard. Jacob shut down his desk and went to see; he was expecting one of his own people, a trusty and astute rogue who would take the letter to the gaol; one who in dress and manner could counterfeit well enough such a one as the Mayor would employ. So Jacob opened the door, thinking it was he who knocked. One stepped in from the dark of the street, a short sturdy figure, wrapped about in a cloak, not the rogue aforementioned. By the door the shadows were deep, so Jacob did not see this till too late, then he saw that his visitor was none other than the Mayor himself.

The hour was perhaps inconvenient and certainly somewhat strange for the visit of such a one. He had not much honoured the shop since his marriage; by mutual, though unspoken consent, he and Jacob had had few dealings together. Still, so Wrench thought, there was reason why he might come now; Amos, a Jew, lay under charge, and that of a hanging matter; it was possible the Mayor might seek private information of one who might tell him somewhat.

"Be seated, most worshipful sir," Jacob said in his humblest way. "Be seated, I pray you. I must

e'en make fast the door again ; there's over many lads and idle 'prentices playing pranks in the town to-night for it to be wise for old men—feeble old men—to keep their doors on the latch."

So he fastened the door, and at the same time hung upon it without a little iron ring which meant, to those who should feel it and could read its import, 'come again soon.' His messenger-to-be, when he came, would feel for the ring before he rapped, and when he felt it he would go away till a more convenient season.

The Mayor had not seated himself as the old man invited, he had gone further into the candle light, but he stood very upright and with his cloak yet wrapped about him.

"Master Wrench," said he, "there is little need that you should fasten your door, my errand will not keep me long, it is this—to warn you of your danger—to give you notice to quit."

"Notice to quit?" Wrench repeated like one in amaze, but his heart quailed at the words.

"Yes," Coote replied, "notice to quit. Now, this hour. Before to-morrow this place must know you no more."

Wrench had placed himself so that the light did not fall upon his face ; there was a cold sweat upon his brow and a fearsome sinking in his inward parts ; yet he clung to a last hope and still played the bold game.

"But why, most worshipful sir?" said he. "Is there mischief purposed against me ; is there a conspiracy to rob me of my little all ? Surely the law will deliver me from such, your mighty arm can protect me."

"My arm cannot protect an evil-doer."

Jacob moistened his lips : " An evil-doer," he began, though his voice quavered.

But Coote cut him short. " Desist, Master Wrench," said he. " It is useless to waste words, you know, and I know, though as yet no other, whereof you will stand accused not later likely than to-morrow. Bandy no more words and leave off to play the hypocrite, the time is too short ; get together what you can bear and go, and let no man know whither." And with that, Coote made as if to depart, but Jacob was after him and caught him by the skirts of his coat.

" Sir ! dear sir ! " he entreated, falling upon his knees. " Save me. Have pity upon me ! " he mumbled the coat he held to his lips and with his tight-gripping fingers effectually prevented any escape. " How can I go ? " he asked. " How leave this, and how live friendless, helpless in a strange and inhospitable place ? Consider, I pray you, I am an old man, feeble, poor—yes, yes, very poor ! If I lose my living, may I not as well lose my life ? My goods, my gear, I cannot leave them ; I cannot forsake this little which is my all ! My moneys that are lent out, how shall I leave them ? Give me but time to collect my debts, time for that, I ask no more—half of them ! A quarter—very little suffices me. Jehovah, He knows that I am a poor man, I have lived poor all my life. I have nothing, you would call it nothing ; but to me it is everything—it is my all ! If I leave it I die. Indeed sir, sir, do not drive me away, let me but stay ! I am a poor old harmless man, I live retired, I hurt none. Blessed sir, do but let me stay ! "

But Coote had shaken himself free, and now cut short the other's pleadings. " If you stay," he said curtly, " you will assuredly hang."

"No, sir, not if you save me!"

"I cannot save you, and that you know; when the evidence comes to be known, the law will take its course and neither I nor a greater can prevent it. I have warned you to flee, and that for the sake of your daughter, Drusilla. It will be grief to her, doubtless, to have you vanish, no man knows whither, but lesser grief by far than to have this charge preferred, and you pay the last penalty."

Jacob croaked in his throat, but less at dreadful thought of that last penalty than with ugly mirth at the thought of Drusilla, tender daughter and faithful wife.

But besides, this there came at that instant yet another thought in his mind, which, indeed, was quick and furtive, at such time, as a rat in a sewer that sees best in the dark and the filth.

"And so," he said smoothly, "for her sweet sake you came here to warn me, worshipful sir? It shows a pitiful and a generous spirit, truly. You came all alone and unattended, privately, no man knowing whither you went, or when you should return."

He was listening; he heard approaching the step of the rogue who should visit him. He went to the door and began unbarring it. "It is too much to have done for so little," he said with a leer. "We must have more for these pains," and he flung open the door as the rogue reached it.

But Coote had read menace in the smooth tones, and for the first time realized there was danger in what he did. Though he could not see how the opening of the door could give entrance to it, he sprang forward as it swung back and attempted to reach the street.

But Wrench flung himself upon him and strove to

hold him back. "Seize him," he cried. "Hold him, hold him! All is known, all is lost! Hold him, I say!"

The rogue, a young and lusty man, fell upon the Mayor in the front with great violence, and it seemed like to have gone ill with his worship indeed. But fate gave him an advantage for all that. Jacob hung like a ferret upon his skirts. He had loosed his cloak even as he sprang for the door, meaning to cast it from him, fearing it would hamper his action. But it did not fall free, instead, it hung to him till the rogue laid hold, when it fell upon him, enveloping him in its muffling folds. Instantly the Mayor seized the advantage and threw the encumbered man to the ground. He was not hurt as he might have been, for the garment in some sort broke his fall; yet it served well enough, for it so enwrapped him that he could not speedily rise. With a jerk and a quick backward blow Coote freed himself from Jacob's claspings hands; then, after stooping for a moment to wind the prostrate man tight in the folds from which he was striving to get free, he made off down the street. And with him he dragged his prisoner, *bump, bump!* over the cobble stones, the two corners of the good cloak serving to pull him by.

It is to be observed that there was little noise and no shouting during this brief affray; it would seem that, for different reasons, not one of the three desired publicity for their flight from or even their presence in that place. Even now, when all was ended, none came out to see our mayor speeding down the street, none but Jacob who crouched in the doorway where he had been flung. For a moment he crouched, muttering maledictions horrible to hear, then he stumbled to his feet spitting after the retreating figure, standing nerved

stiff with his rage. But all at once he seemed to grow weak, and, shrivelling into himself, crept back into the dark little shop, a decrepit old man.

Had Master Coote done his duty by the man his cloak took prisoner, he should, doubtless, have delivered him up to the arm of the law. But he did no such thing ; having begun by attempting to balk justice that night, he went on to further defraud her—in such ways does one evil act as parent to other—or several others. There seems to be something in the natural man which makes him not always content with the slow, and sometimes sure, course of justice ; Master Coote, our mayor, was clearly a natural man, for he was quite satisfied to himself administer punishment to his assailant. At the corner of the deserted street he stopped to make him yet more fast in the cloak, then he went on, but more slowly, dragging him down another street, and down another cut between high houses, and so to the brink of the canal. Arrived at the bank, his worship unswaddled his captive and without more ado, tumbled him into the water to scramble out as best he might. There was no danger of his drowning, there were about ropes in plenty, and boats dark and idle for the night. But there was a certainty that he would give no further trouble, the cold water would cool his ardour for more mischief yet awhile, and the cobble stones, knocking at his bones, had doubtless used strong arguments for right courses. So he was left to digest his lesson to himself while the Mayor went on to supper with the guildsmen.

Now, as has been said, there were many townsfolk abroad that evening, and among them, of course,

Tobiah the Dissenter. This good man, though he held in disfavour pagan and carnal festivals, whether sanctioned by Church, State, or the unregenerate custom of an ignorant populace, yet approved the celebrating of the fifth of November. Did it not memorate a shrewd blow struck at the Scarlet Woman of Rome, and likewise sundry traitors? Therefore Tobiah walked the streets that evening with a benign countenance and a demeanour of seemly satisfaction, lending his aid to any bonfire that stood in need of poking. He was, also, of some assistance to those who sang choruses (not of the ribald sort) suitable to the occasion, and of much assistance to the beadle in keeping order among the youth of the town.

When the hour grew late and the fires burned low the more respectable folk went home to their beds; the rest, however, remained in the streets. It was then that Tobiah found the most to do; he was here and there and everywhere, doing much to clear the streets and to promote the peace and orderly conduct of the town. At the last he came upon a maiden of his acquaintance about to set forth on her homeward walk with a lad. The maid was a dairy girl at a farm some two miles away, modest enough after her sort, but doubtless not more prudent than most. There was also nothing known against the character of the lad, still the season of youth is a season of temptations; Tobiah joined himself to the pair and walked the two miles with them, to the great mending of their pace and marring of their satisfaction, but doubtless virtue was well served.

Tobiah felt he had done a good work when he saw Peg, the dairymaid, now sulkily silent, safe within the door of the farm. He turned him about and set off

for home both brisk and cheerful. The way was a lonely one; deep lanes winding sometimes between fields bare and wintry, but for the most part between close copses. Here and there a corner of waste land lay beside the road, here and there a clump of tall trees rose black against the sky. At first Tobiah sang as he went, a cheerful, and maybe melodious, way for a man to occupy himself. But after a time he fell silent thinking of many things.

It was when he was silent that he fancied he heard human movements at hand. They seemed to him to come from a small coppice that here lay by the road. He drew near and threading his way among the close growth, listened, thinking it must be some bent on mischief to my lord's game. However, it appeared he was mistaken, there was no one about, all was quiet and black. He stood awhile among the trees, hearkening to the multitudinous small noises of the dark. He grew thoughtful as he listened, dwelling in his mind upon the thousand obscure lives of fur and feather and six legged flying and running things. "These," thought he, "all seek their meat of Thee—and none fall to the ground without Thy knowledge." A wayside coppice, when one dwells upon the victualling and the fighting thereof, is a wonderous thing truly. Tobiah took off his hat, he felt the Lord was in the place, busy even now with this multitude whose eyes waited upon Him.

While he stood so, he heard a rustling, and not at any great distance. It was not native to the night and place for all other noises ceased for a moment, it sounded as if one drew himself along the ground carefully. Doubtless, one was in hiding and, deceived by the good man's long silence, believed him to be preoccupied or gone.

"But you are too soon, Master Thief," said Tobiah, but to himself, and at the same time pounced where it seemed the sound had arisen.

"So, so," said he as he seized something for his pains. "I have you then, I have you!"

He stooped to the ground, for the malefactor was lying upon it among the dead leaves and tree roots now quite still. Nay, even when Tobiah laid hold, there was no outcry made. It was a cloak, of which the Dissenter had hold, a rough thick garment; he felt down it and below for legs. And, behold! His hand touched a woman's skirt!

"Mistress!" cried he, in astonishment. "What do you here?"

There was no answer, either the woman was sullen or afraid, or else intent to play the waiting game of silence. But such a thing would not do with Tobiah. "What, no words?" said he. "We must e'en to the light then and talk face to face. I know that you are not dead, I heard you stir but just now. Come, up with you."

The woman moved, but did not rise; in the dark he could not see, he judged her movements by the tearing and catching of the brambles and small branches of undergrowth.

"Come, Mistress," Tobiah said somewhat incensed by this obstinacy. "If you will not rise I must raise you, I tell you I know that you are alive."

"You know much, wise sir," her voice spoke contemptuously from the ground at his feet. "Do you not also know this--there are three things with which it were well a man did not meddle--a wild cat caught in a trap, a she-bear robbed of her whelps, and a woman in extremity:"

This was not the manner of answer for which Tobiah had looked, nor was it the manner of voice, though indeed that seemed to be in a measure familiar to him, although he could not tell when he had heard it. But, as any who knew him will testify, he was not one to be silenced or thrust aside, he stooped to the woman and without more ado pulled her to her feet. She struggled in his grip, but he mastered her for all that ; twice she slipped from his hold, but neither time did she attempt flight, only sought to baffle him by making it well-nigh impossible for him to raise her again. But at length he did it and, having her fairly and squarely now, dragged her out from the coppice to the broad margin of grass that here bordered the road.

It was still misty, though clearing now ; a small moon shone golden ringed through a haze, by its light one could see more or less. Tobiah, dumping his captive down upon the wet grass, saw her and to his uttermost astonishment recognized her.

"Mistress Coote !" he cried.

Last he had seen the Mayor's wife sitting at her ease in her crimson parlour, finely attired with well-dressed head, and ready speech, too ready by half to his thinking. Now she, if she it were, was huddled on the roadside grass, her gown in muddy disarray, her flapping hood and dishevelled hair framing a face, beauteous still, but full of passions and pains and stirrings which are far enough from the comely fair.

"Mistress Coote !" said Tobiah, and she sat up, not shrinking or starting, but pushing back her hood and shaking the hair from her eyes.

"So you call me that too !" said she, with a little bitter laugh.

"I call you what you are," Tobiah answered shortly,

although inwardly he was somewhat surprised, both by her appearing and manner of address.

"Look again," she said thrusting her face forward in the faint moonlight. "Am I Mistress Coote, wife of his worship the Mayor? Fine lady, gowned in silk, encompassed with ease, served and attended on every hand?"

Tobiah was perplexed. "If you are not she, who are you?" he asked.

"Go to her and ask," she told him. "Go and say you found one at night time, hiding in a wayside wood; alone, outcast, bedraggled. Say she was like unto her, so like that were the two dressed alike, fed alike, housed alike, it were hard for a stranger to say which were the Mayor's madame and which she of the draggled tail."

She spoke with a low-voiced bitterness that might well come from a woman black and scornful in her shame and despair. (She was a monstrous skilful deceiver, and remembered to do the whole of the thing. Moreover, as has before been shown, she kept her head in wrong-doing.) The manner even more than the words began to carry conviction to Tobiah. "Are you then another daughter of Jacob Wrench?" said he. "But no, he has the one only, all the town knows her by name, he has no other."

She laughed hardly. "There are," she said, "things men do not tell to the town, some names which they are willing to blot out of their memory. Even a Jew may have pride and know shame."

Tobiah was now fully convinced. This then, it seemed, was an outcast woman, of the same blood, truly, as Drusilla the Jewess, and like her, but outcast. Still for all that she could not abide in the wood for that November night. He said as much.

"I can and I will," she answered. "I would have been far enough from here by now could I but walk. But I caught my foot among tree roots and turned it, so that now I cannot put it to the ground. To-night I will rest me among the leaves, it is warm enough for such as me, and to-morrow I will go on my way."

"You will not go to-morrow, nor yet the morrow after," Tobiah said, "and that I know we'll, for your foot must be hurt indeed, seeing that you, so wild a cat, suffered yourself to be caught. No, Mistress, whatever you be, you will to-night lie beneath my roof."

"No," cried she with sharp decision. Then she began to argue. "It sorts ill with my plans," she said, "and ill with your reputation to bring in such as I. Consider, sir, your good name."

"Tut," said Tobiah. "My name can take care of itself. If it is not so robust as to stand for itself, why then it may fall. Were you twenty times a harlot yet under my roof you should come to-night."

"You are transgressing the commandment of the Lord," she warned him, "does He not tell you to have no dealings with the works of uncleanness and to touch not the accursed thing?"

"The devil," so Tobiah observed, "quoted often the Scripture to his advantage. I go now to find somewhat on which to transport you. There are wood sledges for the moving of faggots just within the cop-pice. I will fetch me one of those. It will not perhaps be the easiest carriage, still more comfortable than the hurdle whereon you may yet ride at the cart's tail unless you mend your ways."

Tobiah went among the trees to look for the sledge. He knew she could not get far while he was gone, crawl-

ing cannot be done at a great pace, and there was little cover near excepting the wood the which she could hardly enter unheard by him. Nevertheless, no sooner was his back turned than she started to crawl ; over the bit of waste grass, down into the ditch, and then up the bank and through the hedge beyond. It was toilsome work and very painful, for her foot hurt so that the sweat burst out in beads upon her. Yet she did it and squeezed through the hedge and out on to the ploughed field behind it. Here she lay down along a furrow and rested.

Tobiah, in the meantime, had found a sledge loaded with faggots, on to this he put a thick bed of dead ferns, thinking to make it an easier carriage. It took him a little time, and a little time, too, to bring the sledge, for it would not pass through the brushwood at the thickest. He was long enough for Drusilla lying in the field to a little recover herself. She was desperate, for she knew, were she brought to the town, her deception would soon be known. Accordingly she thought she would make good her escape ; fear, it was said, lent wings, why should not desperation give strength ? She believed that it would and, struggling to her feet, started down the field, keeping close to the hedge. Twice her foot gave way beneath her, letting her fall, and twice she stumbled up again while the sweat ran down her face and a great sickness made her faint. Thus she got half way down the field, though none knew how : then she fell for the third time. And now she did not rise, for her foot had doubled again under her, and the sudden sharp agony brought the faintness upon her afresh, so that her senses went from her for a little and she lay long and dark across the furrows in the misty moonlight.

In this manner Tobiah found her, and rating her somewhat severely for her folly, took her up and fastened her to the sledge. When he had made her secure, he laid hold of the ropes that were affixed to the thing, and started at a good round pace for the town.

V

OF THE WISE, RIGHT AND VIRTUOUS DOINGS
OF TOBIAH THE DISSENTER

TO those that sleep the night is short enough, but to those that lie awake, more especially with ill thoughts and uneasy fears for company, it is long indeed. To Drusilla the night she spent beneath the steep gable of Tobiah's house was long as eternity, and black as that is like to prove for some. Nevertheless, during those dark hours she thought much on things, and what was best to be done to secure her secret flight. Before morning she began to discern what seemed to be the wisest course. She dressed herself in good time and crawled down the narrow stairs, so as to be below before Tobiah. This because she desired to prevent his going out to learn what must already be known in the town; choosing rather to tell him herself in her own way and, if possible, to win him to support her flight.

Tobiah was surprised to see her before him.

"Why are you here?" he said. "You should have lain awhile."

"I have something to tell you," she answered, "and it will not be the better for keeping."

Tobiah was only partly satisfied. "Say on," he answered curtly, kneeling before the hearth to blow upon the sticks which were kindling but poorly.

"It is a confession I have to make," she told him, and he jumped to his feet.

"Ho!" said he. "By all means proceed."

"I have deceived you," she began, and there was no bashfulness about her. "I am indeed, Mistress Coote, no sister of hers, never had she one. Yet for all that I am an outcast woman, wicked and desolated by her own act, even as you thought me."

Now was Tobiah indeed astonished, first that any should have deceived him, and second that the Mayor's wife should call herself outcast and desolate. "What?" cried he, and "What? A daughter of the Father of Lies, indeed!"

"That am I," Drusilla made answer, "and for that reason am I fled. Hear me out, and then shall you know that that which you foretold has even come to pass, there was no blessing on my marriage and there is reason to repent it."

"Ah, ha! Even so," said Tobiah, nodding his head, "I mind the occasion. Over ready of tongue, I found you and over sure, pride goeth before a fall truly. For what are you fled? Let us hear the whole matter."

Forthwith she told him how she had tried fraudulently to save one (unnamed) from the gallows. "And now I go," she said.

But Tobiah broke in. "Now, you do not go," he announced, "for I bear you to your husband and to the justice that you merit."

"That must be as you will," she answered, "though if you bear me to my husband the thing begins again. Did I not yesterday deceive and cozen you? How much more then, think you, could I cozen him? Justice would be served did you bear me back, but right-

eousness did you let me away, for thus and thus only can you remove evil from his life and temptation from mine. But please yourself what you do ; your duty to the townsmen, doubtless, asks that you deliver me ; for me, it imports little, seeing that I have already lost all."

"My duty, Mistress," Tobiah retorted, "I need none to teach me. As for the townsmen—who are they that they should know what makes for good ? Should righteousness suffer before the thing that puffed aldermen call justice ? Never ! No, Mistress, it is certainly as you say, did you confess to the seven deadly sins, yet would you be able to beguile Master Coote, a simple man, seeing that you could beguile me, even me, and that against the clear testimony of my eyes."

With that he arose as if the matter were determined and set about the orderly arranging of his house. The guest could do nothing, for she could only move with great pain and difficulty, and that to the further damaging of her injury, so she sat still while he set his affairs in order. When all was done he went out.

At dinner time he came home again, bringing news which made his face grim.

"Mistress," said he to Drusilla, "I have a word for you, and not of the best sort."

"Have they already come upon my tracks ?" she asked, "or do they still seek me in the town ?"

"Of the search," Tobiah answered, "I know nothing, doubtless there is hue and cry enough, though I met none of it." (This because he had sought retired spots for meditation.)

"What then have you heard ?" she asked.

"This," Tobiah made reply. "Two spoke of it as

I passed ; I forebore to question them, having other matters on my mind, but this much I heard—the shop of Jacob Wrench the Jew was burned last night and that before midnight.”

“Burned !” Drusilla cried, “And he ? Where is he ?”

Tobiah moved his shoulders as one who cannot tell.

“Doubtless,” said he, “the devil looks after his own.”

“You know not where my father is ?” Drusilla asked him. “You cannot tell whether he escaped or no ?”

“Nay, I cannot tell for certain, it was only a few words spoken in the street I heard. It was said the Jew had perished with his ill-gotten goods, but likely it was a lie ; the devil, as I said, is careful of that pattern ; moreover, why should a man burn with his house ? There are doors and windows to it as to all.”

“Yes,” she said, but as one who does not hear. She sat a long time with her eyes fixed and staring and her lip bitten in. Tobiah looked at her and looked again. He moved and strove to get between her, and that at which she stared, but to no purpose. Heretofore he had said women were of one sort, now it was revealed to him that there were two kinds and Drusilla was of the rarer—that which can keep silent in grief.

For a time they sat so. At last she brought her gaze back from far, and seemed once more to see the worthy Dissenter and what was at hand.

“Have others of the Jews suffered last night ?” she asked. “Is such a one and such another safe in his house ?” and she said the names of several, among them Amos, as if she did not know he was prisoner.

Tobiah fell into the trap. “This was no rising

against the Jews," he said, "this fire was one and singular ; it is even reported that Jacob Wrench, who alone suffered, set it agoing himself, though none know why. All those you name are safe as you and me, excepting only the young man Amos who was apprehended yesterday on some capital charge and is lodged securely in the gaol."

"Is Amos within the gaol ?"

"He was there clapt yesterday and to-day has told somewhat that is detrimental to your father's good name. I know not what it may be, for this much and no more I heard from the two who walked in the street."

Drusilla nodded. She knew now that the forgery had not been presented, it was doubtless perished in the fire and her father with it ; had the one been saved the other would have been with him, and Amos by this time likewise. Her sin, then, had been in vain, and her fall for nought ; her father, here was confirmation of it, was in very truth dead.

Of these thoughts Tobiah knew nothing, he thought only she grieved inly after her own fashion. When it seemed to him she had given time enough to the unworthy dead, he put her a question he had in his mind and that concerning herself.

"Mistress," said he, "when your injury shall be well and you depart to return no more, what do you purpose to do ? It is well that you should go and take evil from another's life, but it is not well that you should take it into your own ; the way of sin is ever wide open for one whom men call fair."

"That is not open for me," she answered, "not peradventure for your excellent reasons, I have no such high and holy motives. But I have been wife to a

good man and true, and I shall not forget it. I have borne his name and, though I cannot now wear it except in my heart, yet I will wear it there unspotted to the end."

Tobiah nodded slowly and did not reprove so poor a morality, this because the woman seemed strange to him and her strangeness filled his mind. She neither wept nor moaned nor raised her voice in protestation or prayer; yet it would seem that this quietness was the quietness of a great despair, and though there were no tears in her eyes nor sobs in her voice there were tears of blood in her heart, and a strong, dumb anguish within her.

It was she who first roused herself to speak. "Seeing that you have sheltered me," she said, "I owe it to you to tell what I may, and now that my father is dead I can tell all. It was for his neck I did this thing."

"To save him?" Tobiah asked.

"To save him from his deserts, there was no other way, he would have hung else."

Tobiah clucked with his tongue. This matter, it seemed, was not easy of judgment as at the first appearing. Things should be either all ill or all well, else how is a righteous man to judge between them? But this business the Dissenter found composite and very patchwork.

Drusilla leaned her arms upon the table. "There is one thing I would ask of you," she said. "After I am gone, go to Master Coote and say, 'This woman, whom you loved, played you false, even as she warned you she was a rogue and dishonest, and in the end stole from you your integrity.' Will you tell him this? Do so, and the cause of truth will be served. Moreover,

it will a little stay his grief, turning it to anger against me ; it is better that a man should be angry righteously than grieve without hope."

"That is so," Tobiah made answer, "when the object of his grief is naughty. Yes, yes, there is some wisdom in what you say, certainly Master Coote will think ill enough of you when he hears."

"It is what I would have," she said. "Did he think well he would grieve, but, knowing the ill, he would be content for me to go."

Tobiah could believe it and saw no reason why the pair should not derive what comfort they could from his bearing the message the one to the other. A little later he went out again and as in the morning kept to retired streets. But when twilight began to fall he came to the more populous places. There was again a small mist, but lighter than yesterday, for the air was colder, sharpening for frost ; the cobbles of the road-way were greasy, but above it was clear, the bare branched trees showing lace-like against the pink of sunset and the smoke rising straightly aloft afrom the manifold chimneys of the town. Tobiah crossed the market place, where charred remains not yet cleared away marked the evening's bonfire. The town had been too busy in the search for Mistress Coote for any to spare time for such clearing, and the youth of the place had profited accordingly, carrying off what half burnt brands they desired. Even now, two little boys stirred the white ashes, letting out into the thin air the pungent smell of burnt wood. Tobiah admonished them and sent them about their business, then pursued his way.

In time he came to the river and the Mayor's great house. He passed by the front and then, seeing afar

off Septimus Smallpage, one of our townsfolk overlong in the tongue, he turned into a by-way. This led but down to the river edge, and was really almost private to the Mayor's house, passing just below its south side. Tobiah walked slowly, not forgetting to look up at the windows above. Now the window of the crimson parlour looked on to this lane, and when Tobiah looked at that, what should he see but Master Coote within.

He stepped back into the roadway so that he might observe the better; he could see the Mayor plainly, a candle burned before him, and truly he looked a gray and old and heartbroken man. He had papers in his hands, doubtless he searched among his wife's gear, seeking something by which he might trace her; but he was not looking at the papers, rather at some scrap of embroidery he held. And the look of his face was strange to see, at least it was strange to Tobiah.

The Dissenter debated with himself a moment, then his way was made plain to him. Seeing that he had it in his power to turn this grief to righteous indignation, clearly it was his duty to do so, and at the same time to interpret to the man chastened the finger of the Lord in his affliction—this immediately. Accordingly he went boldly to the house front and sought admittance. He was refused, it was not easy to see the Mayor that day, except it were on the one matter. Tobiah had come somewhat on that matter, but he would not name his business to an underling; still he effected an entrance; it was not for any Jack in office or William either to keep him out. Into the crimson parlour he stalked; to the presence of Master Coote, who had put out of sight the embroidery and the letters.

"Do you bring me news, friend?" he asked.

"Well," replied Tobiah, seating himself, "that is perhaps hardly to be said, nevertheless——" and he paused as if choosing words.

But the other's impatience would not brook this. "Have you news of my wife?" he demanded. "Speak man, can you tell me where she may be found?"

"No," said Tobiah.

(Let not the adversary rejoice, this was no lie, he could not tell where she was. Should he betray the cause of righteousness?)

The Mayor's countenance changed: "Then," said he, "I must ask you to keep your business for a future day, my mind is too full of another matter to give it the attention it merits."

"My business," Tobiah made answer, "is the Lord's business; moreover," he raised his voice, for clearly the Mayor was going to bid him stop. "Moreover, it concerns this woman whom you seek."

"Drusilla? You have heard of her? You know something concerning her!"

"I know this much," Tobiah said, "she is one of whom you are well rid and this I can prove——"

But alas! These words had not the immediate effect of cooling ardour and reducing grief. Master Coote, without waiting to hear the end and far from being brought to a halt of consideration and reasonable indignation with the wrong-doer, fell into a rage with Tobiah and used to him sundry words, most unseemly.

Tobiah folded his arms and leaned back in his chair. Coote ordered him from the room, but he did not go; he was not, it may be remarked, of the size or sort to be hustled easily. "Man," said he with dignity, when

the other ceased speaking, "the Lord is afflicting you for the furtherance of your soul's health and also that He may save you, against your will, from a worser evil than has now befallen."

Coote rose to his feet, he had cooled now as suddenly as he had heated, and seemed to have no heart for the forcible ejection of any—since the Dissenter would not leave him he prepared to depart himself. "You have," said he wearily, "chosen the worst of ill times for your exhortation and your abuse of a fair and noble woman."

But it did not suit with Tobiah's mind to be thus left with only the half told, so he turned about.

"If," said he, "you had it on good authority, in her own hand, namely, that this woman had done you a wrong——"

"If," Coote cut him short, "if I could have that or anything I would give much!"

Tobiah nodded, not ill pleased. "You would see the Lord in the matter?" he suggested. "If you knew with assurance that this woman, who came of rogues and deceivers, had fallen back into their ways and deceived you and afterwards fled?"

Master Coote laid hold of Tobiah by the arm, he had heard Drusilla in some of the words. "You have seen her!" he cried, "you have spoken with her!"

"Last night," Tobiah answered, "without the town. Nay, do not be in haste, you cannot catch up with her for much hurrying. Sit you down, man, sit you down, she is where you cannot find her. I had her confession from her and you shall have somewhat of it from me, so that you may see that things are better as they are."

"Where I cannot find her?" Coote said slowly. "Dead?—she is dead?"

Tobiah did not say "yes," nor "no," only, "Sit down, sit down."

Coote sat down like one in a dream.

"She hath done you a great wrong," Tobiah began.

"She loved another and fled because of him," Coote asked. "And died. Man, why then did she die, if she loved?"

"Nay," said Tobiah, "she loved none but you."

He spoke with all simplicity, the fact had been too plain for him to overlook. Nevertheless, when Coote heard it, he started like one who could not believe his ears.

"Loved me?" he said. "Loved me?"

"Why yes," Tobiah replied, "it is for this reason, and for your good that she has gone. She stole from you the great seal of the town, and set it fraudulently to a false deed; she deceived you, and she knew that, did she stay, she might deceive you again. She is of ill stuff, a clever and cunning mind, much prone to evil; it were better, and she knew it, to remove the evil of herself from your life."

But Coote continued to stare upon him. "She loved me?" he said again, but more softly. "She loved me, and she is fled!"

Then all on a sudden he stretched his arms upon the table and bent his head upon them, and cried with a low but exceeding bitter cry. "My God, my God, have mercy upon me!"

Outside the air was clearing with the increasing cold, steps and voices rang sharply, reaching even now and then to the secluded red parlour. Within, all was very quiet, the fire had burned low, so that it only glowed upon the floor and made no sound of falling ash. A tall candle, much in need of snuffing, stood

upon the table, but placed so that it cast no light upon the bowed head and the shoulders that had quivered and were still. Tobiah sat looking at the candle with his mouth screwed on one side and his hand rubbing his chin. He could not tell what the Lord would have him do—to speak or to keep silent. To withhold this woman from her husband and so remove evil from their lives ; or to restore them the one to the other, so that they might live together as man and wife, even as they had sworn before God's holy altar. For a little he thought about it, and his mind was clear from any foolish or intruding thought of the townsmen. Justice, he saw plainly now, would not be served by any public mention of this affair—seeing that the forgery was destroyed and the man it was to have saved as warmly housed in Tophet as if the hangman had helped him there. He thought much and silently ; not biassed at all by the sight of the bowed figure before him or the memory of the heart anguish he had seen in Drusilla's face. At least, he says he was in no way biassed, and we must perforce believe so good a man. But the Lord does not leave His own without guidance. In a little Tobiah saw his way, for he knew how to seek it. He felt in the great pocket of his coat and drew from it the Bible which bulged it. This he let open where it would, putting a finger on the revealed page, without trying to discern where, knowing that in this way the Spirit would give him a sign. Then he drew the candle nearer and looked to see on what spot his finger rested, and he saw that it was the sixteenth verse of the twenty-seventh chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon. "He that hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself."

Now, to some this saying might have been dark; not so to Tobiah, he interpreted it easily and aright. He saw plainly that it was as vain for him to hide Drusilla as for a man to strive to hide the wind, the which bewrayeth itself. Also that it would be wicked and contrary to the now declared mind of God to attempt it, seeing that it was foretold of her that she should be as ointment to her husband's hand. He closed the book with a snap, being clearly resolved.

The sound of the closing roused Coote to a memory of his presence. He lifted his head, but, forasmuch as his face was in shadow, it could not be seen.

"I crave your pardon, good friend," he said, "I had forgot you in mine own private grief. I must ask you to bear with me to-day, I am unmanned, perhaps over old to take well these blows of fortune. If you would leave me now and come again some other day, I could the better thank you for your service—for, of a truth, you have brought me sweet news with the bitter."

"Brother," said Tobiah, rising, "my news is not yet all told. The Lord has revealed to me that you should hear all and not part. You are over hasty in your conclusions, I said not that your wife was dead, rather that she was where you could not find her; which is the truth indeed—you could not find her, but I, brother—I am the man."

He pointed to himself with dignity as he spoke. Coote sprang to his feet. "You!" he cried. "She lives? You have seen her? You know it?"

"Yes, brother, yes," Tobiah answered. "But not so fast. I will tell the tale decently and in order, but let us be moving the while, I can tell it without doors as well as within."

And he told it, his own way, very fitly. And Coote, in his joy at the safety and nearness of Drusilla, neglected to say aught about the long withholding of the news and the part Tobiah had taken in the affair, which was very right and proper, for the Dissenter had but done his duty, for the which he deserved no blame nor desired no praise. Thus talking they passed along the streets. Where every lighted window was as a beacon of hope to Coote and not a mocker taunting his own desolate heart with the sight of others joyous and warm. Nay, even the figures of the townsfolk that hurried past, all wrapped up because of the sudden cold, were a glad sight to him, he hoped in his heart that each was going home to a wife who loved him. Tobiah stalked by his side, contending of the justice and mercy of the Lord, speaking weighty words, while his heels rang upon the ground and the breath of his nostrils rose up as smoke into the frosty air.

In time they came to the quiet street where old narrow houses with penthouse roofs look decorously down, like grave and godly citizens past their first youth and somewhat lean and lantern-jawed. Tobiah paused just before they reached the house with the yellow plaster front and the flight of wooden stairs that leads sideways to the street.

"Brother!" said he, tapping the other upon the shoulder, "it is ever my rule to forbear, when I can, all interfering between man and wife. Go you in and settle this matter to your liking. She is in the room that lies at the back; she sits by the fire, and, seeing that she is hurt, she cannot run away. I remember me that I have an errand to one at the corner."

And saying this he thrust the key of the door into Coote's hand and strode away to the end of the street.

There he went into the shop of one, Richard, and, after consideration, bought a candle.

This Richard, not having seen Tobiah all day, and being crammed with gossip, came at him with big mouth and eyes and all the scandalous hearsays of the town concerning the vanishing and flight of the Mayor's lady, Mistress Coote. But Tobiah cut him short.

"Mistress Coote fled!" cried he. "What folly is this? She is within my house at the present and his worship the Mayor with her. See you here, neighbour, if some had been as busy to find herself as to find her wrong, she need not have lain as she did. And, of a truth, if sundry within this town were as industrious to search for the holes in their own garments of righteousness as in those of others, the company in the Kingdom of Heaven would be bigger, if less select than it is like to be now."

Richard stared upon him speechless for a moment, then "Mistress Coote is found?" said he. "Wife, wife! John, there! Master Bunsen, d'ye hear? The Mayor's lady is found! Worthy sir, how can this be, all the town has searched for her?"

"The town," replied Tobiah, "is a dog with an ill nose, clever only at smelling out what is unsavoury. I found Mistress Coote, and with no searching at all, lying in a wood where she had fallen these many hours gone. Where she was like to lie, seeing that she had done herself an injury and could not rise; and every mud-head in the town was too busy wondering what evil she had done to think that she might have met with a hurt when she had gone out privately on an errand of charity." (Is it not a charity to attempt to save one from the gallows, and also a charity to remove evil from the life of another, even if to do so you must

remove yourself? Tobiah saw plainly that it was, so he spoke with decision.) "Nay, brethren," he went on to those now assembled at Richard's shouting, "your talking does not please me, rather it cuts me to the heart for your sakes. Do not I know that you, who are so ready to flay one even before it is known she has fallen, have curious things in your own lives? There are short weights with one, and a saucy tongue with another, and monstrous crooked dealings not so far as over the way. The Lord, who has Mistress Coote and her errand in mind, has these also. I will on the Sabbath following declare unto you something of the mind of the Lord; the text of the discourse will be Matthew twenty-three, fourteen. 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!' I will trouble you for two pence, Master Richard, if you please."

Tobiah stretched forth his hand and Richard put into it nervously the two pence that was the change of the piece he had given. Also in eager haste he gave the candle, wrapt in a large and fair piece of paper—a thing that was rare in that shop and marked respect indeed.

And in this time Coote had let himself into the quiet dark house; softly felt his way down the narrow passage; softly opened the door of the room that lay at the back. There he saw her in the firelight—the lost, the beautiful, fairest of women, Drusilla—who loved him!

For a second he stood while her eyes met his and her lips formed a voiceless cry.

"Drusilla! Wife!"

His voice was hoarse and low, but she drew back to the shadow.

"No!" she cried, and struggled with the sob in her throat. For a moment she struggled, then she mastered herself. "Do you know?" she said, "have you not heard? I have wronged you, I have stolen from you, taken your dearest. I am no longer fit wife for you, I have abused your trust in me, abused even your office to mine own ends."

"Yea, I know it," he answered, "I know it, and I also am in the same case with you; I, too, have abused my office and the trust of the town, and that for the same ends as you, for I gave private word to one to flee from justice."

"You?" she whispered, and then—"My father! You did it for my father, for me?"

"Yes, sweet one," he said, "and to no purpose; he is beyond our justice now, and you are alone in the whole world except for me."

She bowed her head, but her thoughts were for him, not her father.

"Truly have I brought evil into your life," she said, "even to this last, when, by reason of me, you have stept aside from your straight course."

"Nay, wife," he replied, "you never brought ill into my life until yesterday, when you sent me a black cloud by the withdrawing of yourself."

But she shook her head.

"I brought ill the first day that you saw me and the day that you made me wife. Do you know why I wed you? It was for some such purpose as this which has come to pass."

"For that was it?" he said smiling gently. "Often have I marvelled how it could ever have come about. For that you wed me, and for what did you leave me? Ah, sweetheart, that also have I learnt to-day, and it

is the greatest wonder of all." He took her face between his hands and drew it to him : " You wed me for gain," he said, " and you left me for—love," and he kissed her there and then in the firelight.

So the rose of love came to Josiah Coote, Mayor of our town. For long it had been but the half-opened bud of service and he, plain-featured, sober-minded man, had been content to wear it so. But now it had blossomed, it was the full and perfect flower which lay upon his breast ; in the firelight he gathered it to him, loving and loved.

Marie Angelique

Tobiah the Dissenter saw plainly that the Lord had been with him in the matter of Drusilla (as He also was in the sermon he preached on hypocrite, the which much folk flocked to hear, each man anxious to know what might be said of his neighbour, well knowing himself to be above the charge). This of the Mayor and the Jewess is the first connubial matter to which Tobiah was called to lend aid.

The second concerned Marie Angelique. But here it was not the Lord's will that he should reunite husband and wife, rather that he should be the instrument to take the man from her. This not only for her good, but also that of many, for there were strange and awesome happenings mixed with the thing.

I

THE GRISLY HAPPENINGS IN OUR TOWN

THIS befell in the terrible winter. That winter is one all remember ; there is not its fellow within knowledge, nor is there like to be, unless men need to be visited for more than ordinary sinfulness. The cold was beyond belief ; before November was out the snow lay thick on eaves and ledges, piled at street corners and trodden hard in the roadway, till one forgot the colour of the good cobble stones. The river froze ; by December our fine river, a water highway frequented of many ships, was frozen, so that the craft were locked fast and many hands idle. Some folk, with more fuel than sense, roasted an ox upon the ice, as if this frost were a fine thing and something to rejoice over. But the most of the townsfolk looked sourly upon the proceeding ; and the Lord, in derision, sent yet more frost, so that even lower down stream, where the lift of the tide is strong, there were great ice blocks that leapt and ground upon one another, talking an hungry talk, the sound of which men have forgotten these many years. And this cold was not with the clear shining of sunlight and crisp air, it seemed never to be light in those days ; even when the air was free of snow and fog, which was rarely, there was but a black, drear light which came late and went early.

In this evil time John Pennywether—he lived then a mile outside the town—came daily through the little wood, which lies on the northern border in order to reach his work. The wood was not thick and a goodish path ran through, though now that the snow was deep it was heavy going and very lonesome. One morning when John came that way he found the first of this strange and terrible thing. It was a still morning, so still that the rare snapping of an overweighted branch sounded like the crack of a whip. The hour was early, the day but blue and starlit as yet, and the wood a dark place except for the glimmer of the snow. But in spite of that he was able to see a little, and he had not gone far when he espied something lying near to the path.

Even at the first, before he rightly knew what it was, fear possessed him ; nevertheless, he turned aside to look, and beheld half under a leafless bush the body of a child. It lay not buried, yet partly concealed, as if some ill-equipped creature had striven to scratch a hole to hide it. The snow, which had fallen lightly during the night, was powdered over it, and in part hid its face. John stooped to see who it might be, thinking that it must be some poor little one who had missed the path in the gloom of yester evening and, numbed with cold, lain down to sleep and die. But when he would have brushed the snow from the face, behold, beneath the glittering white, there was blood ! Blood on the face, on the breast, on the torn throat, on the little shoulder, which showed where the poor gown was ripped away ! The good man stared at the horrid sight ; some beast of prey must have been here, some starving ravening beast made desperate by cold and hunger ! With terror he glanced into the

dark wood and down the straight path, and he had it in his mind to run away ; but he was a sturdy man, and had with him a goodly basket of tools. He bethought him, firstly, to remember that, since the body was cold and stiff, the beast must have gone ; and secondly, to wonder what manner of creature it could have been. For in this country there are neither wolves nor bears at large, and dogs would scarcely so attempt to devour a child. He looked again at the cruel work, and then in the increasing light he began to search the ground for signs of footprints. The last night's snow, coating anew the hard frozen white of many past falls, had made these hard to find ; yet, seeing it was not heavy, he at last found a spot where the new powdering was thin, and the old soft enough to show a track. And when he saw it he fell upon his knees and remembered that he was a sinful man and no better than another, for the footprint was the print of no animal that goes. Five toes it seemed to have, five little round holes it had made in the snow ; yet not set like a dog's toes are set, nor nailed like a bear's are nailed, but set almost a-row, but curving back a little, though only on the outer edges where the print was so faint it was hardly a print at all. These and no mark of heel or sole ; nothing more, nothing less ; three prints of these, and no other sign of coming or going. Then John knew that something grim and ghostly had been done last night in the snow.

When he had sufficiently come to his mind, which was not at once for he was an ignorant man, very heartily convinced of the truth of hobgoblins, and he had found an evil and awesome thing, not good to see. When, as I say, he had come to his mind and gathered courage to move, he took to his heels and fled with

what speed he could. Soon the tale was known abroad, and John, fortified by the company of some strong and lusty men and also by the presence of a minister of the Lord, had led the curious (and valiant) to the wood. But neither the lusty men nor the minister could make anything of this. Foul work had been done by something foul, and fell too, and beyond that the wisest could not go. So the tale stood.

From that day few folk stirred abroad after night-fall unless they were driven to it; and John, who must always return after twilight, trudged two good miles round by the road in company with a lantern and a stout stick, and, if fortune favoured him, a brother wayfarer too. And grisly tales grew, though none knew how nor why; but so they will when the nights are long and dark and the frost holds like a vice, and there is somewhat to fear to which no man can give a name. But nothing befell to talk on till some sen-night later when there was the burying of old Robert Ginfillen—he who grew rich, though not respected, as harbour master here.

The burying was on a Friday, the grave on the north side the church. Dame Alice, his wife, who predeceased him a year, was already lying on the south, and he had said they must have the church between them, or else, if they were within shouting reach of each other, some difference would arise and delay them at the Day of Judgment.

Friday is not a good day for a burying, certainly it proved a poor one for Ginfillen. The snow came on while the service was being said, and though they got it through with something of haste, there was no filling in the grave that day. The mourners hastened home, what tears they had very stiffly frozen within them;

the coffin was left riveted to earth by holy words certainly, still not covered with mould. All that day it snowed and snowed, so that midday and midnight were of much the same opaqueness. At nightfall it slackened a little, a low moaning wind—wherein many sitting by the fireside claim to have heard eerie sounds—driving the flakes away. But by the small hours they were falling again, and ceased not till belated day crept out to a numb world.

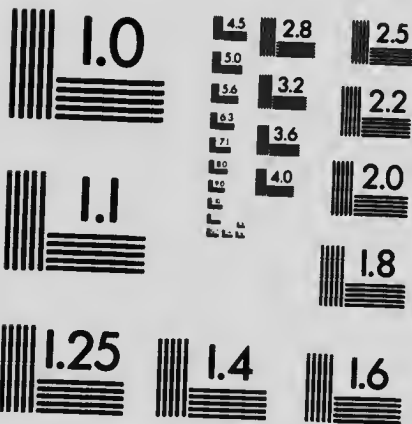
In the afternoon when the drifts had been a little cleared, there set out for the churchyard Primus Postler the sexton, and his man Jack. But they came speeding back again very soon, bringing an ugly tale with them. One, they said, had been there before them between the great snow of yesterday and the smaller of this morning. The unfilled grave had been entered, the coffin broken open, and the body strangely mauled! A gruesome thing certainly, and one of which the handiwork looked not like that of man, for the ring wherewith the corpse was known to be buried was still upon the hand. Yet, so Postler said, he and his man had found an old pick, snow buried beside the grave, such a tool as one might take to break open a coffin lid; that certainly spoke against its being the work of beast. Much disturbed by these conflicting signs, they had set about searching for some further hint or trace, and found it soon enough. In a near corner, sheltered somewhat by wind and so passed by the drifts, there was a print: five toes set a-row, the line curving back on the outer edge, and no sign of heel or sole. And when they found this they cast down their tools and fled hot-foot to the town.

This news was soon astir among the townsfolk; each man looked at his neighbour, not knowing what



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to say, yet making shift to say something and plenty of it. Primus and Jack sat them down in the *Fox and Grapes* and fortified themselves with liquor, telling their tale to all and sundry. And seeing the habits of some of our townsfolk and how they would sooner seek council and comfort of strong drink than of the Lord, one may believe Master Landlord drove a good trade that candletime. In a while, some one bethought him that the person most concerned, young Robert Ginfillen, had not yet been informed of the happening at the churchyard; accordingly, two set off to take him the news, Jack was one, but not Primus, he deemed he would be better employed answering questions—and swilling ale—at the *Fox and Grapes*.

Young Robert Ginfillen was a stranger to the town, but newly come there for his uncle's burying and to claim the inheritance which was his. He had lived much a student in foreign lands, a poor one, too, till this his uncle's decease had unexpectedly made him rich. He was a quiet youth, but he had borne himself very decorously at the funeral, albeit he had shed no tears for the uncle he had not known, which some thought scandal. It is possible that he, being but lately come from the company of books and a land of sunshine, found our town, in the twilight of the great frost, and our folk, sturdy and god-fearing though peradventure of a hard sort, a little drear and grim, though doubtless wholesome. To this young man reading some poet as he sat in state in the great Ginfillen house, came Jack and another with their tale, and all details in order.

The young man went white when he heard them; even, it would seem, his stomach turned, which was womanish indeed; though, for his excuse be it said,

it is a long jump from the land of poesy and orange groves to our frozen churchyard where his uncle's broken coffin lay. Certainly he thanked Jack and the other in a handsome manner, and, after they had refreshed themselves, they went away ready to swear he was of a proper sort.

When they were gone, Ginfillen called for his cloak and boots ; he would go to the churchyard. It seemed to him nothing less than his duty to keep company with this uncle lying in the unfilled grave. And if the awesome and unknown Thing which came last night came again to-night, why, then it came ; a man must take odds in this life and in the next.

Soon he was out in the white streets, where now wayfarers were infrequent and went in pairs, looking sharply about if they fancied they heard the muffled thud of other steps answering their own. In time he came to the churchyard, where the dead folk made scarcely a furrow under their common winding sheet of snow. He stumbled among the half hidden mounds, taking his way to the open grave, there to begin his watch.

It was wondrous quiet out here with a kind of silence that was like a separate thing, filling the air solidly and growing to weigh on a man's chest. And what made it the more strange, the hour was not late nor the town far away, little more than just below, but so bereft of all companionable sound of joy or toil as to seem frozen. He began pacing to and fro by the grave, three yards that way three yards this, as a sentry on duty ; a man could not sit still and live out o' doors that night, so he walked and walked. No one came to disturb him or to break the peace of those who slept so well under the mould. No watchman

looked over the wall to ask what one did among the dead ; no wandering spirit left the twilight other world for the darkness of this. Nothing showed but the baleful blue shining of the snow, nothing moved save when a small breeze rattled the ice which hung in the churchyard yew, as rattles the breath in the throat of death, and the air was cold as the graves are cold, and the night drew itself out and out and out, till it seemed to have endured many days.

Towards the black end of the night in the small, but very long, hours, weariness grew upon Ginfillen. By this time a freezing mist obscured the upper air, distilling a rawness which ate into the very bones ; his legs grew numb and silly with it, and dulness pressed upon his brain, so that he was fain to stand for a little. He propped himself against a high-reared tombstone, one that made a peak in the surrounding plain, and so standing drowsed. And in his drowsing something came to him ; it was as if a breath smote him, and icicles, brushed by an unseen thing from the stone's top, fell upon him. He awoke and stretched eager hands to grasp—nothing.

Nothing was there, nothing but the empty air. Yet something had been ; he felt it as one feels the presence of a dream after waking. He came out from the shadow, but all was still ; on either hand only silence and the little mounds where the dead folk slept. To right and left he looked, doubting ; then, dim in the dimness, a shadow among shadows, something moved and was gone. Soundless on swift feet it went, vague for a moment against the pallor of the snow like a dream-begotten creature of sleep that speeds away into the night. Thus he saw it, and thus he, like one who

strives to lay hold on the skirts of the dream people, turned him and sped after.

Away and away he went over the quiet graves about the high-reared vault ; here where the shadows lurked, there where the unnamed dead lay thick, away into the icy night, so they went, it and he after. Out to the silent town now, beyond the haunted acre to the quiet streets where men dwelt and slept, all slept. Down wide ways, silent ; past houses, gray and sere, rows of houses, row on row with shuttered windows like blind eyes that blinked past and were gone. Down tortuous ways, steep and narrow, down and down ; past dark doorways and jutting corners and black alley mouths. And everywhere there was silence, as of a city of the dead, and the half dark wherein things are seen and not seen, the blackness of night and the evil shining of the snow. And before sped the Thing, now there, now vanished, to appear again, but to vanish again. And sometimes he saw it two legged and sometimes four, sometimes beastlike, sometimes manlike, always shadowlike as it leapt and ran and vanished into the night. Thus Ginfillen went, and as he went the way grew narrower and the dark houses frowned down, drawing close, closing in on either side. Walls of blackness that pressed near, a way steep as stairs that went down and down through a hundred leagues of night.

Then suddenly in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the bottom was reached, the black walls were gone ; all before stretched an open space, gray, white and misty, a place of ghosts where the sea fog and hoar frost are born. Under foot was ice and crumbling snow, overhead stars veiled, hidden by the breath of ghosts ; a place where all was without form and void,

and the cold was such as grips at the throat of a man even as grips the hand of death. But the Thing fled on, so he after ; over the rough ice floor speeding, leaping the cracks and fissures where blackness showed through the white as from the floor of the world.

And as he went gradually he gained upon it ; it vanished from his sight less often, even though in the mist he never saw it clearly. He would have it yet, he would touch it and know if it were flesh and blood ! Nearer he came, nearer ; he was upon it, he stretched hands—

A wall rose up before him, black and blank looming out of the mist, and the Thing was gone from him. Just as he was upon it, it sprang upwards, outwards, and vanished, even as if the wall had opened to swallow it.

Thereafter there was silence, so that a man might hear the laboured beating of his heart, might hear water moving far down under the frozen crust. So till, faint and far off in the distance, came the sound of ice grinding as the outgoing tide fell in the river.

II

OF THE FOREIGNERS IN OUR TOWN

NOW Tobiah the Dissenter had of late been afflicted with a cholic, and that of so sore an order that he was perforce obliged to remain within doors for more than a week past. Had it not been for this it is very certain he would have been before now stirring in the ill business of the thing which had begun to haunt our town. As it was he was not enough recovered to go about until the day after Postler and Jack brought their tale to the *Fox and Grapes*; then, however, having with forethought covered the affected part, with a flannel apron, he sallied forth to look into the matter. Although Tobiah lived in a quiet and retired street, he had heard all the news of these happenings, even of the going of Jack and another to young Robert Ginfillen, what he said to them and what they to him. This some may think strange, but the Lord can direct even the winds of town talk for His purposes and the enlightening of the elect.

Betimes in the morning Tobiah was about. The roads were in a very parlous state with ice—by reason of the freezing mist of the small hours, and the godly as well as the ungodly had much ado to stand in the slippery places, which were many. In time and with cautious walking the Dissenter came to the Ginfillen house. He intended to see young Ginfillen and hear

what he thought, what did and what determined to do ; none of which things, it seemed, Jack and the other had ascertained yester evening. But he was to be disappointed ; for at the door, a black and solemn door, much resembling that of a handsome family vault, he was told that the young master was abed.

"Abed ?" said Tobiah, "at this hour." By the clock it was now full morning, although the light was no more than gray ; it was not truly light all that day.

The manservant, who knew Tobiah, for he was himself of the Dissenters, nodded his head.

"Master was out late last night," said he, "or rather 'twas morning before he came in."

Tobiah frowned, this had an unseemly sound, not in accord with the way the heir should keep the day of the testator's funeral—yesterday as well as the day before was in a sort the funeral.

"I will come by and by," said Tobiah, and withdrew to examine the churchyard and to question Primus Postler and others.

But before Tobiah presented himself again at the imposing black door, Ginfillen had also made an examination for himself, and that in another direction. As soon as he had breakfasted he set out for the older part of our town, that which lies towards the river. He was, as has been said, a stranger to the place, and knew nothing of the ways ; yet he asked guidance of no one, but went slowly, picking his road by some landmarks known to himself. Once or twice he went astray, but retraced his steps and in time came to one of those steep, narrow streets, ill places alike in savour and repute, which lead like rat runs through the poor quarter of the town down to the river. Old dark houses stood close

on either side here ; they seemed to press in on the wayfarer. At the bottom all ended abruptly, and one found oneself without warning on the river, now for the most part frozen, and, by reason of the part which was not frozen, much given over to fog and hoar frost.

This was the spot to which he had come last night, this the place of ghosts where he had followed the unknown quarry. They had sped up the frozen river together, until the thing, by some instinct, had discerned that somewhere on the right bank, hidden in the mist was a lair of safety. It had jumped to the place, and Ginfillen, following on, had come suddenly upon a wall which went sheerly down to the river—to the water in ordinary times—to the ice now. He had felt it, groping over it in the dark, till he perceived that it was a house, with, above his head, a protuberant window, to which the creature must have jumped. When he was convinced of this, he marked the wall with care, and then took his way home, noting the streets so that he might find the place again.

Now after some searching he found it, and not only the wall he had marked and the rounded window which overhung the river, but also the other side of the house and the front it presented to the street. When he was quite sure that it was indeed the very house he went boldly to the door and knocked.

A moon-faced serving woman opened to him ; her he asked for the master. But the master, she said, was out ; whereupon he requested to have speech with the mistress. This she granted him, bidding him to the parlour, which lay to the front. There he found Mistress Malregal.

Up to this, most will say he had acquitted himself well enough with caution and decorum ; thereafter,

perhaps, so much cannot be said. But in his defence let this be remembered. Mistress Malregal was the Marie Angelique whom some of you have since come to know ; those that have may perhaps think he, a young man, was not without excuse. In those days her face was like a snowflake, as pure, as delicate ; her beauty, then as always, was like the beauty of dawn, the dew on the rose, the scent of the lily, which a man cannot depict or forget. Robert Ginfillen had known her in times past when she lived in France, the native land of her husband, the learned Doctor Malregal. Ginfillen was a penniless student in those days, but he had come and gone a welcome guest at the Doctor's house until his heart was not in his keeping. Thereafter he went no more, for he was an honest youth, and one, moreover, who had the rare wisdom to doubt his own steadfastness. So, as he had no will to repay the Doctor's hospitality by laying siege to his best treasure, he avoided the house before he had begun to flatter himself the girl wife had for him the affection she had not for the husband parental wisdom had assigned her. Which was wise, right and unlike enough to the ways of youth to deserve some reward of fate. But fate is a tricky jade and one given to strange rewards, that which she had for Robert Ginfillen was the finding of that winter rose, Mistress Malregal, in the little dark house where he had come seeking other quarry.

And so perhaps it was not wonderful that, on this drear afternoon, he forgot for a while the purpose of his coming, and remembered only that she was here. But after a time it was recalled to him by herself, for innocently she asked him how he had knowledge that they dwelt there, and he was compelled to say he had no such knowledge, but came only by chance.

"I am seeking a dog that is lost," he said, fearing to fright her with more explicitness. "I followed it last night to the river, but there I lost it, it seemed to spring to a round window that jutted from the back of a house hereabout."

She listened with surprise. "There is no dog here," she said. "You know that my husband has no liking for the creatures, nor they for him."

This he did know and felt the lameness of his tale.

"Yet you say it was to a round window it sprang?" she asked, "That is strange, there is no house but ours with such a window hereabouts."

"It must have lighted for a minute and sprung down again when I was gone." So he said, and she thought it likely enough. "Let us go to the room at the back," she said. "The snow is hard, yet your dog must have come with force and if it lit on the sill we can perhaps find its footprints."

And he agreeing gladly enough, she led the way to the room. There, he went to the window niche.

"Pray you keep by the fire," said he; "the wind is bitter to-day."

This he said, doubting what might be to be seen on the window-sill: but she came to the window none the less, and though he opened the casement only a little way, blocking the aperture with his arm, it was useless; she saw, even as he saw, two prints on the ledge. Five toes each had, set in a row that curved backwards; and it seemed as if the thing that made them had faced forwards to the house and had not turned about again.

This they both saw, and she, seeing it, grasped his arm, so that the casement slipped from his hand and swung free.

"My God," she breathed and her face was ashen white.

"Madame! Mistress!" he cried. "Lady sweet! and leaving the casement to swing free he supported her to a couch.

Eagerly he strove to calm and reassure her, much in remorse that he should have been the instrument to give her such a shock. But for a little his efforts were without avail; the which perhaps was the less surprising, seeing that he was himself much shaken at the thought of the close approach of this unnamed danger to her. But in time he succeeded, and best when he pointed out that it was idle to fear for a danger which was overpast.

"The thing," he said, "can but have rested a minute and gone. It cannot have entered here, it could not enter without knowledge of any."

"No," she said, shivering a little, "no, it cannot have entered without knowledge of any."

She rose and went to the window; he would have closed it for her, but she possessed herself of the casement so he could but stand behind her. While he stood he saw something he had not seen before—another print in the hard snow. It was higher, almost on the stone mullion between the windows—the print of a human hand, as if one had steadied himself with the one hand while he pushed wide the window with the other. He opened his mouth to exclaim, at this sight, then closed it again, for Marie's sleeve was almost on the print, and he thought of her terror to find her gown brushing where this had been. The next moment he discovered a very strange thing, she had seen the print even as he had, if not before. Her eyes were now upon it, but she did not cry out nor swoon nor shrink away,

rather, let she her laces fall over it, as she pulled the window to with a steady hand, and never a word of it she spoke.

After that they sat down and talked again ; but he was troubled and uneasy in mind, doubting and fearing he knew not what. Before he left he said he would, if he might, come and pay his respects to Monsieur Malregal. This she seemed glad that he should do.

" But you will not say aught of this thing to him," she entreated. " Nay, you must not," she persisted when he hesitated, thinking it, indeed, little less than his duty to speak. " His health is poor now," she said, " I would not have him troubled, neither he nor any other can do aught, the danger, as you say, is overpast, why disturb him with news of it ? Let this be a secret between you and me, I think we can trust each the other to keep it ? "

So he promised, finding it goodly to be trusted by her, and to share a secret even of this sort. So he agreed ; but to one other thing she asked he agreed not. It was nothing less than that he should promise never more to seek or follow the Thing which, as he had now confessed to her, he had followed last night from the churchyard. She entreated him to promise, she whom he had thought not long since it would be happiness enough to entreat, whose lightest commands he had believed he would always obey. Yet he refused, though he knew not why, and went away thoughtful.

In the meantime Tobiah had come once again to the Ginfillen house, and declaring it his will to wait the return of the young master had been admitted. He waited now, seated in the old harbour master's chair of black leather, before a goodly fire, improving the hour by studying the Bible he always carried with him.

When Ginfillen came home, the servant warned him of the presence of the worthy man and also told him so much of his goodly sort that the young man greeted him in a respectful and becoming manner.

"Sir," said Tobiah, when he had acknowledged the greeting, "I have before waited upon you to-day, but you were then abed, being, I suppose, tired by the unbecoming doings of the night."

"Unbecoming?" Ginfillen said in surprise. "Reverend sir, I did but company with mine uncle."

"Your uncle," Tobiah made answer, "is in Hell, whatever you will——"

"My uncle," retorted the young man, "may or may not be there, but that is no business of mine, nor, worthy sir—I say it in spite of your years—is it of yours. It was no further than the churchyard where I kept company with him last night, and where I must to-night, if there is no man brave enough in this town to fill in his grave. It seems to me but a poor gratitude if I lie snug and warm in the great bed he bequeathed to me, while he lies in the narrow one which is all we have for him now, exposed to the attacks of fiends, men and others."

"Ha," cried Tobiah, "is that so? A proper spirit, a very proper and becoming spirit! Young sir, I ask your pardon, I misjudged you; I took you to be no better than the common youth of this ungodly time, so bent on junketing and wantonness as to grudge even one night to decorous and seemly mourning. I see now that you are otherwise, and it pleases me to see it."

This apology Ginfillen accepted readily, for he was not quick to give or to take offence. He explained more fully how he had spent the night.

"Had I but known," Tobiah said, "I would have companied with you, in despite of my cholic. I should most certainly have been there. Saw you aught?"

"Well," said Ginfillen slowly. "I did not to say see anything, yet was something there."

"Explain," cried Tobiah.

And Ginfillen explained, yet with reservations, for in the telling, he carried that nightmare chase no further than the river, saying vaguely he had lost his quarry there. It did not seem well to him that Mistress Malregal should be drawn into this affair even in converse with so good a man as the Dissenter.

Tobiah listened with all attention and said this and that, so that they talked of what nature the fell thing might be, and how best it were to be dealt with. At last the Dissenter rose to go.

"Sir," said he, "a word at departing; I think it well that we kept our own counsel in this matter. There is already more fear than enough in the town, this which you have told me will profit none of the ordinary sort, you and I may make something of it, Postler, Pennywether and others will not, let us pursue our search and say nothing."

"With all my heart," Ginfillen answered, and he had more reason than the other. With that Tobiah took his leave, saying, however, that he would come again.

The which he did, not only because of the strange and mysterious thing, but also because he had conceived a kindness for the young Ginfillen, who certainly was not at all like to his late uncle. This last had been a great enemy to the Dissenters and all god-fearing folk; a cantankerous blasphemer, reputed to have been able to outswear not only Beelzebub, but also barge-masters

on our river, which is a rare and dangerous thing, seeing how these, when outsworn, throw turves, wood and other missiles, besides vile, obscene and blasphemous epithets.

But, alas, for the strength and wisdom of youth ! In these days, when Tobiah came sometimes to the Ginfillen house, Ginfillen went often to the little dark house by the river. He had his reasons of course, a man never need want for them ; Monsieur Malregal invited him, but that was not one, he had invited him before in his native France. Mistress Marie Angelique invited not, yet it seemed to Ginfillen she was glad of his coming, and that was one reason to bring him. Another and a more, righteous one, was a feeling that some evil hung about the house, some formless danger that he hoped fondly he might be able to avert. So he came and he went ; but none others came, for the Malregals, it seemed, preferred to live solitary, poorly on the small fortune that had come to Monsieur with his wife, and alone save only for Ginfillen.

And the shadow that was there grew and grew, though the learned doctor never felt its chilling breath. But about his wife it spread till, under it, it seemed to Ginfillen she drooped, growing pale and thin, till only her great eyes lived and watched. And a bitter anger sprang up in the young man's heart against the doctor who could see nothing ; and a black suspicion that this man was the cause of the grief. And with that there came a hot unlawful desire to comfort the grief, even, perhaps, a wicked thought to throw over old wisdom and honesty and try for the forbidden thing. This, for some time, but later a better mind prevailed, and the knowledge grew, though how he knew not, in the young man's mind that the sorrow eating at his dear

mistress' heart was not her old mate or her loveless match, but in some way had to do with the Thing he had followed that awesome night. What traffic she had with it he might not guess, nor even what it truly was ; of two things only was he sure—that she had knowledge of it and that it was a crushing burden to her holy innocence.

Vainly did he strive when he was sure of this to have her confidence ; or if that might not be, by his own wit to free her from this thrall or earn her a respite from her trouble. But such a thing was not to be, with a woman's insight did she perceive his least effort and gently, skilfully, yet withal wholly did she keep him from so much as approaching to any knowledge of her ill secret. It was never spoken of between them, never hinted ; he might come often to the house, play a game with her husband, hold converse with her, but he must do no more and pretend always that no grim shadow was there, nothing amiss, even though her wan face wrung his heart. And let those who call him fool for bowing to her in this thing try for themselves to break through the impalpable, impassable fence delicate woman sets up when she will.

III

OF THE TERROR THAT HAUNTED OUR TOWN

THE winter wore on, the terrible, terrible winter. It thawed sometimes, for a day almost, but always it froze again at nightfall. And if by any chance some snow melted, filling the air with a raw and freezing damp, more fell before the old was half gone. So the days went, and as says the old adage, as they lengthened so the cold strengthened, and folks hearts grew as leaden as the sky, for food was dear and work not to do. And strange tales went about, as bats at twilight, sending men early indoors, making the dark staircase a terror to little maids, calling women's hearts to their mouths when a soft footstep sounded, snow muffled after nightfall or a passing wind shook the shutter. For there was some fearsome thing in our midst, a foul thing which thirsted for blood and feared not, that struck the little child in the lonely wood and the quiet dead in God's acre. An awesome thing, the worse that none knew its shape or nature nor whither it went nor from whence it came. Unless, perhaps, this great frost had called it from some other world where it had slept from the beginning of time, held under ice by those of whom there is only legend now.

And in all these days Ginfillen, who knew a little more of this evil matter than most, said nothing ; only

went to and fro, to and fro to the house which overhung the river. And one evening when January was almost three weeks old, he drew a step nearer to the ill mystery. On that evening he took his accustomed way to the Malregal's house, by then it was his accustomed way all but every day. Some company, however, had prevented him yesterday, which made him the more anxious to attend to-day; when his first rapping was not quickly answered he knocked soon again. To his surprise this summons was answered by Mistress Malregal herself. She told him that her husband was from home, nevertheless she allowed him to come within and led him to the room with the rounded window. There he sat him down beside the hearth and entered into trivial talk, though his heart ached for the trouble which seemed to be greater even than of yore behind her watching eyes. She, for her part, took up her embroidery and plied her needle busily. So for an hour or more they sat, and gradually it seemed he was able a little to beguile her away from her secret, so that she smiled and talked, even laughed once or twice.

It may have been the lightening of her face or perhaps this sitting the one on either side the fire like some married couple who spend their evenings sweetly beside their hearthstone. Something at all events put thoughts into his head, foolish thoughts, of what gladness had been his had she been his wife, black thoughts of the man who neglected this joy and went out none knew whither to return. none knew when, and left her these hours alone.

When his mind had come thus far she looked up suddenly, and seeing his eyes fastened upon her, asked him for his thoughts.

For a moment he said nought, things struggling within him, but in the end he spoke, though only to make answer, "I was thinking of you."

There may have been more to come, like as not, but she spoke quickly before he had time. "Do not," she said. "Think nothing of me, wish nothing for me, but an early grave, there is nothing else I desire."

"A grave," he cried. "Nay——"

But again she stayed him. "It is all that I may desire," she said, "the best blessing for which I may hope. My friend—I think that I may call you friend?"

"More," he said, "much more!"

"Not more," she answered, "none can be more, few can be that; you, I fear me, you would not be professing that much did you know all."

So she spoke in the quiet voice of one who knows the last despair in her sorrow and her innocence all unawares of the hot thoughts that had come to him. And he looked down, shamed to the heart for himself and cut with grief for her, abashed to meet her sad eyes, knowing not what to say. Haltingly he entreated her to tell him somewhat of this great burden, saying he was ever her friend, befall what might.

"Nay," she said, "I cannot. Ask me nothing."

"Perhaps," he urged, "I might help you. See, I am yours to command, I will obey your least word without question or reason. I can obey in the dark. Tell me nothing if you will, save only how to serve you."

But she shook her head: "None can help me," she said numbly, "none save God, and for the sole help He can give I may not pray."

To that what could he say? He felt something choke in his throat, but he held his peace, only in his

mind determined to come to her often, to hold himself in check always, to pray that when the hour of need came he might be by. So he vowed to himself in grief and sorrow of heart and sat silent.

By this time the candles which were small when he entered, had begun to burn down, and seeing that he moved to call for more, but she stopped him.

"I will fetch them myself," she said. Then for the first time he perceived the stillness of the house, that stillness which comes of no inmates.

"Your woman?" he asked her, wondering, "is she not here? Are you indeed alone?"

She nodded. "Good Elizabeth departed this morning," she answered; "during the night she discovered that the house gave her creeps, and was too lonesome for her. So, seeing that my husband is out, I am alone." Then, as the thought suddenly came to her, she added, "For that reason I should not have bade you enter, I fear me I forgot decorum and propriety altogether."

She rose as she spoke as if to dismiss him now, but he did not move, though, God knows, he would have done no disrespect to her; indeed in his deep penitence for the ill thoughts that had come to him awhile back, he would have gone far to avoid even the seeming of it.

"I think," he said gently, "you bade me enter because you had need of my company."

She did not say no. "But now," she urged, "that the hour grows late, I must bid you good-night with thanks for your company. Yes, indeed you must take your leave, for the sake of my name."

"Your name," he told her, "is more dear to me than to you, but I do not think it will suffer if I remain, none

knows that I am here, none knows of my coming or my going. I cannot leave you unless you let me bestow you with some near neighbour."

She shook her head. "That is impossible," she said, "my husband will return and must be admitted."

"Let me remain till then," he urged. "Nay, he will but thank me for bearing you company."

"He will not see you," she answered, "he will see none when he comes in."

She shivered a little as she spoke, and Ginfillen saw plainly that she had other reasons than her words showed, though what they might be he could not tell. Yet it seemed to him he could not leave her alone to face perhaps this unnamed fear. Therefore, when she said again—though not with the greatest urgency—"Will you not go?"

He made answer. "No, but I will abide by the words I spoke, I will obey commands without seeking to understand them, I am blind and deaf at order to-night, and should any call you to door or window I will not seek to follow; command me how you will, only do not command that I leave you to this watch alone."

She hesitated, then she said, "I trust you, yes, I will trust you."

Afterwards she took up her embroidery, though she did little, indeed, her hands were cold with dread, and it was only by that desperate, fearing courage, which the weak know better than the strong, that she had found strength to urge him to go. She had been watching six and thirty hours and for almost the half of them alone in the house.

So once more they sat them down together; they talked a little, but fitfully now, with pauses in which

they heard the wind howl about the house and drive the fine snow hissing against the window. Towards midnight she lifted her head to listen, looking towards the window niche. Ginfillen looked too, and observed that the latch of the casement was not fastened.

"Did you hear aught?" she asked.

He shook his head. "It is a bad night," he said, "the north-east wind slants the sleet along the streets till without one cannot see, and within one cannot hear."

"Yes," she said, and took up her needle again; but she was listening now, listening so that for sympathy he could not but listen too, straining to hear he knew not what, feeling the awesome presence of the shadow settling close about. So, till in a pause of the shrilling wind, he did hear something. Heard? Nay, felt rather, it was but as a breathing, something which breathed without, something, unless 'twas the wind, which made the leaden window pane shake softly.

Mistress Malregal heard too, and dropped her needle. "Come!" she said hoarsely and gripped his wrist with a desperate strength. Together they made for the door, she wild-eyed, he obedient; out to the chilly passage-way, then to the room which overlooked the street. She almost thrust him in, but not alone, for she shut herself in with him, and, when she had shut, she locked the door.

The room was quite dark and bitter cold, there had been no fire nor light there that day. They stood close together waiting for he knew not what, he breathing hard, she scarcely breathing at all, though he persuaded himself he could hear the laboured beating of her heart. At last, a board without creaked; he fancied it was one at the foot of the stairs, for while

he strained to listen for the approach of some unnamed thing he heard another board more distant, creak, and made out what might have been unshod feet going softly up the stairs. Mistress Malregal must have heard it too, perhaps even it was that for which she listened, for as it died away she sank down into a chair, shivering and trembling in the soundless way of one who is beyond tears. He put his arm about her; at the moment he forgot, and she did not remind him. "Courage," he whispered. "Courage, the worst is overpast now."

She drew a shuddering breath and leaned against him, too weak to do aught else. Then she seemed to awake again to her all abiding watchfulness. "The worst?" she said, "there is no worst! Nothing bad, I would say, you do not know."

"I know nothing," he answered, "save only that you have been afraid, doubtless without any good reason except that it is fearful to a young and delicate lady to watch alone at night."

"Yes, yes," she said with a poor little pretence at deceit, very pitiful to see. "That is it, and you have been good to me, passing good. I will go to my chamber now, and you will depart with my thanks, is it not so?"

"When I have seen you to your door," he answered. "You need have no fear, when that has closed upon you I will go without spending further time or thought, but I will come again to-morrow."

This he did in all particulars, even as he said, leaving the house when she was within her apartment, but being careful to close the door so that Monsieur Malregal could open from without should he return before morning. The which, it must be allowed, he thought

unlikely, and blackly did he think of the learned doctor who thus spent nights away from his young wife.

Ginfillen did not understand the business of the evening, but to him that meant nothing, for he was of the faithful kind who are content to serve in the dark if they cannot in the light. This at least was clear to him, other than blind service would be none.

On the morrow he went to the house by the river, and on the morrow after that, every night for a week. And every night he found Marie Angelique alone, her serving woman departed and no other in the place, and Monsieur Malregal not there. Blacker and blacker grew his thoughts of the doctor, yet he said nought, fearing to ask questions, scarcely trusting himself to think on the matter, lest thought should break beyond control, and he say somewhat that would banish him from the beloved place in this time of need. Each night was the same as the first, the hours of companionable talk and silences; then the time of restless watching, a long-drawn strain gradually increasing till it seemed as if it must break the thin barrier which was set between the two minds and compel their thoughts to declare themselves in a shriek. Then, when flesh and blood could bear no more and the limit was reached, then would come the Thing that fumbled at the lattice, seeking entrance. Thereafter, was swift flight, waiting in the dark for the creak of the stairs, and then "good-night."

These expeditions kept Ginfillen out at very unreasonable hours, and earned for him a reputation with his servants that he did not deserve; but of that he recked nothing, and after a while it came to an end.

One day an errand of charity called him to a village which lay a little beyond the town. The errand was to a sailorman whom the late harbour master had wrongfully defrauded and to whom the nephew was seeking to make amends. The poor man was in bad health and bad condition, and the recital of his troubles and the telling of his gratitude were so long that it was after twilight before Ginfillen could take his leave and start on his homeward way.

The way was a matter of some two miles and lonesome, though, being a highway of importance, passable now that the snow was hard frozen. Even after dark, and dark fell wondrously early that day, for it seemed there was more snow coming, one might find the track by the heads of pollard willows, not all buried, which marked the roadside. Ginfillen started and soon had left behind the few cottages of the village and was out in the open country which lay between him and the town. To right and left was nothing but the snow; ridged somewhat by low hedges now buried, and delled somewhat by icy ditches all filled, a sea frozen and white-hummocked with nothing in sight as far as the eye could see.

And when he had been gone nearly a half mile a strange thing happened, although the place remained to all senses as empty as before he began to be aware that he was not alone. He knew not how he knew it, yet he did, and knew it beyond gainsaying. There was neither sight nor sound of any, yet in his back he felt that something was following him. He stood a moment to listen. The night was quite still and windless, and though the snow in part muffled steps one could yet have heard an approaching tread. There was none, the silence was the dry empty silence of long

frost. Perplexed, but calling himself fool, he went on again. But again he felt it ; it seemed as if the thing had stayed when he stayed and went on when he went on. He stopped again looking sharply about, both near and far off. But nowhere was there ought but snow, white snow.

" 'Tis rank folly," he told himself, and set forth once more.

But no sooner had he moved than it was with him again—the feeling which was not hearing nor sight, the creeping in the skin of the back, the coldness in the marrow, the certainty that somewhat was coming up behind.

For the third time he stopped, and now he spoke aloud, challenging the thing which would not be resolved into fancy. " You, whoever you are, come on and come forth, whether you be good or ill, show your face ! "

So he cried ; but the words melted into the cold air, even as did the steam of his breath, and there was no sign nor sound in answer. For a while he stood listening, then he bethought him to lie in ambush and let this thing, whatever it might be come up with him and either pass or show its ill intent here and now. It is as nothing to face an evil, be it man or devil, compared with feeling it creep upon you from behind. He chose a snow hummock which lay beside the road and stooped behind it, waiting, his ear aslant for approaching sound, his eyes fixed on the backward stretch of dim-seen road, and his sword grasped ready in case of need. Thus he crouched waiting for five minutes, ten minutes, more ; and there was nothing to hear and nothing to see, nothing, only all round the great silence of the snow. Even the sense of one following was gone, he was alone,

in a dead world. It was as if the earth were dead, the judgment day overpast, and the children of men an extinct race long gone, and he, only he, left forgotten.

He strained his eyes to see, his ears to hear; nay, even sought, as he had not sought before, for the sense of one following hungrily, wishfully. Be it beast or devil or unnamed unnameable evil it still would be some other besides himself that moved, that stirred and lived in this death. But he could not hear it, there was nothing, nothing—and the minutes drew out and out, till it seemed time stretched itself, and was lost in eternity. Then a great shuddering took him and a fear. The fear to look behind or before, even a fear to breathe, as a child in the dark, so that he shrank within himself, the manhood melted out of him, and the heart in his body standing still. He dropped to his knees; he dropped lower than that, loosing the blade he held, and gripping the frozen snow, seeking, perhaps, to find some holding near to the familiar earth. The cold particles melted in his hand and slipped from him and he was left clutching at nothing—nothing that was real, nothing but the empty dark—a soul, alone in the blackness that is outside the world.

Thus on the white road Fear took him, one who seems not to have been a coward. The fear that one cannot face, that leaps on the back and knows not cause, nor reason, nor master, the fear which is as the horror of great darkness — from which the Lord deliver us all.

And while he lay under it, not grappling with it, how can a man grapple with that which has neither form nor substance—a sound broke on his ear. Low yet piercing, hungry, fierce, lamentable, surely the terriblest

cry in all the world, compared with which the grinding of the ice packs in the river is as joy bells and gladness. Yet when Ginfillen heard it the blood flowed back to his heart, his abjectness went from him and he felt once more a man, for out of the shadow something had become real and Fear vanished now that there was a thing to fear. He had heard that cry before, in a place where deep woods grow on mountain sides, the mountains which are in France, it was the howl of a lone wolf. A strange sound, verily, to hear on an English highway even in this winter ; yet that it seemed to him. That yet with some curious difference, a wolf's howl, yet with a touch of the human in it which gave it more of awe and set old tales afloat in his brain.

He waited, the thing would come nearer and perhaps show itself, he was fain to see. Ah, it was coming now ! Something moved high up the road on swift light feet ! It had stopped now just out of vision. Cautiously he drew himself up and looked over the hummock. There on the white road it stood, a vague shape in the obscurity, standing ungainly, four legged, sniffing at the air. And while he looked, even in that moment, there was an awesome sight, the creature reared itself up and from a beast became a man !

Ginfillen caught at his breath, this then was the horror he had sought before, this which the north calls werewolf, and the south lands name loup-garou. The monster, terror of winter nights, the fearsome thing, which is not man, nor beast nor devil, outcast even from Hell's gates and condemned to wander eternally in dead worlds of snow. For one moment he stood with the hair on his flesh rising up and the sweat upon his brow ; the next he had his hand on the hummock, he would have sprung out upon the Thing. But even in

that instant, with incredible swiftness, it had passed him and in the blue glimmer of the snow he had seen it—and its face was the face of Monsieur Mal-regal.

IV

OF THE GOOD HUNTING OF A GODLY MAN OF OUR TOWN

AT this time Heber, he who was a Dissenter and servant to young Robert Ginfillen, took it into his righteous head to be troubled by the irregular hours kept by his master. This partly because he liked long time abed himself, and partly because he had doubt, but that the young man was taking to harlotry. Therefore, after some days of early outgoings and late incomings, he betook him to Tobiah, knowing the good man to have some acquaintance with Master Robert, also a righteous interest in the welfare of many, and told him all the matter.

“Tut!” said Tobiah. “Well are you named Heber, for it seems you take after the other of your name, he whom we infer from the Scriptures to have been a man of loose tongue and weak hand; had he not have been so he would not have been overpassed, and the work of the Lord delivered into the hand of his wife, Jael. Keep a shut mouth, friend Heber, for an open mouth does more harm than an open eye does good, more especially if the eye be turned upon the doings of betters. I have observed yon Ginfillen, and I am not ill-pleased with him; for these ungodly times he is not an ill youth—as youths go.”

With this and other admonitions did Tobiah dis-

miss the servant. But after he had gone the good man bethought him to look into the matter ; for, though he was not one to soon alter his judgment of any, yet he knew that youth is prone to temptations, and that it might peradventure befall that Ginfillen was stumbling on the threshold of "the primrose path that leadeth unto the eternal bonfire." Therefore, he made investigation, and shortly discovered that Master Robert was in the habit of going daily to the house by the river ; that of late it had become his custom to stay there till far into the night, also that the house was inhabited by Monsieur Malregal and his young wife. With these two Tobiah speedily made acquaintance, for, thought he, it were well to be sure of what nature was the harm likely to be gotten by Ginfillen before he admonished him for this company. It was not of the easiest to make acquaintance with Monsieur Malregal, but Tobiah was not one to be balked, so he did it and, uninvited and perhaps unappreciated, talked both with him and his wife, doubtless to the good of their souls. Afterwards he went home deep in thought.

"I mistrust me for that doctor," said he to himself. "I have no yearning of the bowels for him, he is of a doubtful sort. The woman is well enough, as women go, meek and docile, though over fair of face for the good of the spirit. Certainly it were better the young man Ginfillen frequented not the house—a young fair wife, a crabbed husband past his prime—'tis ill company for youth ; I will to him with a word in season."

Thus Tobiah to himself ; yet he did not at once go to Ginfillen, for he knew that with hot youth the word at times acts more as fuel than as water to fire. Therefore he bided a day thinking the matter over,

and trying also to himself resolve some of that which puzzled him about the dark house by the river. He, too, had felt the presence of the shadow there ; a man could not enter without feeling it now, he could not see Marie Angelique without discerning somewhat of the cloud of fear which encompassed her, hung, as it were, almost in the air about her. And seeing this, as another might, it was borne in upon Tobiah that peradventure the Lord had work for him there. It was never his way, as is well known, to intrude between husband and wife, yet in this case it seemed he might be called upon. There was, it appeared, something out of ordinary between these two, and Tobiah had heart searching as to what it might be, for he misdoubted but that it was something more than the young Ginfillen, something which perhaps called for him.

Besides heart searchings the worthy man had other searchings too, and so learnt what little was known in the town of Monsieur Malregal and his wife. This was almost nothing, for the house was quiet and the couple respectable. A maidservant, it was said, had lately quitted their service, saying there was something ill about the house, but that was little ; the words of a maidservant are most usually the veriest chaff on the wind, and in no way to be valued. Yet in the lack of all other provender a man may make something of chaff, and Tobiah bethought him to try if so be he might find the girl. It was with this thought in mind that he betook himself to the village where she dwelt ; that village was the one where dwelt the sailor-man defrauded by the late harbour master, and the day of Tobiah's going thither was also the day of Robert Ginfillen's, for he had not till then discovered th se

other things. But the hour of the Dissenter's setting forth was a little after Ginfillen's, and the young man was within the sailor's cottage hearing the recital of his woes when Tobiah came striding down the village street.

But as fortune would have it the maid whom Tobiah sought was not within her mother's home, having gone to visit an aunt not very far distant. She would return with the men folk who came from work before nightfall, so the mother said, and Tobiah decided he would wait her coming. This he did the more readily as there was a worthy man of his persuasion in the village with whom he could spend the time in profitable discussion. But the maid did not come that day for twilight fell early, and she, being afraid to venture along the roads after dark even in company, was persuaded to abide where she was till morning. This was in time told to Tobiah; but he did not at once set out either on his homeward way or in further search of the girl, for he was at that time engaged with his host on a great point of doctrine.

For more than an hour did the two of them wrestle with it; it may have been they would have wrestled much longer, even, perhaps, far into the night, for they were both mighty and great disputers, but an interruption came to them. A country lad employed about the place broke into the room wide-eyed and white of face.

"Master! master!" he cried, "it ha' been here, it ha' passed behind t' barn. I seed the prints o't in t' snow!"

"What? What, boy?" said the master in amaze.

"Five toes arow!" the youth mouthed, more than half distraught. "And no sign of heel or sole!"

"Ha!" cried Tobiah, and sprang up. "Say you so? Which way went it?" and he looked for his hat.

"Stay, stay!" said his host.

But Tobiah was not one for staying; again he asked the frightened lad which way the Thing had gone, and, by shaking, got some sense from him. The prints, he said, looked as if the Thing had come from the road and was making for the open land behind; it must have but lately passed, for there were no dints in the snow a ten minutes gone.

"It must ha' gone by the whilst I wa' in t' barn!" the youth said, and fell a-shuddering as if he would be taken with a fit.

Tobiah let go his hold on him, and having found his hat, clapped it upon his head.

Again his host would have stayed him. "You must not go," he said, "I cannot go with you, I am crippled and old, and there is none other in the place who will!"

"I want none," Tobiah made answer as he strode to the door. "I fear no man, and as to the devil, I have had ado with him before. This is the Lord's matter; do you, a servant of His, bid me hold back?" and he got the door open.

The old man hobbled after. "Take Ban with you," he said; "at least take Ban."

Now Ban was a great lean dog some seafaring man had brought from Scandinavia; weary and saturnine of look was he, in shape somewhat like a greyhound, only vastly bigger, and in colour and coat resembling a wolf, the which indeed, it was said, he was used to hunt in his native land. Tobiah had no desire for help of dog or man; nevertheless, when his host put

the strong leash in his hand to satisfy him he held it, with the tired-seeming dog he set forth for the barn.

Here all was quite quiet, and, except for the shining of the snow, very dark indeed ; but in spite of the darkness the hound quickly picked up the tracks and followed them to the open white fields beyond. There he began to run, easily without effort or panting, a deceptive run that covered the ground before one could tell it. Tobiah ran too, keeping fast hold of the leash ; and he was a mighty runner, long and lean, light of flesh, but gristly. Soon they were out on the wide plain, the village roofs lost sight of, nothing on either hand but the ridged whiteness spread dim in the faint starlight. The great dog strained at the leash, and Tobiah slipped him. Then he sped away, and it was a wonder to see him go, a wonder and a joy, for he went with long swinging stride that licked up the miles as the racing waves lick up the sand ; untiring, unswerving, noiseless, a dark streak on the whiteness, the wind of his passing more real seeming than he.

Tobiah the Dissenter had among his ancestry an ungodly man, now long dead, who had been in his lifetime much given to hunting and venery. Tobiah himself held with none of these ways of the old Adam, knowing them to be an idle misuse of time and a snare of the evil one ; nevertheless, when that hound slipped from the leash and went away over the snow the worthy man gave a strange and singular halloo. An old woman in the last cottage of the village says she heard the devil a-hunting, hallooming to his hell hounds that night—she may have done, there were evil things abroad. As for Tobiah, he saw no hell hunt ; he was following hard on a good hound ; and the air was light and dry and the snow hard beneath his feet and the blood

quick in his veins and the frost cold on his head, and he was making a fair running over a good country. He leapt over ridges and hummocks, he plunged deep into hollows, he ran like a hare ; he doubled when his hound doubled, turned when he turned ; and when, far off black against the whiteness, he saw the quarry spring for a moment into view, a gleesome man was he.

Let not any from this think that the seeds of wickedness and carnal pleasure-seeking were in Tobiah. Rather let them from it see how the ways of righteousness are also ways of pleasantness and peace, and that those who pursue goodness find great happiness therein. Tobiah, one may be sure, would have had no joy in an earthly hunting, but in this, strengthened by the arm of the Lord, he was hunting iniquity down, and herein, doubtless, was the sole cause of his holy joy.

But the Thing which he hunted was no ordinary thing ; it had marvellous skill and cunning, even though its speed was much lesser than was first imagined. It turned and doubled, striving to shake off the great dog, and though Tobiah saw it thus, for a moment almost plainly, he lost it again. Aye, he lost sight of the hound also, for though he was swift afoot, no man is a match for the wolf dogs. In time he lost sight of both the two, and, alone in the great snowland, sped on after as best he might. So, till in the silence a scream rang suddenly, and suddenly died away.

Now Tobiah had never heard puss scream when the hounds are upon her, nor any other, man or beast when at the last stand death grips him by the throat and fear at the heart, yet it was revealed to him that this was of these, a death scream of somewhat *in extremis*. He gave a great halloo, for he knew that the hound

had killed. Then he hastened on as best he might, over hill and dale, over ridge and hummock, till at last in a scooped hollow of the white land he saw dark shapes that made blots on the snow, the dog and the something it had brought low.

He shouted, calling the beast to him, and it came, the which did not surprise him as it might others who knew it had in ordinary little fancy for leaving what it had killed. Half way to him it paused and looked back, then came on and fawned upon him, half fearful, half apologetic. Then it turned and trotted before him to the Thing which lay in the snow ; it sniffed as if puzzled, and shied away from it as if more than half fearing.

Tobiah came up. "Heh, heh, what have we here ?" said he, and stooping saw that that which lay dead and still had the shape of a man.

"A man !" said Tobiah, "and barefoot too ! This is strange. Let us see your face, master ; I fear me there may be some mistake here."

He turned him over, and peering at him in the faint light saw that it was Monsieur Malregal.

Tobiah drew back a little, and stood frowning down in deep perplexity and thought. It looked to him for a while mightily as if he had been hunting an innocent man to his death. Yet if innocent, why was Monsieur Malregal here, why barefoot ? How came it that he, a man no longer young, could run and double swift as a beast ? There was something strange here, something not readily to be comprehended. Tobiah saw plainly that he would need the enlightening of the Lord. But he was not like to stand looking puzzled until that came to him when it were better he were stirring.

"You had best come with me, master, whatever you be." So said he to the dead man, and stooping hoisted the body upon his back.

The dog shrank away as if he liked not the Thing, but Tobiah, who had no dread of it living, knew nothing of the folly of fearing it dead. With the body upon his back he set out, Ban following after, three paces away, now that the chase was done weary-seeming and contemptuous as of old.

It was a long way to the town, and not easy to find in this snow time in open country. The worthy Dissenter lost himself more than once, so that it was very late before he struck the road, and the threatened snow had begun to fall before he entered the town. By reason of the snow and the lateness of the hour there was no one about to see him and the burden he carried, and, unobserved and unchallenged by any, he made his way to the little dark house where the Malregals dwelt. By this time Tobiah saw plainly it was the Lord's will for him to go straight to the dead man's wife and learn from her what truth he might.

The Malregal's house had a porch before it, sheltered by a penthouse roof; in the shadow of this Tobiah put his burden down and the dog, Ban, lay down before it. Then the worthy man rapped loudly upon the door. There was no light showing in the forepart of the house, yet he thought it like enough that some one watched for the homecoming of the master. Therein he was not wrong, for, in a little, steps approached and the door was unbarred by one holding a light, and that one was Robert Ginfillen.

This sight did not altogether surprise Tobiah, though he looked very sharply into the young man's face. By that look he saw that he was very white, his appearance

strange and still, with something even of the bearing of one who has seen into the eyes of death and worse.

"I would speak with Mistress Malregal," said Tobiah.

"Not to-night," the other answered, with his hand upon the door.

"Yes, to-night," Tobiah said sternly, as one who demands, "What do you commanding her nights? I bring news.

"Of her husband?" Ginfillen asked with a searching gaze.

Tobiah nodded, meeting the gaze, and in that instant they understood one another.

"What is it?" came a voice from behind, and Mistress Malregal approached.

Ginfillen would have drawn her back, but Tobiah said: "I bring you news, Mistress."

Her eyes leapt to his with a shrinking fear in them, but her white lips shaped a question.

"Yes, of Monsieur Malregal," Tobiah answered, and it were pity to see how the dread grew, and how she clenched her white hands till the nails grew red.

"He is dead," the Dissenter said briefly.

"Dead!" she breathed. "Dead." And Ginfillen, thinking she would have fallen put an arm to support her. "Tell her all, man," he said sharply, "and be speedy."

"Yon great hound set upon him." Tobiah, thus adjured, answered, "he killed quick, as is his nature."

"Yes," she said dully, yet rallying herself with the strange courage of women. "Yes, good sir; I must go to him."

"There is no need," Tobiah told her, "I have brought

him to you." He pushed the door further open. "He is here."

"Here?" she said shrilly. "Now? When was it? Who did it, who knows?"

"None know," Tobiah answered; "none yet, save only we three."

"None!" she said. "None!" and she laughed.

God! How she laughed! Peal on peal till the silent house rang and the flesh crept on the men's bones. Tobiah closed the door, and Ginfillen put his hand on her lips to stay the crazy sound; but still it rang in their ears, the sound of a snapping brain.

V

THE RUMOURS THAT WERE IN OUR TOWN

ON the morrow after that day the townsfolk had somewhat whereof to talk, and well did they acquit themselves. (Rumour is a good jade and may serve you, do you but start her in a discreet path.) Before midday it was said that another was added to the list of those attacked by the Terror which stalked o' nights—one Monsieur Malregal, a learned Frenchman, living quietly and inoffensively in our midst. Tobiah the Dissenter, whilst out with a good brother's hound, searching for this same Terror, heard the poor man's death scream, but came up too late to save him or apprehend the attacker. The worthy Tobiah, owing to his own necessary reticence and the embroidery of generous townsmen, became a hero in the eyes of many—when he was not present in the body; when he was he put down all such folly with a stern hand.

There are some who will say that the talk of the town was not in every particular strictly according to fact. But what would you have? Strict fact is not always a revelation fit for the many; bare truth is doubtless beautiful, as is the bare human body, but it is not at all times seemly that either should be presented naked to the eyes of this corrupt generation. Knowing this to be so the worthy Tobiah did not at that time display all facts bare, nor yet contradict rumour,

save only in the particulars of those foolish fables which touched his own heroism. So our folk talked as it pleased them about the Terror unknown, about Monsieur Malregal and Mistress Marie Angelique his wife. For the last much sympathy was felt when it became known that she had been taken with a fit on hearing the tragic tidings of her husband's death, and was not yet come to herself. Tobiah and young Robert Ginfillen, who, it seemed, together brought her the bad news, did what they might for her relief. Tobiah hastened to a near female neighbour, and rousing her, brought her to the poor lady's aid. And when it seemed the woman, being of the humble sort and having a houseful of children of her own, would be put about to give the attendance that was needed, Robert said Mistress Marie should be borne to the Ginfillen house and put under care of the staid women of the late harbour-master's household. Of these things the townsfolk talked and were pleased to commend them.

And there was some truth in the talk, for within the hour that the news of her husband's death was brought to Mistress Marie she really was borne to the Ginfillen house, and the best leech in the town called to her aid. Tobiah himself saw to it, perceiving it to be the wisest course, Robert standing mutely by, for, when once he had given necessary orders to the women of his uncle's household, he seemed like one stunned or in a dream. But when all was arranged to the satisfaction of Tobiah, the worthy man turned to the young Ginfillen and bade him stir himself, requesting his company.

"You were best walking with me to my abode," said he, "for I have somewhat to say unto you."

Ginfillen obeyed and they set out together, tramp, tramp along the snow-muffled streets till they came to

Tobiah's quiet house. There the good man opened the door with a great iron key, and after kindling a fire, bade Ginfillen sit down beside it.

"Now," said he, "there are three heads on which I need enlightenment. First, as touching these grim and mysterious happenings, concerning which it is plain you know more than another. Second, as touching the part played by these foreigners called Malregal and the cloud that has hung over their house. And third, touching your acquaintance with them, its length and extent. Now, sir, proceed."

But that Ginfillen did not do; in truth it seemed he could not, he was as a man still half stunned.

Tobiah seeing he did not answer said grimly, "Explain, Master Robert, you would do better to explain."

"Would that I could," the young man answered, "I would joyfully explain to you if I could also at the same time explain to myself. That it should be he! That it should be this! When I saw his face on the lonely road, when I knew him—I cannot tell what I did. I do not know! But afterwards, a long time afterwards, it came to me that I was a coward to leave her thus, for, if this revelation seemed so to me what must it be to her, his wife. She who lived with him, who shared bed and board, who sat with him of days and watched for him of nights. And thinking so I took my way to her, purposed to watch with her as on other nights. And I watched, though I knew not what I said or what did, I watched until you came.

But Tobiah was not by these words much nearer to what he wanted to know, so he only nodded his head and repeated his demand for enlightenment. "For," said he, "I must know how and in what way this young woman shares in the matter, so that we may be resolved

as to what authority to deliver her to when she shall be recovered."

"What!" cried Ginfillen. "She to blame! She, an angel from Heaven!"

And speedily he set to telling his tale, for all at once he saw the danger of Mistress Malregal, and how it lay with him to clear her, establish her innocency and win the Dissenter to be her friend. Quickly he told what he could, answering all questions great and small, repeating with care the little he knew, the much he guessed, striving his best to show Tobiah the whole truth of the case as it was known to him, and arguing for Mistress Marie Angelique with wondrous dialectics. Tobiah listened, asked a question here and there, and pondered the matter much. But his judgment was sound, and in the end he saw the only thing to be done at the present—let town talk wander where it would for a time, while they two, the only two who could set it near right, held their peace till the day when they should hear the whole of the matter from Mistress Malregal. "For," said Tobiah, "it were certainly poor justice to blast the wife's future by the public anger with the husband's past until such time as we know her share in the wickedness, and what truly are her deserts." And as he said this he rose, for the hour was late, they had sat talking far into the morning.

"I must wait," he said, as he raked the embers together so that the hearth might keep warm; "I must wait. 'Tis clear there is nothing for me to do now; for you neither, Master Robert; and, see you, whilst yon lady abides in your house you must wait outside of it, mind you that."

"Sir!" cried Robert, "for what do you take me?"

"For a good enough youth," the Dissenter answered, as he searched a candle, "but 'tis a mistake to set temptations in the way of any."

"I would have you know," Ginfillen said wrathfully, "that I had no dream of entering my door so long as she honours my roof. I look to abide at the *Fox and Grapes*, or if need be quit the town; I would sooner a thousand times quit the town and return no more than the lightest shadow should fall on her; I would think my life but a small price for her happiness, her honour——"

"Ho?" said Tobiah. "Sits the wind in that quarter, I suspicioned so much. Do you look to wed the young woman now her husband is dead—that is, should she be cleared of all charges?"

Ginfillen's face first flushed and then paled. "No," he said; "she loves me not; you do her wrong; she has had no disloyal thought from her husband; she is an angel."

Tobiah had little opinion of matrimony, and small comprehension of the ways of man bent on it, but it had seemed to him more than an hour gone this was a clear case, and he liked not to see his judgment at fault; therefore, though he was not much in favour of it, he said—

"Tut!"—and then—"You do not look to wed her? Why not?"

"Because," Ginfillen said and paused—"I tell you she is an angel."

Maybe," Tobiah said, stooping to light the candle at the fire, "but a man might do worse than wed an angel, for with such a one he would not be too much taken up with clipping and cuddling, the wings coming in the way. Lad, you were best in bed."

And seeing that he thrust the dip into his hand, Master Robert could do no more than take his hot face to the small room under the steep gable roof.

On the morrow he established himself at the *Fox and Grapes*, there to abide long. Long it was Mistress Malregal lay in the Ginfillen house, battling with death and also the dark terrors which beset her mind. But in the end she won through, and came feebly back to life, very white and tired, a wraith of herself. This was not till the end of the great winter ; it almost seemed as if while the cold was upon the earth it held her under some spell. But with the going of the snow there came to her the beginnings of health, feeble and small, yet growing by degrees.

And at last on a day it was thought she might with safety see, as she was wishful to do, some other than her nurses. Word of this and of her desire to speak with them was brought to Tobiah and Robert Ginfillen, and accordingly they set forth for the Ginfillen house. The snow was by now long gone, the great heaps only a memory ; the dear earth all brown again. All the hedges and trees were purple brown, even house fronts looked soft and tear-bedewed, and the distance was a wonder of green and grey, with dew mist on the grass and a violet veil on the hills that lay westward beyond the town. It was afternoon when they went to Marie Angelique ; gentle and grey with a west wind which blew soft promise of more rain. In the air was sound as if the earth lived again, wet ground crunched under foot, sparrows chirped about house eaves, and everywhere was the noise of running spouts and tinkling waters, tongues tied no longer by the frost.

Marie Angelique was sitting in a small parlour looking on to the street, so frail a shadow of herself she

seemed that when Ginfillen saw her something choked in his throat and he had nothing to say. Tobiah, however, stepped forward and said many suitable words—as of her necessary gratitude to the Lord for her recovery and other things proper to the occasion. Afterwards she spoke her thanks to them in a seemly and decorous manner; but again Robert said nothing, though as was due, the most of her thanks were directed to him for the protection of his roof and the kind care she had received beneath it. As before Tobiah had to say all that was suitable, and well if briefly did he acquit himself. But that done he thought it were time they came to the real matter of the visit.

“Mistress,” said he, “seeing that you sent for us I take it that it is thought by you and others that you can without danger to your reason speak of important matters, I mean those strange happenings——”

But here Ginfillen found his tongue. “Nay,” said he, “why reopen the evil past, can we not let it rest?” and he looked at Tobiah with eyes praying the good man’s consent.

But that was a thing scarce to be expected, and Marie herself did not wish it. “You must know all,” she said; “yes, you must, otherwise you cannot do justice to the dead; it was to tell this that I asked you should come to-day.”

Thereafter she told a strange tale of how of the last year a certain madness had possessed her husband, coming at times only, not very often and most usually after dark; but during the winter it had come more often, growing even as the cold grew. In his madness it was as if he had a wolf’s nature, its tastes and its powers, its swiftness and scent, and hideous appetite. But at sound times he was as ever and seemed to have

no knowledge of the doings of the other of him ; but the sound times grew less and the other more.

This she told, and Ginfillen, remembering the old tales and also what he had seen on the white road, said nothing.

But Tobiah asked, "at what season and from what cause did this madness first come upon him ?"

"It was in the spring of the year," Marie answered, "when we were living in his native land where there are many wolves. At that time there lurked in the woods a wolf which was reputed mad. It did much harm and destruction, and for long none could take it, but at last the wood-cutters had it in a trap. My husband went to see it while it was still alive, for he doubted if it were mad ; but unawares he went too close, within reach of its spring, so that it leaped at him, and reaching him, bit him. It was that"—her voice sank low—"it was that which did it, that—the madness of the wolf, working slowly but surely in his blood—which turned him to—to this thing unspeakable——"

So she spoke and so believed, and maybe she was right and maybe wrong, one may not say ; and certainly no other has an explanation to give ; the thing is passing strange, a grisly mystery.

Tobiah asked of her more enlightenment, and she told him what she might, but it was little, and in the end he saw that she, who knew most, knew almost nothing.

For a little he pondered the matter and she, forgetting him, turned to Ginfillen. "I have given you half my burden now," she said, smiling wanly ; "a poor return, truly, to make to one who bore a part of it in the dark without question. Aye, it was a burden in those days, a nightmare of fear ! Fear for my husband, unworthy fear sometimes for myself. Ah, God,

none knows what it was, day in, day out—the watch, the waiting, the terror ! To live with it, to dream of it, to know it always there ! But I will not speak of it, he was my husband and he was mad ; I will remember only how in the past before this befell he was good to me, kind as a father.”

“ Yes,” Ginfillen said, “ yes ! ” That was all, and it was somewhat stupid.

But she went on—“ None knew my secret, not even you, for you would not look, you turned your head away. Ah, friend, loyal and faithful, you were generous indeed to one who can only pay you in thanks ! True you were, true to my trust—I have no words——” Certainly she had forgot the presence of the worthy Tobiah, who was deep in thought, for she took the young man’s hand to her lips and kissed it.

But he, being English born, did not like these foreign ways ; he drew his hand away, his face glowing hot.

“ Mistress,” said Tobiah, arousing from thought, “ what do you purpose to do now ? ”

“ I ? ” and she had recovered herself quick as even good women do, “ I must e’en earn my bread ; I have nothing left now that my husband is dead ; a little suffices me, I could earn that with my needle, I am a neat seamstress.”

Now a young and lonely seamstress, very fair of face even though a widow and no maid, is nothing less than a snare to youth, a plain pitfall in the way of virtue both to herself and to many weak. Tobiah, who knew the ways of the Evil one, was much against such a thing and saw clearly that it must be prevented. To prevent it, Mistress Malregal, who in hiding her husband’s madness had done nothing worthy of the house of correction, must be provided with some other

means of livelihood. There was but one other—she must be found a fit and suitable husband, one likely to keep her respectably and from want. Tobiah looked round the parlour and at her seated there, and saw that she seemed to fit it well enough. He also bethought him that while the Ginfillen house had no mistress the maidens of the town would have their heads so full of the master that they would have small room for godly things ; it would, therefore, be for the gain of many if Marie were established there. Judging Master Robert to be, in spite of some foolish words, more than willing, he said—

“ You cannot live by your needle, mistress, you must marry again.”

“ Marry ! ” cried she, as if in horror at the talk of another husband when her first was not three months dead. “ Marry ! Oh, no ! ”

And Robert found words hastily, more readily than he had done heretofore, and always with an eye on Tobiah as if he feared what he would say. “ ’Tis hard,” said he to her glibly, “ that one of your condition should come to this ; but you are brave, and if you do——”

“ You will help me ? ”

“ Indeed, all I can.”

And so forth, talking so fast, the two of them, that the worthy Tobiah might not put in a word, amongst their clitter clatter of nothings. In wrathful surprise he listened ; in times past he had more than once, for the good of their souls, stopped the mouths of a man and a woman, and prevented their silly love talk. If any had told him at those times that he would find it more difficult to set two agoing on such folly than to stay for a little twenty who were at it, he would have

laughed that one to scorn. Yet so he now found it and he listened awhile in angry amaze ; then he bethought him to try tactics.

"Master Robert," said he, breaking forcibly in on their nimble discourse, "touching that matter whereof we talked one night as we sat by my fire—the matter of the angel—I have taken thought on the subject and see that I may have been in error there ; it is possible the wings would not be in the way of earthly and amorous embraces."

"Oh !" said Ginfillen, his face strangely hot. "We will discourse on this some other time."

And to his silly talk he got him swift again, Marie helping him, telling once more of her gratitude for his past help and his future promises.

"Gratitude !" said Tobiah wrathfully. "Fine gratitude, mistress, that spends itself in words !"

"Oh, sir !" she said sadly, "Would that I had something else to give ! But I have nothing, so little——"

Tobiah measured her with his eye, "Little, yes," said he, "but time and health might mend that."

"Sir !" cried Ginfillen, springing to his feet, "you forget !"

The lady blushed, yet she smiled. But Tobiah did not see, he had got him to the door in wrath. "Look you," he said, wagging his finger at them, "I waste no more time on you. I have other and more weighty matters for my consideration. Go your ways, both of you, but I warn you well, I will have none of your seamstress."

With that he departed, and Ginfillen, much ashamed, was for going with him. But at the door he paused, he seemed to feel he must offer apology to Marie for the sayings of the godly Tobiah.

"Mistress," he said.

She looked up ; she had not moved from her place, but sat much as he had once in his brief hot madness dreamed of her sitting, by his fireside, with the gear of his uncle's collecting about her, an eastern carpet beneath her feet and the dragoned china all a-row on the shelf above her head.

"Mistress."

Still she moved not, nor spoke, but her eyes shone on him starrily. "Marie," he said and pushed the door to ; "Marie Angelique ;—Angel !"

One knows not quite how these things befall ; nor how a man comes first to say what he is purposed in his mind not to say. Somehow it did befall ; yet seemingly to no great purpose for it all had to be said again, and left much to be explained at the next saying. But the words, though possessed of little fluency—half the sentences were but half spoken—appeared to be of some potency, for they brought more colour to Marie's cheeks than had all the leechcraft of the town, and more light to Robert's mind than all the wisdom of Tobiah. But of such words men keep no record, nor of such times either, at least no record that other eye may read. Suffice it, therefore, to say that these two spent such a time by that fireside and found it one of great sweetness ; and in some half hour or so they found themselves together by a window, listening to one who cried violets, and looking at the great mouthed spout opposite, and laughing like children because it vomited water into the roadway.

The little wench with the flowers passed along the street, and Ginfillen threw the window wide so that the south wind ruffled the gold of his lady's hair.

"Violets !" he cried. "Aye, all !"

She stretched up to put them into his hands and he tumbled them in Marie's lap, the flowers which are first promise of the spring. And when he turned from the window she was gathering them together, bending over them and pressing them to her lips, so he knelt beside her, pressing them to his lips, each one that she did.

Folly? Yes, but sweet folly.

Oh, 'tis good to have been young, to have seen the spring come and the light dawn in loved eyes! I would not give that folly for the best wisdom the years can bring.

The Elf Lady of Moorwood

Tobiah the Dissenter saw plainly that the Lord had been with him in this matter of Marie Angelique, both as touching the death of her first husband and the marrying of her second—young Robert Ginfillen. Concerning the terror which haunted our town, nothing more was heard—which was perhaps not strange, seeing that it was dead, though unbeknown to all but these three. And in time men ceased to fear it, though for long they talked of it; but always without finding any good and sufficient interpretation, for Tobiah, after bethinking him, saw no reason to contradict rumour or instruct an ignorant populace in facts it could ill digest. So it befell that none ever knew so much as he and Ginfillen did, and though many at sundry times essayed explanation of the grisly Thing, each and all stuck at the shape it bore. The wisest as well as the most foolish was put about by the tracks in the snow. To all such Tobiah said—

“Were folk but as fond of washing as of talking they might peradventure find enlightenment even in these dark matters.”

If any doubt this wisdom let him go to the sea and there, after bathing, run a tip-toe in the sunshine garbed in none but Adam's coat. Then will he find behind him in the sand a track very like to that which folk saw in the snow. But our townsmen are not to be found drying that way, they are monstrous decorous folk and perhaps without much appetite for cold water, so they doubted the words of Tobiah. The which mattered not at all to the good man, for he had a conscience void of offence. He knew well he had done his duty, not only with regard to this Terror, but also in the affair of Marie Angelique.

This, as has been said, is the second connubial matter to which Tobiah was called; the third was concerned with the Elj Lady of Moorwood.

I

THE SMELTING OF CHARLES CHRISTOPHER

THIS is a tale of the forest ; one for those who love the good wet smell of the trees, who feel their hearts sing when their feet fall once again on the soundless black earth, and who waken for very joy of nights when the leaves whisper and murmur close at hand.

The forest, let me say, is not very near to our town, although once, doubtless, it was close up to the walls ; now it has receded much, though it is still within a journey.

At one time, some little iron smelting was done on the confines of the forest ; not of the finest kind, for the ore is of poor quality. But wood is plentiful and charcoal cheap and old Charles Christopher—he who built his works on the ground leased from the bailee of the absent master of Moorwood—made some small profit. Thus till, all at once, his iron began to grow both better and more. He said it was because the ore was better, and folks were content to believe him, seeing nothing else appeared likely. So he worked on unmolested, and if he were growing rich he told no one and gave to no one either. He had two workmen, Poacher Joe and James-from-the-Town. James was a townsman born, though for various reasons he

had found it best to live elsewhere. He, at the time, believed in nothing; there are some townsmen who refuse even to believe in the devil until he comes to fetch them from their deathbeds. Yet was the unbeliever afraid to venture far into the shade of the trees. But Poacher feared not at all; although, being forest born, he believed firmly in elves, fairies, hobgoblin, Jack o' lantern and much other strange cattle which some say is still to be found haunting far depths of old woods. These two men often worked at night-time, the roar of their fire might sometimes be heard in the forest, and the glow from their hearth danced unsteadily upon the tree tops. James did not like these night workings—he liked some night work well enough, but he would have it in towns and among folk—this in the great silence and near to the close pressing forest pleased him not; a man could not tell what might come from or return to that shade betwixt sundown and sunrise.

Now it befell that on a certain night in April one did come. It was a windy night with rain, very sweet smelling; even above the smell of the fire and the work one could perceive the scent of the wet ground and the dripping leaves and opening bud and oozing gums, very incense of earth. James did not note these things, but pulling his collar about his ears went to tend the fire, muttering something blasphemous about the weather. Poacher noted them, but as the hares and rabbits note, and knowing only dumbly that this was a good smell, and that a good world lay somewhere hid in the dark.

And while he looked, feeling these things, one drew near him, coming up out of the night. A tall man with the rain streaming from his clothes, and mosses

and young broken leaves clinging to him, showing plainly that he came from the forest.

"What would you?" Joe asked stoutly, for no such had business here by the smelting fires.

"Supper and lodging," the man answered, "and failing that, a seat by the big fire and a bite of anything you have"

"This is no hostel," Poacher told him.

"So I perceive," the other said in the same tone, the tone of one to whom nothing matters, seeing that he is sure of always having his will.

Poacher swung the lantern round the better to see him. He was a dark man, lean and swarthy, somewhat like a Spaniard with his grand high nose and shining black eyes. A cloak hid his dress, but the hand that held it was white and fine, and on it was a ring with a jewel brighter than the stars in frost. Poacher grew uneasy, he saw that this was no ordinary wayfarer, the which indeed were few enough in this unfrequented spot. He knew not what to think, except perhaps that it was some unnatural thing with which it were ill to have traffic, and yet more ill to refuse.

"What are you?" he asked.

"That is naught to you," the other answered.

But now James had heard voices and come out, his face very black from the fires.

"What's to do?" cried he. "What trespasser is here?"

The stranger looked round on him with something of pity in his contempt, as if he thought him gutter sweepings, but maybe through no fault of his own. He moved towards the fire without regarding him.

"'Tis against orders for any to come here," cried James in blustering voice befitting a beadle (the which

he knew all about, having been more than once set in the stocks by one for drunkenness and other unseemly conduct).

"Whose orders?" the stranger asked over his shoulder.

"Charles Christopher's," James made answer.

"Charles Christopher?" the other repeated in his soft, light tones, and one eyebrow went up. "Who is he, and since when has he owned rood of land within a mile of Moorwood or two mile either?"

"Nay," said Poacher, "he owns it not, 'tis my Lord Gierrack."

The stranger nodded. "Just so," said he; "and of him I am friend enough. By which fire shall I sit?" and he walked past them, neither for some reason quite ready to withstand him longer,

They pointed him to a cubby and followed him there, muttering as they went. Poacher plainly thought him the devil, or if not he, then something nearly relative. James, by reason of his unbelief, could not think so; he thought him some impudent and belated traveller and he was all taken with abuse of Joe for letting him in, and also anxiety to prevent old Charles Christopher from knowing thereof.

"Nay," said Poacher, "that is nought, rather I am minded to fetch him; this one, I doubt not, has come for his wage, it were better Master Christopher paid it than we, who get no profit of the thing."

James would have answered, but the stranger turned him about here. "Who is Christopher?" he asked, stretching his fine hands to the blaze.

"Our master," James made answer; "and you had best begone before he comes o' morning, whether you call yourself friend of my Lord Gierrack or no."

"Gierrack, I take it, troubles you not?" the stranger said; this to Joe, to the other he did not trouble to speak.

"My Lord," Poacher said, "comes never, neither here nor yet to the great house at Moorwood, at least not these many years; the which shows him to be a fool. 'Tis a fine place, noble coverts, well stocked"—but here master Poacher pulled himself up, remembering him of his name.

"He is no good squire," so he said hastily, "more like to the wandering Jew, ever amove, like a damned soul."

The stranger nodded, as if this were small news to him; then—

"Why call him lord?" said he. "There has been no Lord Gierrack since a king of blessed memory took the title from one, as he would have taken the head had not a queen, of still more blessed memory, saved that ornament for kissing."

"I know nothing of that," Joe answered; "he is my lord, I know that, and he ever will be, though he be the devil's own, and I work for another—also possible one of the devil's."

And with that he gave the stranger bread and cheese and watched while he ate it, for he was fain to see if a devil had bowels and inward parts even as a man. Soon after the two of them, Poacher and James, went out to their work, leaving the other to sleep by the fire.

For a time he slept, but a while before dawn he grew wakeful. By then James had come in, leaving Poacher to work alone; and possibly because he did not like his company, the stranger slept no more. Soon he arose and went to the door; by now James

was sound sleeping, and did not hear him go out. The stranger went towards the smelting hearth and stood watching from a way off; he saw Poacher at work, he saw his shadow flicker and dance; but he also saw another shadow. Once he saw it, twice almost, but no more; a small shadow somewhat like a boy's, yet not a boy's. He looked to see what caused it, but he could see no one but Poacher Joe. There was around the waver of uncertain light, the air laden with smoke, and the smell of sea coal. This last might seem a strange thing, for at that time all men knew iron was not to be smelted with sea coal. Crazy philosophers had tried it over and again, spending their substance to prove that it might be done, and dying in the end, broken alike in heart and fortune. To one who thus stood watching Joe at work it would seem that old Charles Christopher was following in the steps of these philosophers. If so, it were easy to understand why his men were so loth to give shelter to a wayfarer. Loth they certainly were and fearful, too, as was plainly seen on Joe's face when he looked round and saw the stranger standing near.

"Get you gone!" he cried fiercely, seizing somewhat wherewith to enforce the order.

"Tut," the other answered contemptuously. "I want none of your secrets. What is it to me if you smelt iron with coal or stone either? Come, down with that crowbar, Poacher, though one may tolerate some familiarity with such honest rogues as you, it must be a familiarity without crowbars for Gierrack."

"Gierrack!" Poacher cried, and lowered his bar. And all at once he knew him, though he had not seen him these many years, not since boyhood. But the face was a face which had been before in the family;

moreover he knew him as dog knows master and cat knows hearth.

"Lord," he said with respect, though not humility—these folk who have the freedom of the forest are not humble—"Lord, I took you for the devil."

Gierrack laughed. "Others have done that before," he said, drawing nearer the fire. "Get about your work if you will, rogue, I will not trouble your master's secret." And he sat him down.

Poacher went to his work, now and again passing and repassing close to my lord; once when he came Gierrack said: "Who is it works with you?"

"James-from-the-Town," Joe answered.

"No, not he," Gierrack said. "I mean the one who is with you now, I saw a shadow a while gone, a boy's shadow, I think."

Poacher shook his head. "There is no boy here, Lord," said he.

Gierrack seemed satisfied with this, but the next time Joe passed he had moved, and was facing now, so that he could see the clear space that lay between them and the trees. By this time the dawn had come, and everything was gray but quite clear.

"'Twill be a fair day, Lord," Joe said, looking out at the mist wreaths left by last night's rain.

Gierrack laughed. "You are a fair villain, Poacher," said he, "that is if it is not a poor liar you are. The shadow I saw a while gone has a substance, the one or the other—and I think it was t' other—flitted past just now. I was not in time to see it clearly, but it was there fast enough; it went into that patch of dark, and it must either come forth soon or be revealed, seeing how the increasing light is swallowing the darkness. If it is boy, then you're a liar, Poacher;

and if it is not, why then it is girl, and you are a villain and no truer to your good wife than she, maybe, is to you."

"Nay, Lord," Poacher protested, "it is not so, it is neither boy nor girl."

"What then?"

"I know not."

Gierrack set one eyebrow up in the strange way that he had. "Was it for this," he asked, "that you thought, if I were devil, I had come for wage? Come, Poacher, I must have this tale; I have been the world over seeking strange sights and strange things, to find, it seems, the strangest close to my own door, within shadow of the trees which are as familiar to me as my hand, although I did lose myself among them last night. To the tale, knave."

Now Poacher Joe should not have told that tale, seeing it was his master's rather than his. But in this land, where a man is in some sorts free, a money wage seals no mouth against the claims of an older tie. Joe served Charles Christopher for his living, yet was he freeman and liegeman to Gierrack. For Gierrack was master of Moorwood, and so by birth lord of all the forest folk. Thus it had always been, a Gierrack at Moorwood for as long as the oldest oak had stood, and Poacher Joe and a hundred such obscure folk of unknown name in the forest glades, honest thieves and liegemen all to their lord, absent or present. Therefore Joe made no bones about it, but out with the little he knew.

"I cannot tell what it may be," said he, "but somewhat comes out of the forest now and again, when we conjure for it with white willow twigs. And when it comes it helps with the work, it shows how to set up

a hearth with a wondrous draught and how to smelt the ore with sea coal, the which all men say is not to be done. Neither is it by power of man, but by trick of this thing it is done, so that iron better than any in the three kingdoms comes forth, and Master Charles Christopher grows rich."

"But," cried Gierrack, "what is this thing, and how came it here?"

"It is not for me to tell all of that, Lord. At the first it came of itself in a time when little was doing, and James-from-the-Town was here alone. It was at night, and James, but indifferent sober when this came to him and showed him—like as not drove him to it, for he is poor stuff—to make a new hearth in which the draught was different. Also it showed him to use sea coal, a load whereof lay in a barge on the river. James told nought of this to any, but said the fine metal that appeared was of his sole making. The new hearth still stood; he said that also was of his sole making, an improvement of his cunning. Yet he could not use it unaided, and so at last was obliged to tell me what had befallen; together we strove to use it, but that we could not either. And while we were still striving comes Master Christopher, and must of course hear the whole tale. James was for lies, I out with the truth; and Master Christopher at once saw there was something which might profit here. He said we two must catch this elf thing and set it to work or else go about our business. At first we could not catch it, and indeed began to think we should have to find other employ before we had it. But the goblin folk ever come back and back to the same spot, they are curious, and must see what has befallen. This came and I made bargain, and now it comes

sometimes, when I set a white willow twig in an old pollard trunk I wot of. It has wages, though small ones, for its trouble, and this we have sworn : not to lay finger on it, nor to seek its name, nor what it is, nor whence it comes."

So spoke Poacher Joe, and when he had done Gierrack could but smile.

"Dost not believe it, Lord ?" asked the man. "See now the iron."

"I see it," Gierrack answered, "and also the coal, also dimly have I seen your elf and would fain see it closer. Tell me, now, what does it most resemble ?"

"In bigness a young boy," Joe said, "also in garb of leathern breeches ; but it hath the voice of a girl and the swift lightness of a fawn ; it speeds away into the forest and loses itself like a shadow, and o' times it plays pranks like hobgoblin. As to face, I know not. Lord, dost call to mind the wishing pool by Tristram's tree ? That little pool all brown from a hundred year o' leaves where the sun sleeps o' middays and the water twinkles and shines ? Always I mind me of that when I look in the elf thing's face and see its eyes shine."

Gierrack laughed aloud. "A crown," he cried ; "but this thing is female, a she, Poacher, and you bewitched !"

"Nay, Lord ; what have females to do with coal and iron, and how has any woman this knowledge ?"

And before Gierrack made answer to this, something looked round the hearth, to the shadow of which it must have betaken itself while they talked. A little dark face it had, all sun kissed, with eyes amber brown as the sun in forest pools. But whether or no it was beautiful as men count beauty will never be known,

for those that saw it swear it the fairest ever seen, an enchantment ; and those that saw it not and knew only the painted lineaments preserved by skilled artists, say there is no beauty neither in form nor feature. Be that as it may, when Gierrack saw the face peeping at him he sprang up. Many ladies had looked languishingly at him, many summoned him with their eyes ; but for them all he cared nothing, nor had since the days of first youth when, being human, he may perhaps have answered the challenge of some few—enough to guess the value of most. Yet now the dancing eyes, which did not summon, set his blood astir. He sprang to his feet.

But Poacher cried : " Lord, Lord, I ha' sworn it shall not be touched nor searched into while it is hereabouts ! I ha' promised ! "

Gierrack laughed a short laugh. " And I am bound by your promise ? " he said. " Well, well, rogue, I suppose I am, seeing I have heard your tale. " And he drew back again.

No sooner was this done than the elf maiden slipped from the shadow ; across the stretch of light to the narrowing darkness, and then to the shelter of the trees. Gierrack saw her, the girlish figure, the boyish dress ; saw for an instant only, then the quick flying feet bore her away, and the forest swallowed her up.

" Au revoir ! " he cried after her ; then he turned to Joe. " There is no oath, Poacher, " said he, " to hinder me from seeking acquaintance with this thing should I catch it in the wood. "

" Why, no, Lord, " said Poacher, and he grinned, " but 'twould be easier to catch Will o' Wisp or put salt on Jack Rabbit's tail. "

“ You have put salt on more than one rabbit’s tail, rogue Joe, of that I’ll be sworn,” so said Gierrack. And with that he wished him good-day, and with some gratuity went on his way.

II

THE INVESTIGATION OF TOBIAH THE DISSENTER

A SECRET may sometimes be safe, even though it is told (to men of course). Master Christopher's was, albeit one of his labourers had told it to the Lord of Moorwood, and even let him catch glimpse of a pair of shining eyes in the firelight's glow ; for there is honour of sorts between lord and liegeman, as there is between thieves. But with some no secret is truly safe, and of these the chief is your poor spirited drinker. With such a one there is danger on two sides ; should the loon drink, being but a poor sort and weak in the head, he may babble. And should he repent—which being only an indifferent rogue he is like to do—he may confess, and in either case where stands the secret ?

James-from-the-Town was of this sort. A day after that wet night, getting some moneys paid him, he drank. In his cups it was revealed, first, that he was an hog, except for the accident of apparel, and, second, that he had much he might tell. But as luck would have it, no one took note of either, because of those who saw him, all were aware of the first and none believed in the second. But in three days James was sober again ; lean in pocket, dry in mouth and chastened in spirit. While he was thus he received a call to grace. Far be it from me to speak small beer of such calls, verily

some men have so heard the Lord ; but ' many are called but few chosen.' James was of a sort none would choose could he get another.

This call to grace and the repentance it carried with it brought James very low in spirit ; in which state he took to wandering the roads, seeking the Lord, he said. Poacher Joe did not say him nay, for at that time there was little work doing, and he was marvellous bad company. Whether he found the Lord is by no means certain, but a servant of His he met, and that none other than Tobiah the Dissenter. James knew Tobiah by sight and also by reputation ; therefore, when he saw the good man, he joined himself to him, thinking to get ghostly counsel, and maybe some temporal and mundane help too.

" Well, friend," said Tobiah, " what would you with me ? "

" Sir," answered James, " there is a matter on my conscience, I repent me of the past."

" Ha ! " said Tobiah. " Repentance is good, also confession ; but better is the eschewing of evil and the ale house door."

This he said perceiving the spirituous smell which clung to James, though more to his clothes than to himself—solely by reason of his present poverty.

James hastened to say he eschewed ale houses and all other snares of the evil one, then went on to tell of the doings at the smelting hearth. It had come to him lately that there was something doubtful in these doings, which might put his immortal soul in jeopardy and that for no more than a common labourer's wage. This he confided to the Dissenter.

" Poof ! " said Tobiah. " Your immortal soul, forsooth ! Why, man, do you think the devil would

take these pains for what might be had much cheaper ? Do we bait mouse traps with roast goose when any scraps will do ? An ale mug, a fourpenny piece, an unguarded pocket are the gins for you, not this complication of iron and goblin and what not."

"But," cried James abashed, "do you think there is no evil here ? Verily there is, and I fear me to be longer joined with it. I tell you witchcraft alone can get such iron as is got at this place from black coal and hard ore. And I tell you it is no good thing that comes from the Forest ; the whole is evil, and I tremble to go on with it. I would fain seek more virtuous service, peradventure I might enter with you, honoured sir ? "

"I have no service save that of the Lord," Tobiah made answer, "and that, I fear me, in spite of your brave words, is not what you seek. This much I will do—I will investigate the matter for you."

This was not the help James wanted ; nay, it was the last thing he would have sought. He did his best to dissuade Tobiah, and when that was of no avail he strove to put him off by telling him it were so hard to know when the elf would come from the wood ; one might waste much good time waiting for her and make the long and tedious journey from the town for nought. To all this Tobiah listened and said he reckoned not such things in the service of the Lord. Also, that, though he could not then accompany James to the smelting hearth, he would at an early day make the journey and would then abide hereabouts until such time as opportunity should be given him for investigation. With that he bade farewell and James hastened back to work with his repentance overpast and his appetite for virtue somewhat satisfied. He did not speak of what he had done to Joe, he hoped in his heart that he had heard the

end of it and of Tobiah. But he was in error, three days later at sunset the Dissenter presented himself, somewhat dusty from the road, but not more than pleasantly weary and full of the zeal of the Lord.

Consternation fell upon James at the sight, he was now very far from wishing to have the doings at the smelting changed or stopped, and so had no welcome whatever for his guest. Nevertheless, he dissembled as well as he could, and then went to seek Poacher Joe. To him he confessed all, for though he feared his wrath, yet he had hopes that the Poacher would keep Tobiah from the hearth. But therein he erred ; Poacher had all the will in the world, and with another man that will, not unassisted by strong and hairy arms, might have prevailed. With Tobiah it was otherwise ; he saw the Lord meant him to look into this matter and he would look into it.

So it befell that some while after twilight one might have seen the Dissenter seated in the cubby whereon another night my Lord Gierrack sat, and with him was James-from-the-Town. Joe was without, busied with work ; and before he set about it he had thoughtfully drawn the bolt that was outside the cubby door. This Tobiah did not discover early, he having been given to understand the elf-thing was not to be expected before midnight ; on learning this he settled himself to wait patiently, and to improve the hour for himself and James by exhortation and prayer. This for some time, he very eloquent, James very drowsy ; but at last, after having awakened the sleeper for the third time, he desisted, perceiving that he was but wasting his breath on so weak-kneed a backslider. Accordingly he took his Bible from his pocket, drew the lantern nearer to himself and left the other to sleep in his

sins. A little before midnight he rose and went to the door and very soon found it to be bolted. He shook it once, but not hard enough to wake James, then he stayed his hand. It was clear to him that shaking would not undo it, and waking James would not help the cause of righteousness, for, though by just and forcible persuasion, that feeble knave could be induced to call upon his mate to unbar the door, the stout poacher rogue would not obey or listen to the arguments of righteousness. So Tobiah looked round for some other way out and soon saw that he must make one, as there was no window, through the roof. This was thatched with dead heather and gorse, kept in place by stones and lumps of timber. Joe had not thought of escape that way, it would need a tall man and a sinewy to make it, moreover he had reckoned that James would raise outcry and warning, did there seem likelihood of the Dissenter breaking cover. But the Lord leaves not his own in straits, is it likely that He who threw down the walls of Jericho before the chosen people, would let a roof of furze balk one of his elect? James-from-the-Town slept like the five Foolish Virgins made into one unseemly man. And Tobiah mounted the log whereon he had sat, swung himself up, lay hold on the roof beam with one hand and with the other forced a gap in the dead heather and furze.

In the meanwhile the elf maiden had come from the wood and set about her task as was her wont. In ordinary Poacher kept his distance from her and spoke no word, but to-night he broke through his rule; partly for her safety should Tobiah afterwards pry about, partly for his own should she discover she had been betrayed. He told how James had confessed and how Tobiah was even now shut securely in the cubby.

She stayed in what she was doing : " Is he a minister of the Lord ? " she asked in her fluty girl's voice.

Joe scratched his head ; he knew the old tales well—those tales of the spirits who haunt earth, air, water, and fire, and who, beautiful with a beauty man has not, and gifted with powers he knows not, and living a thousand thousand years, yet have no immortal souls. He had heard tell how some of these, hungering for the soul which was not theirs, sought it, even offering all their gifts in exchange. It came to him then, that, peradventure, this elf maid was of these, and he knew not what to say, for, if she were, she could not win a soul, though she could empty herself of her powers in the attempt.

" Tell me," she said again, " is he a minister of the Lord ? Take me that I may see him."

" Nay," Poacher answered. " I cannot do that, even though certainly he is such a one. You have naught to do with ministers."

" Verily that is true ! " came the voice of Tobiah. " Naught have you to do with ministers now, but by and bye they will have somewhat to do with you—in the day when your witchcraft is known and you are condemned to just and merited punishment."

Thus cried Tobiah, showing in the glowing fire heat all dusty and scattered over with broken heather and gorse needles. But he did not waste time in the uttering ; even as he spoke he darted forward and with signal skill laid hold on the elf maiden fair and square with hands that could grip. Poacher Joe seized a bar of iron ; but the worthy Dissenter, who knew the ways of carnal man, had foreseen that was likely, and so, easily lifting the light figure, dodged away with her for safety.

But many a man who has caught a mouse with his naked hand has let the little beast—no bigger than his thumb—go again. Thus it was with Tobiah and the elf maiden and for the same reason ; for she, as he bore her off, stooped her head and set her sharp teeth in his hand. Yea, she made them meet, so that with a cry of surprise and of pain he loosed hold with that hand for a second, and albeit, he thought he had her firm with the other, she slipped from his grip. Twist like an eel she did, twist like a maid ; and seeing that she wore unmaidenly clothes with less slack about them, even than the most of boys, the good man could not hold her. She slipped to the ground and went away like an arrow, across the open in the strong moonshine, away to the trees ; but there she paused as if knowing herself safe from any pursuer. In the moonlight everything was as clear as day. Tobiah could see her plainly, even the buttons on her immodest attire and the face that Gier-rack, an experienced man and so perhaps a judge—had found alluring.

“ Minister,” cried she, “ come here ! Come to the edge of the forest, I would speak to you.”

Tobiah crossed the open space with his loping stride, and in a second it seemed was swallowed in the black shadow of the woods.

Poacher Joe stopped with his bar in his hand and laughed a great guffaw. The Poacher had a carnal mind.

On the morrow morning early my Lord Gierrack walked in the confines of the great wood which bordered on to his gardens and pressed even to the very edge of his fishponds. He was idle and restless of these

days and withal weary of nothing to do, sighing to be up and away, travelling, fighting and what not. But it was not for him now ; an old wound, but half healed in an evil climate, had broke forth afresh and could not be mended save by long sojourn in his good native air. Therefore he must remain at Moorwood, cast up accounts with his steward, set reforms agoing on his estates as he had been a parliament of Puritans ; and put all and sundry, his servants and his bailee, in a sweat with running to his orders, with thinking and working—exercises to which they were little used—and even then there was much idle time on his hands. And because of this idleness he had, in the days which followed after his going to Master Christopher's smelting hearth, fallen to thinking of Joe's tale and the elf maiden—it was the sole and only thing out of the ordinary that had come to his knowledge in his home sojourning. With the thinking had come a notion to seek acquaintance with the elf maiden, whom he deemed to be more maiden than elf. This might not be done by the smelting hearth for the sake of Poacher Joe, but he had hopes he might one day meet her in the wood. But he met her not ; though on this morning he met another.

It was early, the day as yet like a young child, not certain whether to laugh or to cry, though a light wind was clearing its face and shaking the last of the blossom from the blackthorns like snow dust. Down a forest path came Tobiah the Dissenter. He wore no hat (it had been left last night in the cubby), dead heather still clung to him and he had the appearance of one who had been up all night. Nevertheless, by the look on his face it were plain to see that, had he been up, it were on righteous business. Gierrack knew him not, yet at once he knew him for a godly man.

"What, preacher!" said he, "it is but a poor congregation you must find in our wilds."

"Nay," answered Tobiah. "Souls are not reckoned by bulk or by heads as game; one who is earnestly set to seek the Lord is a rich congregation."

"Ah?" Gierrack said. "And have you found such a one here? Truly, worthy sir, your scent for souls must be keen—and your hopefulness great. We forest folk are a somewhat heathenish sort."

Tobiah looked him over. "Heathen you may be," said he, "but forest man you are not."

Gierrack laughed. "That is so," he allowed. "It is of the world I am, not the woods. Yet am I of the woods also of a sort, for I am forest born and so, like the beasts, must come here to be healed in sickness and to lie down in death. But you, sir, you are not of the forest either? You must have had ado to find your proselyte here, one would say you have wandered far," and he looked at the marks on Tobiah's apparel.

"Far have I been," the good man answered; "but I have not wandered, I was guided by the hand of the Lord and by a maiden, immodestly clad."

"What?" said Gierrack and his eyebrow went up. "I trust the day was not so old that you were shocked by a too plain revealing of the discrepancies in her attire. That is unless you prefer plain fact to the hinted gleam."

"Sir," returned Tobiah severely, "I am not of the carnal and lascivious sort that it would seem you are, I take no pleasure in any she's legs."

"Lord, man, nor do I," said Gierrack with a laugh. "We are over old for that taste, you and I. This maiden, I take it, had legs then for to be seen?"

"She was dressed as a boy; but I have exhorted

her to the course of modesty and trust she will follow the same."

"As a boy?" Gierrack asked. "Had she brown eyes like pools with the sunlight in them?"

Tobiah nodded, he thought so, although, so he said: "Of her eyes I cannot speak with surety, though of her teeth I can," and he sucked his thumb.

"The elf maiden!" cried Gierrack.

But Tobiah understood him not. "She is a somewhat forward damsel," he said, "albeit with motions towards godliness; she dwells with her mother—a good woman stricken in health—and were better employed tending her or doing fine sewing than enticing men to make iron from sea coal and other acts of questionable righteousness."

"Doubtless," said Gierrack, but no more; he saw it would not be well to ask where this maiden dwelt, at least not yet awhile. Instead he inquired if the worthy Dissenter had breakfasted, and when he learned he had not, invited him to be his guest. Nothing loth Tobiah accepted, and together they repaired to the great house of Moorwood.

The size of the house and the number of the servants did not abash Tobiah, even though he had not before knowledge of the rank of his acquaintance. After all, what is a servant but a man, and a house but a place to dwell in? The rooms seemed well enough to the Dissenter, for they were large and fair, full of fresh morning airs, sunlight and the smell of dried rose leaves and lavender co-mingled with the stranger scents of foreign woods. What of that? Such things are nothing for veneration, and Tobiah had no veneration for them, albeit he was not displeased with the beauty of the place. He sat him down to a good meal with a

good appetite, determined to have good talk therewith.

And have it he did, for Gierrack was no stickler for respect and such things ; rather was he a collector of what was strange, both in men and gear, as all wanderers should be ; he took some delight in the worthy Tobiah. By little and little he learned somewhat of the night's doings ; how Tobiah had come to the smelting hearth ; how he had laid hold of the elf maiden—and let her go again ; how she had run to the Forest and called him to her ; and how he, seeing the Lord had work for him, had gone after her.

“And what was her desire with you ?” Gierrack asked.

“That I should come to her mother,” Tobiah answered “she, so the damsel said, lay ill, desirous of ghostly counsel, yet lacking determination to seek it, and, indeed, not altogether knowing how or where to find a minister of the church, nor even if he would come if sought. I resolved the maid's mind on several matters, expounding to her that the church was but a daughter of Rome, the ministers oftentimes men of flesh ; but that I, an unworthy servant of the Lord, was yet able to wrestle mightily with souls and would travel far, if need be, to do it. At that the maiden laughed, I know not why. Yet certainly it was a pretty sound, like the chiming of waters on a sunny day.”

“Did you go with her ?” Gierrack asked, and though he kept his thin lips straight yet certainly his eyes smiled.

“That did I,” Tobiah made answer, “and far it was and monstrous bad travelling ; she, being small and her clothes set indecent close about her, could get through, where oftentimes I must stick, the which was somewhat

painful. Nevertheless it was in a good cause, the cause of the Lord."

"I trust," Gierrack said, "that cause was well served when you reached your journey's end?"

"It was," replied Tobiah, swelling at the thought, and he showed Gierrack somewhat of the manner of last night's discourse. Gierrack listened without impatience, even one might almost have thought, though it seems hard to believe, he found entertainment in the words of the worthy Tobiah. Afterwards he asked—"Where does this seeking soul live?"

"That I know not," answered Tobiah. "When I go again I have appointed that the maid Clois shall meet and lead me, the woods are strange to me and I cannot do if I leave the paths. The small cot where they dwell is set deep in the woods with none bigger than deer tracks leading to it; a lonesome spot, I cannot tell how they get their meat there."

"That is a simple matter," Gierrack told him, "any may live in the Forest almost free if he be friends with the Forest people and know their ways. Moreover, would not the maiden Clois bring something back from the smelting?"

Tobiah did not know, indeed he knew little about those doings. "It is a business yet to be sought into," said he. "Maybe it is witchcraft, yet I hardly think so; the maid has not godliness, it is true, yet she has the root of the matter in her and right notions, though she is a very wildling. She is the best stuff of the three."

"Which three?" Gierrack asked.

"The three at the cot," Tobiah made reply, "the mother who dies slowly of decline and who at best was but one of the feeble folk; Sarah the serving woman,

a silly sort, and no longer young, and this maid Clois."

Gierrack nodded, and after that began to talk of the Forest; this he did that he might learn more nearly where the cottage lay. It was daylight when the maid brought back Tobiah and left him in a straight path. And though the good man could not from that find his way again, his talking of the trees and the scenes through which he had come could, unknown to him, help one who knew the woods to get near the spot. Before he left the great house he had unwittingly given its lord more than a notion of where best to look for the elf maiden.

III

THE TEMPTATIONS OF GIERRACK

NOW was the season when woods are greenest and fairest, when every bird has a new song and every branch a new leaf; when beech and birch and larch are radiant green and gold; when the primrose blooms and the shy dog violet, and may-trees don white veils like brides on their wedding morn. Now was the air full of the smell of bursting buds and shining gum, and resonant with the glad, glad sound of the lover and his mate, who perch on every twig and rest on every tree, carolling to the good God for ver-joy that the winter is over and past, the summer nigh at hand, and the time of the singing of birds and the stirrings of love again in the land.

In this glad season Balthasar Gierrack, lord of Moorwood, wandered in the forest seeking the elf-maiden, and in this season he found her. It was in a wood of pollard hornbeams, a close-growing wood of old men trees, with twisty black roots like coils of half-buried serpents, and twisty dark trunks full of knobs and warts like the faces of forest goblins. All on the side of a hill the old trees grew, with never a leaf low down, only their tops green, like bundles of faggots sprouting from a parent crown and breaking into leaf at the end. Under their shade all was brown, only the westering sun looked over the slope of the hill and shot the gloom,

warp and woof, with gold. And it was here Gierrack found the elf-maiden; nay, she stepped from behind a tree trunk and showed herself, fearless as a wild thing who knows of nothing that can hold her. A brown girl she stood in the golden gloom. Her kirtle was brown and her hair brown, curls snooded back with a ribbon; her eyes brown as forest pools, and her face and her hands adorable, sun-browned but beneath a glow, as of the inner lining of a shell. And when Gierrack saw her he did not stop to ask himself if this were beauty, for if it were not, he doffed his hat and said, bowing: "Mistress Clois, at last."

She looked at him puzzled. "You know my name?" she said.

"Every one must know the elf-maiden," he answered.

She laughed. "That they do not," she said, "if I am she."

"I at least know you," he told her. "I have sought you long."

"Why?" she asked, and looked him in the face with a boy's fearless eyes.

And Gierrack for a moment was at a loss for the very straightness of the question, but he answered easily: "I have heard of you from a worthy man, by name Tobiah."

"Oh, yes," she said, and laughed as if she found the memory of the Dissenter pleasing. "He is a good man indeed; he came with me when I requested him, and exhorted me much by the way. He will come again another day and finish the exhortation, when he believes he will convince me; but I think not, rather I think I will convince him!"

"I am sure that you will," Gierrack told her, "your

arguments would be beyond gainsaying." And before she could ask him, as she wished, how he knew, he had gone on to speak of Tobiah, dragging that worthy man's name and his small acquaintance with him into his discourse in a way that was shameless. In the end he said how he had heard from the Dissenter that the maiden's mother lay ill.

"Oh, yes," she said, and her eyes grew sad; "she is ill indeed. But you are no apothecary, sir? You could not help her if you saw her?"

"I am no apothecary, certainly," Gierrack answered, "yet I might perhaps help, for I have been much in lands where an apothecary is not to be had, and where, when I and my following are sick, I must do my own physicking. If you think it would be of any comfort and will lead me to your mother, my little skill is at your command."

"Thank you!" she cried joyfully. "Let us come"; and she led the way with scarce an inquiring glance.

And quickly enough he came, thinking what a wild innocent fawn it was. But of one thing was he ignorant as the sequel will show, and that was as to the nature of a wild thing's innocence and the sure foundation of its trust. Such judge not as men do, nor yet as women; but by some instinct know, not what a man is or was or may be, but rather the lost thing deep down in him—devil, angel, hero or hog—which fiery trial or the sword of judgment alone will reveal to himself and others. This they know without trial, as God and the beasts know it. Thus it befell that Gierrack knew both more of himself and yet less than did the elf-maiden when he came with her to the cottage. There he made acquaintance with the dame and also with Sarah, the serving woman; and very

well did he push advantage with them both. As for the sickness, he could not cure it, nor, indeed, could any ; but he could prescribe some simple remedies which would give relief. These he prescribed, promising to himself bring them on a near day.

No more did my lord Gierrack find the time idle on his hands ; no more did he pant for strange lands and strange faces ; he had wherewith to occupy his mind and his leisure. Sometimes of nights he laughed contemptuously at himself ; that was when the days were cold and wet, when he saw to his hand the things which had grown the necessary custom of his life ; when he sipped choice wine from a goblet of graven crystal and studied old books of strange lore ; when he looked from the boar-hound, hero of a hundred hunts, to the plain keen sword he wore, and met the eyes of Jarl, the servitor, who had followed him to the world's end and would follow there again. They two were men, he and this taciturn Jarl, long past these follies : maiden's blushes, women's sighs, adventures of gallantry had lost savour for them almost as long since as lollipops. So he scoffed at himself in grim contempt ; yet so soon as the sun returned to the glad green world—and sometimes sooner—he was off like a youth on the springtime's quest.

And once on a day he brought the elf-maiden to the great house. He inveigled her to the edge of the forest where his boundary wall ran, and then invited her to come within and see where he dwelt. Curiously as a child, and as gaily too, did she come to the fine gardens ; down deep alleys and across lawns to stately terraces where flowers bloomed all a-row. There she saw the peacocks, and because she had never seen those jewel birds before, she ran to look at them. She

went light as thistle down, so the birds did not hear her coming on the turf—though they would not have fled an they had, for they were too proud to be timorous, and certainly nothing feared her. Thus she came up with them and even knelt on the terrace close to one, looking at the fine tail he spread in the sun. Jarl, the servitor, saw her first thus, like a brown butterfly, lit on the grey stonework. He saw her again later, for he must bring refreshment to the chamber where she sat with his master. Quietly he served, yet he watched too, and perceived that which his master, bewitched, did not—that no man could truly hold this maiden against her will. But he only felt it dumbly; at first as dumbly as ever might the boarhound that tracked like a shadow after the elf-maiden as she moved round the room.

She looked at all that was there, listening with eagerness to what Gierrack would tell of the history of this and that, its birthplace, its use, and who had had it before. Anon he took from a cabinet a glittering string, and with admiration she cried:

“It is like dewdrops frozen hard and set on fairy fire!”

He laughed and wound it in her hair, then led her to a mirror that she might see. She looked, but without rapture; certainly the jewels became her but moderately, she not being of the stately sort for such ornaments.

“They are diamonds,” he told her, and she took them off to look at him.

“They are worth much money, I suppose?” said she.

“A poor gentleman’s ransom,” he told her, “may be more, some gentlemen are cheap.”

She gave them back to him, marvelling at the price of so small a thing.

"Nay," said he, "they are yours now, not mine; put them where they look best, in your hair."

But she did not, she had neither use nor desire for such a gift and no will to take it. In the end Gierrack put the gems away where they had been with an inward mock at his own folly in thinking to weight this wood nymph with them. Afterwards he led her about some small part of the house, showing her what was rare and strange. And everything she looked at with fresh delight, and every fresh chamber admired more.

"Would you like always to be here?" he asked, when they were back in the room where they had first sat.

She considered. "It is near to the forest," she said thoughtfully; "easily one could get out."

"Would you stay here with me?" he asked.

"Ah!" she said, "that would be pleasant, like a tale books tell of! If you were alone in the world and I alone, and we met in the forest and wandered and wandered till at nightfall we came to this great house—it is like a palace—and we came in and no one was here, and took up our abode, as the swallows do under the eaves!"

"I could make such a tale befall for you," he told her, with eyes fastened on her face.

"But how could you?" she asked. "Why, no, you could not; I am not alone, there is my mother and Sarah; and we could not find the house while we wandered, for you know where it is, it is yours already."

"But you could come and live here with me," he said.

She shook her head. "Nay," she said, "if it were

yours and you took me in and fed and sheltered me, then I could not be free to come and go, I should be yours, not my own."

She stood by a window as she spoke, looking out to where the tree tops glowed in the last of the sunset. Gierrack stood behind her in the shadow and bit his lip. Jarl came at that moment with some question of lights or of supper. His master turned upon him and bade him begone with an oath. He spoke in the man's native tongue and quietly, as was his way when angered; yet when the man was gone Clois looked about. "Why were you angry with him?" she asked.

"Angry?" Gierrack said. "Do you know that language?"

"No," she said, "not the words, but I know you were angry, I could feel it; why were you angry?"

He did not tell her, only looked curiously at her. "Sometimes," he said, "I wonder what you truly are. So much less you know than any man or woman I have ever seen—and yet so much more."

He put a hand on her shoulder. "So you will not abide here with me to-night?" he said.

"No," she answered, "I cannot; even now I must be gone."

For a moment his hand lingered, then it dropped. Instinct made no mistake when it trusted to that in him which he knew not, and none knew but the God who made him. He stretched past her and set wide the window which was low to the ground.

"There," said he, "the way is clear, begone to your woods."

And withing him a light good-night she stepped out and adown the terrace, across the lawn to the trees, while he stood watching in the deepening gloom.

He still stood so when Jarl came again. This time the man kindled lights unchecked ; when he had them he looked round the room covertly and saw that it was empty except for his master, and a gleam of satisfaction shone for a moment in his eye.

Gierrack saw it. "Fool," said he contemptuously, "you have less sense than yon hound, he knows better than to be jealous of such a rose-leaf."

"Nay, lord, I am not jealous," the fellow protested.

"Why, then, so well pleased to find her gone?" Gierrack asked.

Jarl hesitated, yet looked on his master with a certain shamefaced tenderness. There was that between them which there is between those who have lived together and fought together in rough places, where the bond of master and servant is weak and the bond of man and man is strong.

"Well," Gierrack said, "speak out."

"Lord," Jarl said, "did a babe see a butterfly, a brown butterfly sporting in the sun, and think to have him. Why, he could not unless he crushed his head and then *poof* ! It is no butterfly, no fluttering wings ; 'tis only dead carrion, a little piece doubtless, but carrion as any strung crow."

Gierrack laughed. "Since when have you taken to preaching in parables?" he asked. "You are an old dog to reform."

Jarl grew red of face. "I reform never, lord," said he. "Nevertheless am I glad that she has gone, for"—and his face softened—"Jarl cannot bear his lord's disappointment like his cloak, so is he glad that it should not come for any to bear."

"Jarl, without doubt you are a fool," Gierrack said. These men could never speak a gentleness the

one to the other ; but seeing both were in the same boat, both understood the soft meaning to the rough word, the which is nigh as good as any softness spoken.

On the next day Gierrack went to the forest, and the next, and the next. He saw, after Jarl's parable of the butterfly, that to have the elf-maiden a man must have her will ; and, folly though it was, something in him clamoured to have the illusive thing, therefore he sought her will and went and went and went again.

Now in due time knowledge of these comings and goings reached Tobiah the Dissenter ; the which, indeed, was not strange, seeing that he came to visit the enfeebled dame at the cottage for her soul's health, and her mind was then full of the goodness of Gierrack. But Tobiah when he heard was very wrath ; and, full of a consuming fire of righteousness, he betook him to the great house of Moorwood. However, some such coming, soon or late, had been foreseen by Gierrack, so the worthy Dissenter took nothing for his trouble. The lord of Moorwood was too old a campaigner to be taken even by so sturdy a warrior as Tobiah, albeit he was not a man to be rebuffed easily, and could be instant in season and out of it, and also could play the waiting game and camp for many hours, even days, before the citadel he was for taking. But the house of Moorwood was large, and had many ways both in and out ; also there were servants at Gierrack's command, notably Jarl, to whom it was given principally to cope with Tobiah. So after a little it became clear to the good man that he would not by trying get speech with Gierrack ; and as like as not, even if he did, it would do little good with such a man of Belial. Accordingly, having indited to him a letter, explaining

to him with particularity his future state, he set out to have speech with the other party.

The dame he warned with great plainness of speech ; but she was passing foolish and would take no warning. Indeed, when she heard of the high estate of him who came to her cottage, she rejoiced, for, said she, " 'Twill be a fine match for the girl. He must, as you say, come here for her sake, and glad I am that it should be so. I had not hoped she would make a match near to her own condition, still less above it, for though she is gently born she will have nothing to look to when I am gone. I should die easy were she well wed."

"Wed !" said Tobiah in largest scorn. But his scorn was of no avail, the dame scarcely heard what he said ; already she was planning the wedding gown.

Then Tobiah went to Clois ; but there he fared no better, for, as many a plain man hath found before, the enlightening of a maid is not to be done by the tongue of wisdom. She learns what she learns by no man's teaching, but by some inward light of her own. As yet there was no light kindled in Clois' mind concerning matters of courtship, honest or otherwise, therefore the words of the Dissenter weighed not with her. And still, when the occasion served and her will was inclined that way, she wandered the woods with Gierrack. She read the books he brought her, listened to the tales he told her, and in return showed him much of the wood lore of these his native parts, which before was to him as Greek to her.

And once Gierrack came near to giving her some enlightenment himself ; yet, since her mind was not yet ripe, it passed her by. It was on an evening when they walked in the forest and she told him how Tobiah

had bade her not to do so, "For," said she, "he says you are a sinful man, but I know otherwise."

To this for a moment Gierrack did not answer ; he had expected some such attack from the Dissenter, yet he was in no haste to refute it. He put out a hand to help the girl over rough tree roots, then : "Child," said he, "these worthy men with their hard godliness are not the best judges of sin, they would make the earth an ill place ; all that is joyous and sweet, all that is gay and glad of Nature and Eden they call sin. Yea, with them it is a sin to love."

"Is it ?" said she, quite careless, the while picking her way over soft places between the twisty roots. He still held her, held her fast ; she thought because he deemed she needed help, though she needed none. In sooth, it hampered her somewhat to be held, yet she did not slip free, for it seemed to her it pleased him to do it, though she could not tell why.

So was it with her ; but with him it was otherwise. The feel of the young warm body was a thrill and a temptation ; a renewal of forgotten things and an awakening of things never known. The hour, too, was a thrill and a temptation ; it was drawing towards dark, warm and still after a day of gentle rain ; all the air very sweet and wet, full of the mist of growth. Here, where the undergrowth was thick, night already approached, bough and blossom and soft long grass dripping wet, in the moist dusk everything growing, breeding, stirring with abundant life. All the twilight was alive, the very earth seemed to breathe and every creature spoke to its mate. Deep and soft came the croaking of frogs from the ponds, sweet the singing of birds in the trees ; even the owl told its tale, and everything that ran and crept and flew spoke with

the voice of the hour : " Now is the season to woo and to love, now is the time of youth and of joy."

" Listen ! " a message thrilled up Gierrack's fingers and stopped the girl. She stood awhile listening while a nightingale broke into throbbing song, holding for a space all the twilight with the magic of its voice.

But the tale it told was unknown to her, and her mind wandered to what was nearer at hand. They had come to the edge of the pool which is by Tristram's tree. The tree, a beech, leaned over it, a low branch, all dressed in young leaf, stretched across the bronze dark waters. She stopped to look in.

" You told me my eyes were like this pool," she said wonderingly.

" Yes," he answered, " but when the sun is in it."

" Not now ? " she asked.

" No," he said ; then, " Let me look."

He took her face between his hands and held it up to the dying light.

Ah, soft was the dusk about them, soft the voice of the year ! Sweet came the scent of bud and of blossom ; sweet, sweeter far the nightingale's plaint in the fragrant dark.

" Wood-elf," he said, and he drew her nearer, " wild wood thing, dost know what love is ? Love that the nightingale tells of, love that every bird in the wood sings—love that dwells in the forest shade—and in the heart of man ? "

He stooped to her, lower, lower, and his voice sank lower too, till at the last it was just a whisper that his lips almost set on hers.

Almost, but not quite, for before he had drawn close, even before the last was all spoken, she had slipped from him and was fled. Into the undergrowth she fled,

into the growing dusk, a slim figure lost in the shades as a shadow itself.

"Clois !" he called, "Clois !"

But she did not come and none answered ; at the call of his voice even the nightingales had for a moment hushed.

Then it was that a madness came upon Gierrack—the madness of the hunter who will go all day and risk life and limb for his quarry ; the madness of a man which can only be slaked by other lips lain on his. And in this madness he sprang to the brake where she had vanished ; he pushed and parted it, and found naught in the green twilight behind, yet he went through ; aye, and beyond that and further still ; where she had gone there he followed, even though in cool sense he knew it was as easy to catch the twilight as her. But this was not the hour of coolness or of sense ; it was the hour of madness and of folly, of youth's unwisdom reborn in manhood. Into dense groves he went, into brakes and brambles ; through the warm twilight, through the tangle of green things growing ; to the tune of the wild bird's love-singing, even to the tune of the frogs who chuckled. So till long after he had lost all trace of her ; lost even, in the great spaciousness of beech woods, the green covert which hid her ; so till, all unheeding, he stumbled on to soft ground, a bog hid and covered in a drift of dead leaves.

It was of no size, this bog, and not of a dangerous softness ; there are many such scattered up and down the forest ; a man may cross them easily or withdraw from them either. Gierrack crossed this without much befouling and but little waste of time. Yet was he obliged to go slowly, slowly enough to give pause to

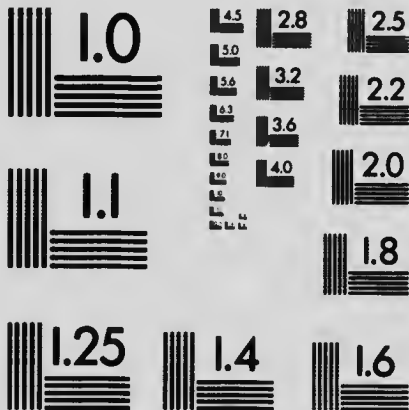
his madness and for him to perceive that this part, where he had now come, was no hiding-place for coy damsels ; no, nor yet for flitting wood-clves. Without knowing it he had been drawn to the great beech wood which covers three hills, and already he was well within its solemn shade. Tall trees rose around him, straight as cathedral pillars and grey, growing close together with nothing, neither bush nor fern, beneath. Dim aisles stretched before him, leading to dim aisles, with yet other aisles leading from them into the deep heart of the wood. Nothing was in sight, no forest creature ; only a bird sang high up in the branches, one alone that sang a hymn to night. A strange light was here, green from shining through the far-off young leaves ; and peace was with it, cloistered peace ; it was as if one walked on the floor of the sea in a hushed twilight all holy and dim.

Slowly Gierrack set forward ; he was clear of the bog now, though the ground was still covered thick with dead leaves. They rustled about his feet as he went ; old leaves and the leaves of last year not yet curled, all amber hued and shining as if some magician had netted the earth with sunshine. Nothing else moved, none but he ; and though on this firm springing ground he might have gone as fast as he would, yet he went slowly and more slowly still. It was as if in this place of silence a cool hand was lain on the passion in his blood. Gradually he came to himself ; he knew wisdom, even he knew shame ; he thought very scorn of himself for folly, yea, perhaps for wickedness too. In this great wood, where time is of little account, where the years verily pass but as watches in the night, where the hand of man cannot make and does not mar—he knew himself. In this grey dimness and



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big stillness he came near to finding truth ; he felt that God was in this place, and he, in his madness, had been nigh to bringing his lust and his passion to the feet of the Eternal. Thus did he come to see more plainly in this twilight, and thus did he go on his way with cooled blood and a shame whercof he was not afterwards ashamed. And darkness came on and hid him and hid the dim aisles. Not falling from above did it come, nor rising from beneath, but distilling as it were from the air ; taking the form from things so that they sank into vagueness—grey trees lost in greyness, leafy floor lost in darkness, as if the glow which enkindled it had faded. And still the late bird sang, sang a last good-night, and then left the world to silence and such as flit when dead leaves, moved by some unfelt breeze, dance a soundless round with the wreaths of night mist which melt ghostlike away.

IV

THE WEDDING OF THE ELF MAIDEN

DURING this time the smelting of Charles Christopher prospered. Let not any from that judge Tobiah to have fallen short of his duty or to have been balked either ; he had investigated the matter to the full and from the girl Clois learned what she did, how profited, the whole of it, and saw plainly that there was no witchcraft, nor malpractice in it ; no, not even a trick.

Said she : " It is not trick that I practise on these men, rather it is good knowledge and wisdom got from my father who is dead. He was a philosopher and a scholar and a very wise man ; he found what all numbskulls in the kingdom say cannot be, that one may very well and profitably smelt iron with sea coal. Yet did he make no money by his skill ; rather lost what fortune he had. He did not know the business of his craft and had no son to help him ; and those men whom he took into partnership were fraudulent thieves, bent only on wresting his secret from him. But they failed to wrest it ; he died broken-hearted, disappointed, poor, but he kept his secret. None knows it but me ; me he told, made me understand, even though I was but a child. That was in the days when we first came to the Forest."

" Hum ! " said Tobiah thoughtfully, when she had

thus spoken, "This does not sound so much amiss, though I doubt not it truly is so. Certainly, Mistress, you should not have parted with your father's secret to these men."

"But I have not parted with it," she told him, "not to any one of them, they cannot work when I do not will it; they try, but soon things go wrong and they must call for me. Much in this secret depends on draught, and I, before I leave them, take care, unbeknown to them to spoil their iurnace draught. A simple thing would set it right, but they do not know and they might search long before they found it, so they must even fetch Robin Goodfellow from the woods."

She laughed gleefully. "I little thought," she said, "to take to myself an elf's part when I began, though then, it is true, I did think to pose me as such for a little. I saw the sea coal lying and I saw silly drunken James, and a spirit of mischief entered into me that day, so that I thought I would bewilder and amaze him. And so I did, and rare sport had I, but the end I did not foresee; I will tell you what befell. I went again on a night to see how matters had fared with James, and behold Poacher was there! Him I found of another sort; verily he believed me to be elf indeed, yet he was for bargaining; and, after a little, seeing the gain, I consented thereto. So I go sometimes when needed; and a living very helpful in our poverty I gain that way."

Thus she explained the mystery, and again Tobiah said: "Hum!" not as yet certain what else to say. And while he debated with himself she went on to speak of this poverty and of the need there was that she should earn somewhat to help their small income

and the charity of the Forest folk, whereon they largely lived. And certainly there was sound truth in what she said (it is also recorded of her that she had a very sweet and winsome voice, many noted like a black-bird's, but this we cannot believe helped her case with Tobiah. Indeed it was a sound case and needed no helping).

"Nay," said he at last, "there is no harm in what you do excepting only as touching the matter of dress; the garb you wear for this work is unseemly."

"Unseemly?" she said demurely, but with eyes where the sunshine lurked. "Why then, dear sir, if it is so, do you wear garments not dissimilar?"

"That," said Tobiah, "is different."

She laughed and held to her lips the bunch of milk-maid flowers she carried; they were full blown, and ready to drop, and when she blew on them their blush pink petals scattered in a delicate shower.

"The good God gave me two legs," said she, as she watched the pale petals flutter to Tobiah's coat, "why should I be ashamed thereof?"

Tobiah picked the pink leaves off. "Thou art a naughty wench," he said, but not with the extremest severity.

"See you here, Mistress," he went on after thinking, "whether or no there is a sound gospel reason for the wearing or not wearing of the breeches by one sex or the other. I cannot now say. This I do say—custom counts it unseemly for a maiden, and though I set little store by many customs, there is that about this which makes it advisable and to be regarded by modest maids."

"By home-keeping maids," Clois allowed, "or town-dwelling maids, or maids who are forward to pass

as men ; but I wear them but for my work, the which I cannot do otherwise. Dear sir, I am sure that there is much need for modest maids and for customs in the world outside the Forest, but is there not also room for me who am of another sort ? Well is it that the hen should keep within the farmyard and observe the customs thereof, but would you have all feathered fowl of that sort ? Nay, sir, I do not know the world as you ; I know very little, I am ignorant and cannot say well what I mean, but I feel it, I feel it in my heart. May not I have this liberty which is not licence to me ? ”

She lifted appealing eyes to him, and Tobiah, after consideration, gave permission. He knew that the Lord has more ways than one of dealing with folk, and he thought that maybe He may also be served by more sorts than one. And certainly it were a poor kind of righteousness which would take away the maid's livelihood for the sake of a mere custom. A whim of fashion, dictated at the first, without doubt, by one whose scant virtue needed the veil of great prudery.

Owing to this wisdom of Tobiah, the smelting of Charles Christopher went as before. Also, and this was not owing to Tobiah, rather in spite of him, the friendship of the maiden Clois with my Lord Gierrack went as before. Often they walked and talked through the lengthening days, though never once did they speak of the green night when a madness came upon Gierrack. From which discretion one may judge that he was a man of some restraint, and she less elf than woman and so acquainted with the wisdom that overpasses some things, even if it does not understand.

But there was one at this time who was sadly perplexed and ill at ease and that was the dame. She

was failing fast, and each day as she grew weaker her anxiety for her daughter grew stronger. The girl, it is true, asked no better fate than to dwell on in the Forest with silly Sarah ; but the mother, who had no comprehension of the wild thing which by some accident was her offspring, wanted a future very different for her. Like the most mothers, no matter what their own hard experience of the estate of matrimony, the dame was all for getting the girl into it. Her hopes were, as has been shown, at one time lifted as high as my Lord Gierrack ; but as spring grew to summer and summer warmed to its height with no sign that he would fulfil her desire, she began to see it might be well to cast about for another mate. Her heart was still fond for the great match, but in time even her small wisdom began to see it doubtful, and though loth to relinquish it and give open encouragement to a humbler wooer, she was also loth to discourage such a one for fear that in clinging to the greater shadow she let the small substance slip. At last, the humbler man spoke his mind to her ; he spoke it bluffly and with a condescension which gave her pride pain. He was as much beneath her thinking of their station as my Lord Gierrack was above it ; yet she saw that that must not stand in the way, Clois he must have unless the great man made a move.

On that same day Gierrack came to the cottage with some new physic for her comfort. Anxiously she watched him, but at first without giving sign of what was in her mind. After a little, however, it seemed best to her to say something and at least let him know that the girl was asked. She dismissed her daughter on some excuse and then, sighing deeply, began—

“Ah,” said she, “ah, what it is to be a mother !

To feel the end drawing nigh and to know one's little lamb will be left to the hard world ! ”

Gierrack said it was sad indeed, making so appropriate an answer as would have caused mirth to some who knew him.

The dame, however, was well content ; she sighed again but with more resignation. “ I must not complain,” she said, “ I know that the Lord will provide. Already He is opening a door for my girl—she is sought in marriage.”

She shot a side look at her listener, but she read nothing ; it was scarce likely her small skill would serve to surprise aught from him. So she went on with her tale, “ There is a worthy factor, Fenton by name, he lost his way in the wood awhile since and Clois guided him out. Since then he has been to see us these three times and now he seeks the girl in marriage. I know not what to say ; he is not of our breeding and, forgetting that, he thinks he does honour to one so ill provided. Yet he is a worthy man, snug of business, and well enough set up in gear, he would keep the girl comfortable and take her away from this lonesome forest to the town. She would have a roof to look to when I am gone and that is a thing to be thought on.”

“ It is,” said Gierrack, and that was every word he spoke on the matter, except to ask some few courteous questions about the son-in-law to be. Soon after he took his leave.

Outside the cottage was Clois, waiting to hear if he thought her mother worse.

“ Yes,” said he, “ I fear it.”

“ And I know it,” she said. “ I think the end is not more than a few months off, she will not live to see another autumn.”

Gierrack thought it might well be so. "Your mother is in a measure resigned," he said and drew the girl into the wood.

She hardly knew that she followed him, hardly knew that she fell into step with him; she was thinking of her mother, for whom, it must be said, she had no deeper affection than the one consequence on their relationship. "Yes," she said at last, "she is resigned; I think even she will be glad to go, she never liked this life in the woods. She would, I am sure, be quite ready, if she had no fears for me, and, as I tell her, there is no need for her to have them."

"No," Gierrack said, "no need at all; she feels that now her mind is at peace about you, for she has determined to give you in marriage."

He spoke in a tone judicial and kind, as one who speaks of a matter in which he has but a passing interest, better fitting in style with his station than with himself—there was not the making of a patron in him.

But Clois had no heed to give to manner, the matter was enough—too much for her.

"Marriage!" she cried wild-eyed.

"Yes," he answered, "your mother tells me she thinks of giving you to one Fenton, a factor."

Clois gasped; she even put her hand to her throat as if the news choked her breath.

But Gierrack went on. "She is, as you say, anxious to see you provided for before she leaves you. Marriage is the only provision she can favour; this man has offered, so, she tells me, you will be given to him."

"No!" Clois said, finding voice, "No, no, no!" and without knowing it she looked about, as an animal that is hunted and seeks a way of escape.

"You do not approve?" Gierrack asked. "It is

a pity, your good mother seems set on it. She could not rest in her grave were you unmarried, so she said, and did she leave you alone and unprotected in the forest she would ever wander its paths unquiet and unblessed.

Alas ! Clois knew well it were such a thing as her mother would say and would believe. She could believe it too, and she shivered as she thought of banishing her mother from Heaven and also making this her own dear Paradise, grievous to herself with the company of the poor complaining ghost. She knew neither what to say or to do. The dame, like many another of the weak, was one who ever gained her point in the end ; the daughter saw plainly that she might struggle and protest, but in the end she must wed. And in this she saw truly.

" But Fenton ! " she said, breathing her thoughts aloud. " Him ! Oh, I cannot ! And he would take me away, I would be shut in—he lives in a town."

" Yes, that is so," Gierrack said, repeating what the dame had told him, " he has a snug house in the town, and a snug business too. He is well to do, he keeps a serving girl, she would help you with the work ; you would have a silk gown too, to wear on holidays when stout citizens and their wives came to sup with your good man. And by and by, when he had grown rich, you, if you were a dutiful wife, careful of his comfort and obedient to his will, should have a gold chain for your neck."

" Oh ! " Clois said, and " Oh ! " and again she looked round as if seeking the way of escape, which was not to be found.

For a little she looked, then she asked, " Must it be Fenton, would not another do ? "

"Another?" Gierrack said. "Quite well, I am sure, your mother says Fenton because he has offered, should another——"

But she cut short whatever more he would have said, her relief was such she did not wait for the end. "I will find another!" she said. "This is what I will do. I will go to Poacher Joe and ask him to marry me. He will if I promise him the secret of the smelting. My father told me it should be my dower, and so it will be. I would be better thus wedded to Poacher than to Fenton, he is the better man; also I would live in the forest and, since I could for a time keep him not sure whether I was elf or no, I might even have some freedom."

"Yes, but," Gierrack told her, "there is one difficulty here, Poacher is already provided with a wife."

"Is he married already?" and sadly indeed her face fell.

"I fear that he is," Gierrack said, "nay, I know it, he has a wife and three little lads. But do not look so sad, perhaps another may be found, will I do? I have no wife, will you marry me?"

"You?" she said, and looked at him open-eyed.

"Yes," he answered, "I have little doubt your mother would let me take Fenton's place, if you will, what do you say?"

She knit her brows and scanned him, thinking; it was as if with the half dark mind of the child she was seeking to understand why he should make the offer, which seemed to her all for her and naught for him.

"Why do you ask me?" she said. "Is it because you are sorry and would free me as I would a trapped hare?"

"No," he answered, and the word rang true.

Still she looked puzzled. "You mean what you say?" she asked, "you will marry me?"

He took off his hat. "Before God I swear it," he said, with a solemnity she did not understand, "on the word of a Gierrack, you shall be Lady of Moorwood, free to go and to come. Queen of yourself and all that I call mine."

She drew a deep breath as if the promise held freedom for her, then put her hand in his. He took it and her other hand as well. "You will have me then?" he said, speaking again in the old light tone of one who is always sure.

"Yes," she answered.

"It will be better than Fenton?"

"Oh, yes! I am not afraid of you, I know you, you are—you are——"

She did not know what to say and he rescued her from her difficulty. "You are not afraid of me? Were you never afraid, never once?"

"No," she said, "never once, and I never will be; with you I am always free."

He dropped her hands; he did not stoop to kiss her lips; she had said she was always free and they were still hers, for a woman's lips are always hers till she gives them. He thought he would teach her to give in the little while that must pass before their wedding day.

Yet he taught her not; partly because by nature and by heritage he was a man better fitted to take than to ask, and partly because there was nothing within her yet which could learn the lesson. Nevertheless, one thing she learned at that time, partly from his ways and speech, but more still from her mother's admonitions—that she must give something in exchange

for the salvation he offered her, something of liberty and freedom of mind ; also she learned that to be any man's wife, even this one, would be far other than being at large in the Forest. The lesson liked her little and the knowledge made her shrink ; yet she gave no sign, and in her heart determined to do all she should, for it seemed but honourable seeing in what way and from what he was saving her.

The preparations for the wedding were speedily made. They were few and they were made with haste, the dame as ready as the bridegroom to push them forward. But there was one who disapproved the business, and that was Tobiah the Dissenter. To his thinking the girl Clois should not have been married to any, she seemed to him both too young and too wild for it ; also he deemed her worthy of a better fate than matrimony, whereof, as is well known, he had but a small opinion. As for my Lord Gierrack's share in the matter, certainly he found that better than might have been expected, still it was a doubtful doing and one likely to turn out ill. There was too much inequality in the match and too little godliness in the parties. So Tobiah said, many times and oft, but without avail ; the thing went through in spite of him, and there was naught for him to do but to attend, protesting, at the church to make sure all was truly in order.

There was also one other who looked askance at the business, and that was Jarl the servitor. Uneasy he was, as a cat is uneasy of wind, and sorrow he feared for his master. On the wedding day, he ventured a word with the bridegroom, this when he asked him why his face was glum.

"Lord," said he, "I fear me all is not well."

"Not well ?" Gierrack said, and he said it sharp,

for he had some inkling of the answer. "How ill?"

Jarl, the slow of speech, halted before he found words, "Lord," he said humbly, "does the bride come of her will?"

"Why, yes, knave," Gierrack said. "Art thinking of the butterfly parable? Well, she has no pin in her head, make your mind easy," and he laughed and would have turned away.

But Jarl's mind was not easy, he was slow to convince, and he loved greatly. "Would she come, Lord," said he, "were her mother dead?"

"Assuredly," Gierrack told him, "she has pledged her word to me."

Jarl nodded, he knew the strength of the pledged word among gentlefolk. "But one can give freedom," he said, "one can buy a lark in a cage, but one can open the door and say 'go,' and peradventure the thing will go."

At this Gierrack's anger burnt up, and it showed blackly in his face; yet Jarl would not be quiet. "Lord, Lord," he said, "if your singing bird were to droop behind the bars—if you were left desolate——"

But Gierrack stayed him with the cold loftiness which does away with the bond of man and man, and marks only the gap between servant and lord. "You are over forward of speech," said he, "you mean well, doubtless, but you must learn to leave alone concerns of mine, also you must curb your tongue or, maybe, I shall have it curbed for you."

With that he dismissed him from his presence, as he would have dismissed his words. But they came back to him and back again, and though he would not lend countenance to them, he knew in his heart of

hearts they held some truth. Yet would he not give place to them, for the elf maiden had bewitched him so that he must have her ; and now that it seemed he was about to have her, fairly, squarely, honourably, and in a way none could condemn—now, surely, it was not the time for hesitancy.

So to the little chapel of ease, which lies on the edge of the Forest he went. There was the ceremony performed, with but few witnesses, save some one or two of the Forest folk and, of course, the godly Tobiah. Gierrack cared nothing at all whether those of condition smiled on his match ; he knew very well that his wealth and his power were such that all, high and low, must pay court to her whom he chose for Lady of Moorwood. To-day he wanted them not, he wanted none but his bride and such others as were necessary to make her his. Thus the ceremony was performed in all brevity, and soon the two left the church, man and wife.

At first they must go to the cottage to bid farewell to the dame, afterwards my lord should have home his bride. So it was planned ; but so it did not befall, for when they came to the cot they found the dame gone, without taking leave and that on a journey from which there is no returning, for she lay dead. It seemed she had lived just to the completion of her wishes and then peacefully given up the ghost. An end desired of many, but at times not altogether convenient to survivors. It was not convenient now ; sorely did it put about Gierrack, a man not used to putting about. But he submitted, for he saw he could not, as it were in a breath, take Clois from the cottage of mourning to the house of bridal. Moreover, seeing she was the only one kin to the dead and she desired to remain with her till the burying, he could not require her coming to him on the

morrow. So it befell that after the wedding words were spoken Clois went again to her maiden home and Gierrack returned alone to the great house of Moorwood ; where the servants said what they pleased of this homecoming of groom without bride. Doubtless some soon knew what had befallen, but none spoke of it in the lord's hearing, not even Jar, who served him silently and watched with troubled eyes as if he saw more than ill-omen in this intrusion of death. For Gierrack himself, he was a man who had no regard for omens and would have dared the devil had it suited his purpose ; yet did he find the twilight of that day very cold. Moreover, there haunted him through the night the sight of his bride, the elf maiden, as he last saw her, vanishing among the green gloom of the woods, as it seemed to him in troubled half sleep she would always vanish.

They buried the dame with proper ceremony and the rites of religion, and when all was done Gierrack at last led home his bride. Through the woods and well known forest ways he took her to his own domain, that which lay within his boundary wall, carelessly let the gate fall to behind. It was an early day of August, grey and warm, all the world a little tired ; but Gierrack was not tired, his heart had found youth and triumph, and he was bringing home his elf lady. Thus to the great house he took her and, to himself at least, enthroned her.

Aye, but a throne is a lonesome seat and a crown a weighty thing ! But I think the Lady of Moorwood hardly knew, for she knew not that she had them. She only knew she had striven to deck herself as a wife should for her husband. Docile she was, and gentle, obedient to what she deemed his will, seeking anxiously

to behave as became her position and to fulfil all her part. Grave she was of course, her mother was dead, her old free life left behind ; the green Forest land, the dear Forest ways lay without the wall, near, it is true, but yet far, far off from the life of the Lady of Moorwood.

Thus to the great house there came no fearless wild thing of the woods, no elf at all, only a quiet girl seeking her duty. But Gierrack refused to perceive it ; he told himself she felt strange as yet (he wilfully chose to forget how she had come to his house before, like a butterfly that comes and goes unchecked, by an open window, how then she had not been strange at all). "By and by she will be at home," he told himself, and curbed the passion in his blood, waiting till the strangeness should have worn off to take her in his arms and speak his heart.

So the day passed, he gentle and kind, she anxious to please and to play her part. Servants came and went at her word ; one at her wish set the diamonds in her hair—she thought to pleasure her lord that way. The old hound, Brutus, followed wherever she went, he had at once taken her for lady, and Jarl served when she sat with Gierrack. And ever when he was there he was solemn and watchful, but careful, so careful to avoid his master's eyes. By consent they avoided each other, these two, for Gierrack knew that in the man's eyes he would see what for himself he would not see. Aye, he would not see it ! To himself he swore it was not there, yet he knew in the very oath was admission. In every nerve and every sinew, yea, in his very skin he could feel it, what Jarl had feared had come true—the elf maiden was gone. The wild thing of the woods, the thing of fires and dews and haunting

nights of dreams was gone. She had grown faint and tired, she drooped even as his hand closed upon her ; she had faded just as in green twilights he had seen her vanish into the shadows. He knew it, and could not fail. Then in his heart he swore another oath, a great oath ; he would keep her, he would compel the glad joy of life, he would make her happy yet.

At the end of the long day when the dusk fell, Gier-rack and his bride walked in the gardens, and beyond them to the fishponds where tall trees grew and the woods began. She hesitated when he would have led her to those green places, almost as if she would have gone within doors again. He told himself it was a good sign, a homing sign, as even wise men will, but he was not really deceived. He withstood her wish and took her to the ponds. She talked as they walked, and looked about her hardly at all. At the end they came suddenly upon a vista, dim aisles of greenness dew drenched, the Forest already full of sleep. It was over the boundary wall one saw it first, but it seemed to be close here too, in the good wet smell and the almost noiseless rustle of trees that settle for the night. For a moment Clois saw it, she could not but choose ; her breath came fast and a yearning came into her eyes ; then she turned her head away.

"Shall we not go within doors ?" she said.

But he had seen the yearning. "Go within !" he said. "You would sooner go without, you would soonest go free !"

"No," she said bravely, "I would soonest do your will."

He laughed. "My will is to be your law, my word the bond of your freedom ? You, elf, are to grow woman under the chain of duty ?"

He caught her wrist. "Child," he said, abruptly, 'do you love me?'"

She moved uneasily. "Yes," she said, hesitating, seeking to be truthful. "I—I am grateful indeed."

"Grateful," and he dropped her hand as if it had hurt him. "Tell me this," he said, facing her again, "had your mother died before the ring was on, would you have wed me?"

"Yes," she answered, "I had promised."

"Set the promise aside," he told her, "were there no promise and no need, would you have given me 'yes?'"

Again she moved uneasily. "You had not asked me then," she said.

"That will not serve," he said, "you must give me truth, truth before God, would you have wed me?"

"I would not have wed any."

Quietly she answered, but truly. And never a word spoke he, only bent his head; then moved to the wall. There was a door in it, opening on to the Forest, he unfastened it and set it wide. "Go," said he.

She raised her eyes in wonder. "Do you mean it?" she asked in half-fearing gladness.

"If you choose, I said you should be free."

She drew nearer, a great light in her eyes and in her soul; it seemed to her he had revealed the plan he had all along—to wed her in name and set her free in fact, a plan kept in store as a glad surprise till now. Earer still she drew, there were tears in her eyes, not of sorrow, but of joy to find herself free, to find this man, her best friend, not binding her as another but setting wide the door.

"Oh, I am glad," she said in the soft thrilling voice which had been lost all day, "I did not know before

that you meant this. Thank you, thank you ! Good-bye ! ”

“ Good-bye.”

He stood with the door in his hand and nothing of his swarthy face changed. So he stood till she had passed out and the dog, Brutus, after a backward look, following her. Then he closed the door and went back to the house alone.

In the hallway was Jarl. “ Jarl,” said he as he passed, “ call for the horses and see to the gear, you and I must be off. We’ll be far before sunrise, comrade. Early, you see, I weary of being a married man,” and he laughed. Then he went into his chamber and shut the door.

V

THE NECESSARY INTERVENTION OF TOBIAH
THE DISSENTER

NOW, as has been said, Tobiah the Dissenter disapproved of the marriage of my Lord Gierrack and Clois the elf maiden. Yet when the thing was done and the two one in the eyes of God and the law, the good man was for the carrying out of the bond; he thought it nothing less than shame that husbands and wives should not live together in (more or less) peace if so they had sworn to do. Therefore was he righteously angry when he found that, of this couple, one was off a wandering and fighting in foreign lands according to his old customs, and the other living again in the Forest, even as before. Accordingly he betook himself to the woods, and, after some waste of time and shoeleather, found the cottage and got speech with Mistress Clois. Severely did he speak to her, opening the mind of the Lord to her on subjects matrimonial with force and plainness. She listened to him readily—men say she was a beguilesome listener. The Dissenter waxed eloquent, though he did not perhaps speak with the sharpness he had first intended—she was over young and wild for extreme sharpness. Afterwards he told her that, seeing that she was thus left worse than

widowed, she had better live quietly in some small village house ; striving to lead a godly life of soberness and almsdeeds, as befitted one in her state. This, however, she did not do, although Tobiah, after leaving her, wrote two epistles to her, urging the course upon her and even describing a suitable abode to her. But Clois remained where she was, dwelling in the Forest with old Sarah ; not widowed at all in heart or life, scarcely woman, even very elf maid still.

The August month grew to its zenith of heat. A tempered heat truly in these dense shades, yet hot and silent with a great silence in woods, now almost black, where of late birds had sung ; and in open spaces where the air danced reels over the purple ling. But after long drought rain came, a tempest of rain and wind and zigzag lightning. Fine was it then to see the trees in their full summer leafage caught and lashed ; to hear the wind in them like the wings of giants ; to see them stand, all pale and stark, against the darkness of the sky. Fine, too, the rain, the rain that fell in deluge ; that soothed the tossing tree tops as tears soothe the breaking heart ; that ran down smooth beech trunks in rivers, that lay in pools of silver in every curve and hollow. Ah, but there was a living thing in the woods then ! Then it seemed that once again there were giants on the earth, who laughed and shook and shouted for very joy of strength. Clois heard and rejoiced too ; no fear had she for wind or thunder, no seeking for town shelter when the rain whipped the trees ; rather she was glad with the things of the Forest.

But August drew its close and September came ; blackberries ripened, rose hips reddened, and yellow leaves showed here and there in the thinning trees. Mornings and evenings grew fresh with a sweet chill

freshness, and far into the day the dew was so thick that the grass looked grey. Then the toadstools grew, in damp patches and dry ones, on old tree stumps and living branches, goblin's houses everywhere, red and yellow, brown and white, and rarest violets. And there was sound in the woods ; quiet and vague, yet a soft stirring as if earth waked from afternoon sleep and prepared for the end. Robins piped sweet and shrill, beechnuts cracked and acorns began to fall ; squirrels hurried to and fro in the branches and pheasants might be seen in the bracken. The Forest creatures were astir, setting their affairs in order ; some making ready for flight, some to meet the long siege of the winter, some few bent on no more preparation than sunning themselves in the last of the golden days. Clois made ready for no flight, well content was she with her home in the woods ; she, no more than the hares, had desire or need to flit to the town because winter was coming to the Forest.

So the autumn sped ; and there were days of weeping rain, tears for the good time gone ; but also days of mild and tender sunshine, very gentle, when the shadows were long even at midday, and the sunset light at evening was red as crimson on branch and tree trunk. Forest paths were wet and black with pools upon them ; untrodden now, so that tufts of russet fern stood in the midst of them. And the trees were yellow as gold and the air was often yellow, too, with the fluttering leaves that fell in still weather or windy. It was the season when silly folk in the town say " the year is dying, and death shows everywhere in the forest." But death is not there, only change, and change is life, the first and last law of it. There was life in the Forest in those days ; life in the clean crisp air, in the gray crossed spiders

shaking twinkling webs, in the red ripe berries which fed birds innumerable. Clois found life in it ; no sorrow at all, nor desire for human cheering, rather the very joy of living.

And at last it was winter, the time for those only whose home is the Forest. Like old age it comes, showing truth and the base of true beauty ; loved best by those who know best, and by them loved dearly. Away now with garlands and garments of leaves, each tree stands forth perfect in the perfection of symmetry. Away with bridal white and gay green and gorgeous triumphant gold, trees are black now or stark gray, and brown when massed together with the sun warming their high tops ruddily. On the wooded hills there is a blue that is smoky, and the valleys are violet with shadow, and every pond is a mirror as of polished steel reflecting the pale sky, the dead rushes, all things icily. Truly it is a good time in the Forest, a time of peace and wide views and far seeing. This until the snow comes and the white hoar frost which in one night turns all to fairy land. Have you ever see it ? All the woods wrapped in a white, white garment, every tree trunk snow trimmed where the wind has blown cold kisses to it ; and every twig and every spray and every drooping grass blade and broken fern stalk ice-jewelled, glittering white ; each dead thing transfigured, even as we shall be at the blessed resurrection. But always this sight is wrapped in mist and mystery, which shifts and shifts and shows fresh vistas. Sometimes the sun looks out for a little and the whole is seen as a vision radiant ; but anon it is gone, mist hiding it as the cloud wraps from sight that which is too glorious. All these things saw Clois, and at this season her heart was joined yet more closely to the

heart of the woods, very far was she from need of the human.

But when spring returned something began to wake in her, a thing that stirred and wanted she knew not what. Restlessly she wandered the Forest ways; restlessly sought, without finding, the old peace and joy that dwelt there. The voice of the spring time called loudly to her; of old it had called only to life and joy and the dance of the sunbeams; now it called in a tongue she did not know, a tongue that was not all joy; no, nor yet all pain. Hungry she went, as one who hungers in sleep and knows not what is amiss. Maybe some thought of the spring that was gone, and the man who then had walked the Forest way came to her, one cannot tell, the mind of a maid is past the fathoming of any; only sometimes she talked aloud to Brutus, the old hound, who had ever remained with her. At last on a day she met with a thing that for a time appeased her heart hunger, and yet (as is the way with that complaint) increased the appetite it fed. On this day she found a child wandering in the wood, a little lad, he was, of perhaps three years; he had wandered from some woodcutter's hut and lost himself chasing the butterflies. He had wandered far and wept much, and at last, tired out, laid down to sleep among the blue bells and tight curled fern. When Clois saw him thus she stopped, for the thing in her heart pulled suddenly. Softly, softly she drew near, as she would have done to the young fawns; but when she was near a twig beneath her foot snapped and the child woke. She spoke to him coaxingly, drawing nearer. Soon she was kneeling beside him, caressingly she whispered, watching him the while as one watches a thing one means to make captive and half fears to frighten away.

"Ah, sweet, art lost in the wood?" she said softly. "And hast been weeping? Poor littleling."

And then suddenly her arms were round him and she had him prisoner. But he did not scream and struggle to escape or even shrink away from her as she feared, but instead put a fat arm about her neck and said in baby talk that he was hungry.

At that she laughed, a soft glad gurgle, such as men seldom hear, for only women give it, and that rarely, and when they think themselves alone with a babe.

Swiftly she rose to her feet, swiftly carried him away in strong young arms, laughing for very joy as she bore him home. All that day she kept him with her, talked to him, sang to him, played with him. At evening she undressed him and, marvelling at his baby beauty, put him in her own bed and slept the night with him upon her arm. On the morrow it was the same; when silly Sarah said something of seeking the mother, she forbade her. She silenced conscience with the thought that the mother could not want the child as she wanted; moreover, since she had found him, she would keep him at least till called upon to render him up. So that day went as the other, and if the boy cried for his mammy she comforted him and told him ever a more wonderful tale or showed him a more wonderful play, and fed him with honey-sweet things. At night he again lay in her arms; but even while he lay there her heart hunger stirred again, she knew that it was not appeased by this as it had at first seemed; it had but grown stronger, perhaps even it was taking shape.

On the next day the mother came, tearful and distracted, seeking, with hardly a hope of finding, news of

her lost child. At the sight of the woman and the sound of the homely voice, the boy forgot the tales and the play, forgot everything, and ran to her crying and laughing. And Clois stood silent, ashamed to have caused suffering by withholding him so long ; abashed, too, by the new thing in her soul, and stricken with a great loneliness. But the mother, no more than the child, knew that ; she only was grateful for the care he had received and went away glad indeed. And silly Sarah did not know ; only Brutus, the dog, put his nose in the girl's hand and they went out together into the living wood, of old so companionable.

Now, all through these months, Tobiah the Dissenter had been following his godly way, reprimanding the unrighteous, exhorting all and sundry to virtuous ways, and with strength and might forcibly persuading sheep into the true fold. He had not of late visited the girl, Clois, he had many matters on his hands, and though he was somewhat vexed with her for not following his sound advice and coming to dwell in a more seemly place, he felt he did not as yet understand her matter fully. So for the time being he forbore to urge her, waiting for some light. This he did the more readily that it was well-nigh impossible, for one not Forest born, to get to the cot in winter ; also there were matters of grave import toward in the town which fully occupied his mind. However, when spring returned and was well advanced, the grave business was overpassed and Tobiah bethought him again of Mistress Clois. At that time news reached to him that my Lord Gierrack was again at Moorwood ; also that he was sick and so could not, as aforetime, avoid virtuous persons who came to him.

To the great house at Moorwood, accordingly, Tobiah betook himself. Yet did he not see the master, for word was brought him that he was sick to death.

"Of what sickness?" Tobiah asked.

"Of a low fever caught in foreign lands," the servant made answer, "he has but come home to die."

Tobiah frowned; and while he doubted if this were indeed truth or some ruse to deceive him, Jarl came forth.

Jarl had heard that Tobiah was without, and at the name a thought had come to him, so now he sought the worthy Dissenter. This Jarl, though his lord always spoke to him in his native tongue, knew enough of our language for him and Tobiah to be able to understand one another.

There was one question only he wanted answered, and he put it at once:—"Dost know where she is?"

"Who?" demanded Tobiah.

"She whom my lord married, he calls her the elf lady."

"Certainly I do," Tobiah replied. "None better."

"Ah!" cried Jarl. "You can find her? You will bring her here?"

Tobiah rubbed his chin. "Her place is here, certainly," he said, "since he married her." He looked round about him at the fair and spacious house and recalled what he knew of the high Lord Gierrack, and it seemed to him likely the great man might have small wish to have his wood wife always here. "It is never my rule to interfere in the connubial affairs of any," said he, "neither in the parting nor the coming together of the unevenly yoked; but certainly this is a truth not to be controverted—if a man marries he must cleave

to his wife, even if he is not over fain to have her."

But Jarl's acquaintance with our simple language was not such that he could follow this speech easily, nor had he patience now to stay picking out all the meaning, the end he lay hold of, that and that only.

"Fain?" he said. "Ask you, sir, if my lord is fain for her? She would be life to him!"

"How!" cried Tobiah surprised.

"The joy of it would stir him to life," the other returned, "if he saw her, if he thought she came of her will to him!"

"Poof! Her will? What nonsense is this? Tell me," he said suspiciously, for he recalled Gierrack's pursuit of the girl and was at a loss to understand. "Tell me, if your lord was so set on her, why did he let her go when he had her?"

"Her heart was not here, nor her desire," Jarl answered.

But with this Tobiah was not satisfied: "I must have explanation," he said.

"Nay!" Jarl cried—he was consumed with trouble and impatience. "Nay, but fetch her!"

"By no means," Tobiah made answer. "Not until I am satisfied and see plainly what the Lord would have me to do. Do you think the man of God is to be hustled into a business without knowing the rights and wrongs thereof? I will hear the whole of it"; and he sat himself down.

And Jarl, understanding at least the meaning of the sitting down, perceived clearly that without the time waste of an explanation Tobiah would do nothing. And since that without Tobiah he had small hope of getting the elf maiden, he also saw that he must make what

explanation he could ; so then and there he told what had befallen as he knew it. He did not know the whole, nor did he tell what he knew in the finest way ; yet it bore the stamp of truth, and from its very simpleness argued well with Tobiah. When he had done, the good man rose in some wrath.

"I see plainly that I have erred," said he. "Little need was there indeed that I should have striven to protect this Clois from my Lord Gierrack, very good protection could she give herself from any. And for him. Truly I have wronged him ! His sole fault has been he was too soft with the baggage ! Needed freedom, did she ? Needed liberty, her will and her head ! It was a good ash twig she needed, laid about her shoulders !"

The worthy man turned to the door. "I go now to fetch the hussy," he said ; "the way is long and the day already advanced ; it may be late before I return, but you may be sure she will be with me."

"I will watch for you, sir," Jarl said. "I will watch in the chamber where my lord lies ; it looks to the trees and has a window low down ; it is the one where he first brought her ; that is why he fancied it now."

"As like as not," Tobiah made answer ; "there are fools in this world."

"Do you think she will come ?" Jarl said, following him out. "You can persuade her so that she comes freely ?"

"Assuredly," Tobiah replied, "I can persuade her ; she'll be here before midnight, do I bring her tied neck and crop and slung on my back like a sack of malt," and with that he departed.

The day had been but indifferent fine ; there had

been rain in the afternoon, but about twilight it slackened and ceased, so that the worthy Tobiah, who went with all the speed he could, reached the cottage in the wood not more than moderately wet. Arrived there he found Clois within. She professed herself pleased to see him, though regretful that he should be wet on her account ; but he did not respond to her solicitude for his wetness nor other welcome.

"Look you," said he, standing before her grim and accusing ; "I have spoken to you more than once, and that plainly, as to the duty of wives."

"Yes, dear sir," she answered demurely, but with the mirthful light twinkling like sunlight in her eyes. "Yes, you have, but I hope you will tell me all over again."

"No, I will not," Tobiah retorted. It was seldom he refused to give exhortation to any, but he had no notion to bandy talk with this maiden of the brown eyes. Peradventure, he found it easier to make words sharp to her, if he also made them few. "I come now," said he, "to see that you do your duty. Get you ready, Mistress, and come with me to your husband."

"My husband !" she cried, "Why he is——"

"He is in his great house a-dying," Tobiah said, "and so far gone is he, and besotted in his brains, that they have some hope the sight of you would please him."

He spoke plainly as befitted the matter, but the girl's face went white.

Dying ? He could not be dying, this strong man ; always he had seemed to her so strong, so much alive ; it were as easy to think of herself dead, or the sun dead as he.

"Oh, no," she said, "no, it cannot be !"

"Most assuredly it can," Tobiah told her—he thought she said "no" to his order to come. "You will certainly accompany me and that speedily."

"Why, yes, if he wants me," she said rising; "but is it true?"

"True that he is dying," Tobiah answered, "and likely enough true that he wants you; seeing he doated upon you in health, it is not to be expected he has come to his wits in sickness. Had you done your duty, Mistress, this would not have happened; he would never have gone to foreign parts had you abode with him as a wife should."

But at this she protested.

"That could not have been," she said, "he did not think of it; he only wed me to let me go free."

"Ho!" said Tobiah, with scorn. "Is that for why men usually wed women? Is it for that, you suppose, the Lord of Moorwood was wasting good days, aye, and weeks too, wandering the Forest. For that he stooped to make you wife—you—when he might have had as good as any in the land? I know you to be but poorly taught, Mistress, and perhaps of a somewhat simple sort, but I scarce think you so great a fool as to believe this, unless you were anxious to do it."

So Tobiah spoke; but she did not answer, she was recalling past words, past acts, and in the light of the something which had grown in her heart of late interpreting them to herself.

"Did he want me to stay, then?" she asked softly. "Did he care that I should go away?"

"In good sooth he did," Tobiah retorted, "folly though it seems. I have no patience with this love; it makes men very blockheads; even taking from them the sense to compass their own ends! Verily I would

know better what to do with a woman than these lovers ! Give you freedom, give you liberty, fear to frighten you ! A box on the ear, and (being carnally inclined) a kiss on the lip is what he should have given you, then you would have known his mind and your own too. Get your cloak ! ”

She went hastily to fetch it and Tobiah muttered : “ A butterfly and a wild bird, quotha ? It is a wild wench she is, and naughty at that.” But the tone of the saying was not so wrathful. The worthy Tobiah was ever ready to believe that some men might find it easier to overlook the shortcomings of Clois than of several, at least in her presence. The which belief showed no weakness in him, nothing in fact—unless, perhaps, that it is a mistake of Providence to give any maiden eyes like to the wishing pool which is by Tristram’s tree.

In a little Tobiah and the girl had started, and though it was by now quite dark she easily led to the greater paths that intersected the Forest. Swiftly she went, so fast that had not Tobiah been a mighty man of his feet he would have had ado to keep up with her. As it was, he not only did that, but also had breath for some suitable admonitions by the way. To these Clois said nothing at all, but walked beside him as quiet as the dog Brutus who followed ; and though there was fear and anxiety in her heart, yet her steps kept pace to a bubbling well of joy ; which was strange indeed and quite new. But when they neared their journey’s end the fear got the better of the joy, and she asked—

“ Is it true that he is dying ? Nay, he cannot really die.”

“ That he certainly can,” said Tobiah ; “ he is mortal, and if it is not this time, why then it is another.

But touching this time, I cannot say, the uncouth, serving man—an honest fellow—said he lay dying, but he seemed to have hopes the sight of you would do good. A strange medicine certainly, but the Lord uses poor instruments at times, so may be there is hope."

"Oh, yes, there is hope," she said, "I think there must be hope." She spoke softly more to herself than him, and her voice, all tender and fluty, had a new lilt in it.

Tobiah snorted, but whether at her folly or perhaps some trace of it in himself for not more sharply condemning hers is not quite certain. Soon after they drew near the house.

"That is the chamber," Tobiah said, pointing to the outline of a window, all black and scarcely now to be distinguished from the wall. "The serving man said he would watch from thence, but now he will not see us, so we must go to the door and announce ourselves."

"Yes," Clois said, but she did not do it; even as she spoke she broke away and sped off across the grass.

"Heh!" began Tobiah, and would have followed, but he saw her on the terrace, a dim figure barely to be seen, pausing by a window. For a little she paused, then she slipped in, and the good man turned him about and, instead of following, set to pacing the grass watchfully. The rain began again, but that he did not regard; he perceived plainly that his duty, now that he had her within the house, was to see that she did not again escape from it.

Within the chamber there was only one who looked for the coming of any, and that one had long given up

all thought of seeing them in the soft blackness of the night. Jarl had not spoken of the hope he cherished to his lord, fearing lest it should come to naught. He only sat listening, though in time he forgot even that by reason of his grief. When darkness fell he moved to kindle lights, but Gierrack stayed him.

"Let be a while," said he weakly, yet withal in the old light way as if nothing mattered greatly. "You have many hours of light, you can spare one to darkness, and for me—doubtless I would do well to use me to it, seeing it would seem I shall soon have done with the ways of the sun."

He laughed the ghost of his short laugh, and Jarl drew nearer, speechless. The gloom deepened and neither servant nor lord had ought to say, yet the lord knew the dumb grief that could find no utterance.

"Jarl, old dog," he said at last, "art sorrowing? Why, man, it was never our way to weep for good blood spilt, good wine drunk, or good hours spent! I have lived my life—a short life, perhaps, but long enough. If it is over I am ready; I have had my share of joying and fighting and doing, and sorrowing too, maybe, and if the gold thread of a woman's love ran short in my days, it was no shorter than my deserts; while for the man's love"—the hand crept out and lightly touched the servant's bent head—"I have had more than my deserts of that."

"Lord, lord!" Jarl said brokenly.

"What if these leeches and apothecaries be right?" Gierrack said after a little. "What then? Why grieve for that? You are your own master. Sorrowing to be free, comrade? Pooh! that's a poor stuff. Sorrowing for me, maybe? That's poor, too; a man can but die once, and I'd as soon now as later—sooner

I think. The old things have lost their savour ; I'm growing old, Jarl, old ; things are not to me what they were of yore." His voice died away, but soon he spoke again. " We had one bout together, one to remember—last winter—I'm glad we had it. 'Twas a good fight—I'd as soon have died fighting—it is a poor end, this—yet the best, perhaps ; no otherwise could I have come back to the forest, no otherwise have heard the trees." He raised himself a little. " They sound plainly, to-night ; set the window open. Ah, the good wet smell ! a man would linger a moment from death for that."

Jarl set the window wide, then moved nearer ; his lord was speaking.

" If the last comes, Jarl, and the end, as they say—bury me under the trees. Fight the bishop and the parsons for my carcase if need be, but bear me off, old pagan, away from their stifling churches to the forest. Bury me deep, under the beeches—God's there, I think, I found Him, God in the forest. She will come there, maybe, unthinking—come at twilight—my little elf lady——"

" I have come—I have come to you, your wife—no elf lady ! "

A sob like the sob of the night wind, the words came from out of the sweet-smelling darkness. And out of the darkness a figure took shape and entered. Swift it came, swift and light as a wild thing, into the room of shadows.

" Oh, live for me, live for me, do not leave me ! " it prayed him, and young arms, still damp with the damp of the forest, were stretched out, pleading.

He took them and put them about his neck and they clung there.

"Elf lady!" he said, and drew her closer. "Elf lady, have you come to me? Do you love me?"

"Aye, I love you," she whispered, and lay on his breast, no elf, just a woman.

The Peace of the Narraways

My Lord Gierrack, as is well known to all and sundry in our town and its environs, did not die of the fever which had brought him so low. On the contrary, he recovered and afterwards presented his lady to all persons, of condition and otherwise, in entertainments of great pomp. But very soon they wearied of such state and ceremony, and before long were away to her ; for always there was something that was strange about them—that is, as our beefy folk count strangeness. Something that was secret and almost sacred in their life and their joy, as if in far woods they had found some old fount of a lost spring and drunk thereof. And so men called her the Elf Lady of Moorwood. There had been Ladies Elizabeth and Ladies Kate, their faces hung, a simpering row on the great house walls ; but she was ever the Elf Lady, then and in all tales aft ; for none ever knew her fully, save only her dear lord, and he too betook somewhat of her strangeness.

But what of that ? What if they were not quite as others are, if they liked less the rout and ball and the company of their fellows than God's green earth ? Are they the worse for that ? In this world there is room for the lion and the singing lark ; yea, even for the wild ass and the eagle, as well as the necessary bull and the barn-door hen. Though, peradventure, these last two, having but a circumscribed vision, seldom see the others and yet more seldom see the need of them.

But Tobiah the Dissenter understood these things better ; he saw plainly that Gierrack and the elf maiden were matched and mated ; and though, perhaps, not sheep of his flock, yet none the less sheep of another fold, and "meet for the Master's purpose." Also, and this pleased the good man well, he saw that by this matching and mating there would be an end to the smelling of Charles Christopher. Of this he was glad, for though he had per-

ceived the necessity and justification of it earlier, he was satisfied that it should no longer be. It ceased, and my Lord Gierrack caused a hearth to be set up for his lady nearer to the great house ; and there smelting went right merrily under direction of Poucher Joe and in accordance with the prescription of the dead philosopher, my lady's father. And if Charles Christopher prospered no more, what then ? He was a rich man and mean, and retired to count the coin he had and curse the secret he had not. And if James-from-the-Town were thrown out of work, what then ? He retired likewise—to his old way of life—and much happier, and scarcely less virtuous, was he than in earning his bread by the sweat of his brow and telling lies the while.

Secing all these things, Tobiah was well pleased with the work of that spring evening when he waited with patience while the elf lady and her lord exchanged confidences in few words ; and Jarl and the dog Brutus exchanged them also, in even fewer. The worthy Dissenter procured for himself a cold in the head by reason of the rain on that occasion, but that was a small matter and one of which he counted nothing. With a cheerful and a satisfied heart did he blow his nose, for he saw plainly that the Lord had been with him in this as He also was in the next connubial matter in which the good man was concerned—to wit, the Peace of the Narraways.

In that affair of the Narraways some may think he exalted the will of the wife above that of the husband—which is unsecmly—yet was it not truly so. It was the cause of righteousness which he exalted, and the establishment of peace was the eventual result of his intervention.



I

THE BETROTHAL AND THE NECESSARY ACTION OF TOBIAH THE DISSENTER

“**B**EHOLD how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity,” but certainly it is rare ; among the Narraways it is so rare that their times of unity are as islands in an ocean of discord. In public and in private they have fallen out, over small things and over large ; two even went to law, while a third, old George Edward, conducted the case and made some profit thereby. But in the course of years their quarrels lessened, for certain of them died, and at last there were only Daniel and Nathaniel left ; and these two, who had not spoken the one to the other for long, finally made peace for a little. This was in April, and so monstrous peaceful were they that nothing would do but they must eat a dinner together to celebrate their unity. Mrs. Bridget, Daniel’s wife, was not all for having the dinner ; she had not lived twenty years with her good man without knowing folks could fall out at table. However, she did not withstand him ; the wives of the Narraways seldom withstood their lords, the said lords usually wedding women of a meek and gentle spirit. Once and once only did Mrs. Bridget raise a protest against the will of her spouse, concerning what and how it befell this tale will show.

Well, the dinner was ordered, and great were the preparations made in lawyer Daniel's kitchen. Mistress Narraway was here and there, and monstrous busy, ably assisted by her daughter Meg, a wayward girl just kissing ripe. In time all was done, and the two ladies, having put on their finery, sat them in the best parlour, where a small fire burned bashfully, shy of finding itself on that unusual hearth. Soon Nathaniel arrived and his meek wife Mary and their son Nat, a young man this much older than Meg that he found her marvellous interesting. Daniel came bustling in from the office at sound of the visitor's wheels, and there were very hearty hand-shakings. Then sundry mild cousins arrived; they had been bidden by Daniel who so overflowed with the milk of human kindness now that he would have the poor relations also to share.

The last of these being come, to table they went. Peace reigned through the dinner, though it was a long affair; Mrs. Bridget felt happy in her mind when she with the women folk left the men to the wine. Meg came to the parlour with her elders, but she did not stay long; soon she slipped out and was seen no more. Nat also slipped out from the dining-room. He was little more than a youth, and one may presume he had not yet come to a proper appreciation of port, prince of wines. In the parlour Mistress Mary and the others conversed in seemly fashion of preserves and furbelows, the transgressions of serving maids and the deeds good and bad—mostly bad—of their lords. Close they sat together, their heads nid-nodding. They had just got to the part in the talk when one says "Since the girl is not here I may tell you," when they heard a sound of discord from the dining-room.

Through two shut doors it came—

“T’was the fourth of March!”

“The fifth, I tell you.”

“The fifth? Why, it was a Tuesday; d’ye think I don’t know Tuesday from Wednesday?”

“Tuesday and Wednesday is neither here nor there!” so the other shouted, “I say it was the fifth, and I’ll prove it!”

“Prove it, then!” cried the first. “Prove it! I’ll not believe a word you say!”

“Not——”

“No! Weren’t you called as a boy ‘Liar Nat’?”

At this there was a roar, though the ladies still made out an answer which held the retort “Lawyer Dan!”

They rose to their feet, but before they were fairly on them the door burst open and the brothers came in.

“Get your cloak, wife!” thundered Nathaniel. “Come, off with you, there’s no knowing how we’ll be fleeced if we stop here.”

“Call your cub too,” Daniel said grimly, as Mrs. Mary scurried away; “you’re forgetting him; mighty convenient, no doubt, but I warn you he’ll find no kennelling here.”

“Good Lord!” Nathaniel cried. “D’ye think I’d leave him here? Like as not he’s already in your girl’s clutches. I suppose you thought to make a match between ’em!”

“I’d wed her to the hangman first!” so her father declared, and Nathaniel doubtless had an answer ready, but before he could utter it the missing youth and maiden appeared, escorted by one of the cousins, who had found them in the still-room or some other place where they had little business to be. It is to be noted that neither of the two looked sheepish or crest-

fallen, but rather angry and determined, from which one may judge both carried a good deal of the father in them.

But now came Mistress Mary with her cloak all awry, and off the party started without so much as waiting for the chaise to come to the door, and thus ended the Narraways' dinner of peace-making.

Both Daniel and Nathaniel were Dissenters, very regular in their attendance at our meeting-room. On the Sunday next following Daniel, accompanied by his wife and Meg, walked with dignity to the meeting and seated himself on the front bench on the left. Nathaniel, accompanied by his wife and Nat, drove the two miles which lay between his cloth mill and the town, and, after stabling his beast, walked also into the room and sat himself on the front bench on the right. Neither brother looked at the other; neither wife did; neither dared. But with the young people it was different, they looked and looked; and though on that Sunday they were content with exchanging glances, one cannot be sure, seeing the stuff they came of, how long they would remain thus.

On the next Sunday Jane, a serving maid at the lawyer's, had a note and a silver piece in her hand before she left the meeting-room; and if she kept the piece it is thought she did not keep the note. About this season Me^r took to walking abroad on the afternoon of the Sabbath, accompanied by Jane, and always at the hour when her father slept after the fatigues of Sunday dinner, and her mother, after a glass of cordial to fortify herself, retired to her chamber—to read sermons it is thought. It perhaps should be said that Nathaniel Narraway always spent the whole Sabbath in our town, dining with some friend or at the inn, so

as to be present at the second meeting for prayer and praise. Nat also took to walking o' afternoons at this season, doubtless for exercise—the spring is ever a pleasant season for such things.

For a time all went pleasantly as a wedding bell, towards which indeed matters might seem to be tending. But it befell on a Sunday in June that an old friend of Nathaniel's must needs bid Nat spend the afternoon at his house. The young man did his best to avoid the unwelcome kindness, but finding that of no avail he was compelled to write to his love, telling her how he could not that day glad his eyes with the sight of her. The note, made as small as might be, he contrived to slip into her hand as she came into meeting. This was done unobserved, but alack and alas! No sooner was she in her seat than her father sighted the small pink missive hid in the glove she held.

He could hardly believe his eyes considering the past propriety of his daughter's conduct and the nature of the place, almost under the eye of the Lord as it were. But in spite of surprise he acted promptly, his hand closed on the girl's and he held it fast, glove and all. She made no outcry, remembering the place, but with her free hand attacked his in a vicious and unseemly manner. The attack was unexpected and made him slightly loose his hold so that she managed to wriggle free, leaving him only the glove and no note within.

"Give it me," he said in a terrible whisper for he saw it between two fingers. "Give it me!" and he snatched.

For answer she put it in her mouth.

Then he forgot decorum, he forgot where he was and how the folk looked upon him. He caught the girl by the back of the neck and would have pinched her

cheeks as one pinches a choked cat, only she kept her head down.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Mistress Bridget. "Does she faint? Does she swoon?"

The which deceived some of the neighbours, and at the same time gave the girl an idea. Struggling from her father's clutches—he had half turned at his wife's words, in part recalled to his whereabouts, and some small sense of propriety—she slipped to the floor as if in truth she did swoon. She lay there, with head well under the bench, and chewed, and chewed, and chewed. Soon they had her out to the air, tending her as if she had a fit, and of a truth she was wellnigh choked, for she had swallowed down all the note.

You can guess that her father was angry; he had never in his life been defied before, and though he loved the girl dearly it was with a love perhaps a thought tyrannical. He was furious indeed, and he chid and he questioned and he swore; but he took nothing by it, for the girl showed herself very undutiful, told naught, hid the name of her lover, and let no fact out except by accident that the lover was no new one and the note a long way from the first communication she had had from him; some folks have said Meg Narraway was a chip of the old block, but there ever will be those who see strange family likenesses.

"To your chamber you go, wench," the lawyer said at last, "and there you will stay till you are of a better mind."

And when Meg was gone he spent a while rating his wife for having brought up the girl amiss; afterwards he announced the remedy—she must be married, and that at once to some suitable person. Having said this, and Mistress Bridget of course agreeing, he cast

about in his mind for such an one, and his choice fell on Solomon Maxworthy, the vintner.

Now Solomon, as all know, was no youth ; he would never see fifty or his feet again in this dispensation ; nevertheless he had ever a roving eye for a fair face, and at that time an amorous kindness for pretty Meg. It is doubtful, though, if he had come to the point of asking for her, but two things helped him. His sister, Mistress Matilda, had been called to tend an aged relative. A grand manager was Matilda, and a woman who knew her mind and could speak it ; for twenty odd years she had kept the vintner's house, but this June it chanced she was compelled to leave him for a while. That was one thing that helped the worthy man to make up what he called his mind. The other was that, as he sipped his port that Sunday afternoon, there came to him lawyer Narraway with the proposal that he should wed the girl. And considering old friendship and the maid's dower and her fair and dainty self, and his own sentiments to boot, it is not wonderful that Solomon felt a warming of his heart and a youthful sprightliness at the suggestion. Over another bottle of the choice wine all was soon settled, even to the day of the wedding, which the friends agreed had best be soon—not later than Monday week.

Home came the lawyer very well pleased, and at once broke the news to his wife. But she was not pleased ; to her it seemed a cruel thing that her sweet pretty Meg, all full of life and youth, should be wed to the staid and paunchy vintner, worthy man and well provided though he might be. So strongly did she feel it that she up and told her lord. This was the one and only time when she did gainsay him, but she did do it now, and though with tears, yet also with the

heat and flutter of an angry hen. Of course it was of no avail, and at the end at her husband's bidding she dried her eyes and went to tell the girl of the fate in store for her, but all the same there was rebellion and sorrow in her heart.

"Marry Master Maxworthy!" cried Meg, when she heard the news, and her face went white, though her lips were set too straight to tremble much. "I won't. Never! Never!"

"Oh, my dear!" sighed her mother; "oh, my dear, dear love! Your father says it; I fear it must be," and she dissolved once more into tears.

Meg walked the room like a little wild thing. "I won't" and "I won't" was all she could say, and her mother could only weep. Nevertheless they were some comfort to one another, for at the end of the walking and weeping they kissed tenderly, though neither saw any way to avoid the fate.

On the morrow came Tobiah the Dissenter to inquire into the cause of Meg's seizure and hear how she fared. Mistress Narraway told him she was well enough, and then, the poor soul being very unhappy and rebellious and also being ever one who sought sympathy, she out with the whole, including the lawyer's remedy of marrying the girl to Solomon Maxworthy.

"Tut! Tut! Tut!" said Tobiah. "What do the dotard's think about? Marry the girl forsooth! It is a whipping she wants, not an husband; that and some work to do. She has been overfed and under-worked, mistress—pampered."

At this Mistress Bridget bridled and almost found the courage to defend her daughter against the Dissenter, but not quite, for she held the worthy man in awe.

And he, unmindful of her, went on to speak of Solomon Maxworthy.

"A fool!" he said; "I ever knew him for that, but I scarce thought the depths of his folly would reach thus far—to take a young wife at his age!"

"Yes, indeed!" says Mistress Bridget, and went all over her troubles again.

Tobiah did not give great heed to her, but when he was ready spoke of his own thoughts.

"See you here," he said, "I do not hold with putting a spoke in the wheel of any married man; still less do I hold with advancing the will of the wife against that of the husband; nevertheless there are times and seasons. This public folly, which is like enough also to turn to a public scandal, must be prevented. It is not, mistress, to advance you or to despise your husband that I concern myself in the matter; rather it is at the dictates of common sense and to advance the cause of righteousness. Something must be done to stay this ill-considered match; the Lord will reveal to me what."

But it was some while before the revelation was made, for the earlier of Tobiah's efforts were without avail. In the first instance he went, as straight dealing men would, to the lawyer. But no Narraway yet was open to reason, and the sole result was that Daniel lost mastery of his temper and his tongue and, with unseemly heat, warned the Dissenter to leave alone these concerns which were not his.

"That which concerns the soul-welfare of the flock concerns me," Tobiah returned, "for the crook has been put in my hand by the Lord, and shall I not use it?"

"Do you use it on me and mine," retorted the lawyer, "then I use certain powers you wot of which have been

put into my hand and you quit your house this day week."

Now this ejectment was a thing Master Narraway could very well do, for of late, through the lapsing of sundry titles, some several houses—that wherein Tobiah dwelt among them—had come into his hands. It may seem to some a matter of small moment where a man should live ; and, indeed, it is somewhat surprising that one so austere as Tobiah should concern himself therewith, yet so it was. The narrow yellow house wherein he dwelt was very pleasing to him ; it had come to fit him as a shell a walnut, and he was more than loth to quit it ; nay, it would have been pain and grief to do so. Nevertheless he was not one to let his personal desires stand in the way of duty, nor yet one to be put about by threats, even such as this which could be fulfilled. Rather these things provoked him to righteous anger.

"What !" cried he, "do you threaten me ! Do you think with the trickery of the law to hold the arm of Grace ! No, no, Master Lawyer ! Quit my house I may, but quit protesting against the folly of fools and the wrongdoing of the wicked I will not ! You must do as your conscience directs you—if that its voice is not too parchment bound to make itself heard. I do as mine directs me, and the direction is towards that fat fool Solomon Maxworthy, whither I now go."

"If you go," roared the lawyer, "you most certainly shall quit your house, and that I swear."

But Tobiah, having admonished him against swearing, departed at once for the vintner's. And on that same night he received notice to quit.

The week wore through, the cause of sense, to all seeming, little prospered—the which is not unusual in

this generation. Tobiah made sundry impressions on Solomon, it is true, but the lawyer afterwards erased them and remade the former ones, and preparations for the marriage went on. Mistress Bridget gave up hope, and, indeed, began to lose the edge of her distress in the pleasurable bustle of preparations for a bridal. Meg said naught and did naught either; only her face had lost its roses and gone white and thin. All the week she was kept mewed within the house with never a chance to get speech with any save her mother and her father, and her lover dwelt two good miles away and could not know the fate which threatened her till the Sabbath brought him into the town. One hope she had, and only one. It was centred in the serving maid Jane, if the wench had but the sense, the courage and kindness to come below her mistress' window when Saturday night grew dark—if she would take up the note which would flutter to her then, and dare to carry it to the meeting-room to-morrow and slip it into Nat's hand! One may well believe that the poor little bride-to-be sat long by her chamber window that Saturday night, with her note, damp with tears and crushed shapeless by nervous fingers clenched tight in her hand.

Sunday came and the folk went to meeting. Meg securely locked in, stayed at home; the which was a disappointment to those who were anxious to stare at her. Most of the folk knew of the wedding fixed for to-morrow, and many were bidden to it; some thought the match an ill-assorted one, some blamed the lawyer for it, some the girl, saying Miss would rue the day when she chose gold and gear rather than some lover with youth and heart.

But besides the wedding the folk had another matter

whereon to think that Sabbath—I mean other than those things proper to the day, whereon it is to be feared they did not all think as they should. It was generally known to the flock that to-morrow Tobiah was compelled to quit his house and that by action of lawyer Narraway ; it was thought the Dissenter might in consequence hold forth on some suitable topic as, “Woe unto them that join house to house !” But he did not, the text of his discourse was of another kind.

There was one who came into our town not long before the hour of the discourse, that was Mistress Matilda Maxworthy. She being a strict woman, given to the observing of the Sabbath, was not one to journey on that holy day ; nevertheless on this day she did journey. A message had come to her, by whom sent and under what circumstances did not appear, bidding her hasten home as her brother had urgent need of her. On receipt of this the good woman, concerned for his wellbeing and burning curious as to the nature of his distress, set out at once. She would have arrived yester evening but an accident on the way detained her, so that she was forced to spend the night at an inn and finish her journey this morning. But having respect to the day, and not choosing to induce another to break its rest on her account, she finished it on foot, arriving at our town in the sunny quiet of Sabbath morn. It was the hour when the streets are decorous empty and dogs doze at the corners, and those folk who are not busy with prayer and praise are much concerned with the preparations for Sunday dinner.

Mistress Maxworthy naturally chose retired ways to come at her brother's house. Now the meeting-room is in a retired and back street ; the door stood wide open that morning to let in the summer airs. One passing

might see some of the folk within, although they, owing to the position of the door, could not well see out. As Mistress Matilda drew near she heard Tobiah's voice—announcing the subject matter of his discourse—

“1 Corinthians vii. 27: ‘Art thou bound to a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not to be bound’; with special reference to the latter part thereof, and some consideration of Amos iii. 3: ‘Can two walk together unless they be agreed?’ and also reflections on the ‘hoary head,’ which the wise man calls a crown of glory when coupled with righteousness and wisdom, but which is a fool’s cap to folly grown incurable in age; with some concluding thoughts on the homely saying, ‘There is no fool like an old fool.’”

Thus Tobiah giving the headings of his discourse and Mistress Maxworthy, hearing him, paused to look at the folk, curious to know what and who had inspired the Dissenter with this subject. At that moment her brother turned, and she saw his face; and the heart in her, like Nathan the prophet to King David, said “Thou art the man!”

Tobiah’s discourse that day was a monstrous fine and moving one. It roused many folk, some of the young and giddy even to feelings akin to decorous mirth. Lawyer Narraway it moved to wrath and indignation; poor Mistress Bridget to something like fear; and Solomon to great discomfort and discomposure of mind and features. Indeed, so put about and out of countenance was the vintner that after the meeting was done he would have sneaked off home without waiting to exchange greetings with any of those who had a pleasant word to say to him about to-morrow. But Narraway was of another sort; he waylaid his

son-in-law that was to be, and spoke with him of his indignation and also satisfaction in the thought of the retribution that to-morrow should bring to Tobiah. Other friends and neighbours soon joined themselves to the two, and with suitable jests and greetings heartened Solomon somewhat.

In fair spirits again did he at last betake himself home. By the time he was within his house he was moderately cheerful, and when he opened the parlour door he even hummed a "fol-de-rol" to himself like (or somewhat like) a youth gay and debonnair. But the "fol-de-rol" died on his lips and left him standing with mouth ajar, for on the table before him there lay a sky blue coat which some one had brought from a cupboard above. It was prepared over against to-morrow, and yesterday he had himself lain it away; but here it was now. Beside it lay somewhat which also had been yesterday lain away—a book of Common Prayer open, where a page had been before turned down, at the order for the solemnization of matrimony, and on the page lay a wedding ring bright and new. And behind, standing back to the wall, quietly waiting, was Mistress Matilda Maxworthy.

II

THE ATTEMPTED EVICTION AND THE PEACE- MAKING OF SOLOMON NARRAWAY

A WEDDING is ever an occasion of mirth, merry-making and junketing, whether the bridegroom be old or young and the bride willing or unwilling ; whether it be an affair of love and kisses, or exchange and barter, or something uglier still. The folk in our town are no wiser than most, so those that were bidden came very merrily to the wedding of Lawyer Narraway's daughter. Each brought his gift. Here it was a cloth of fine linen, there a box of spotted tortoiseshell, or a kettle of shiny copper, or vessels and platters of pewter all neat and polished, though the vintner's house was stored with a plenty of these things. To church went the people for to see the couple married ; the women looking at one another's gowns and noting who had new ribbons and who had not. The elders reckoning how much Master Maxworthy would be able to give his bride, the youngers wondering what would be the fashion of Mistress Meg's gown and also how she liked her groom's embrace. Dear ! What a rustle there was in the dim church, where the heads showed but as apples on a shelf above the high backs of the pews. The bridegroom tarried and so did the bride ; men leaned forward to have speech with their friends, womenfolk smoothed their garments again

and again. The minister was known to be ready, waiting in gown and bands ; and still the pair tarried. Thoughts of breakfast stirred some folks' minds and then doubts as to whether the two would be in time to be wed to-day unless they made haste. At last came a rustle and a bustle about the church porch, a messenger from the vintner's.

"Who is it ?"—"What is it ?"—"What does he say ?"

"Master Maxworthy does not come !"

"Does not come ? Can't come ? Why ? Why ? Where is he ?"

"He is in bed. His clothes are ta'en !"

"Gone to bed !"

The heads that looked like apples were aturning and abobbing, the folk all looked, and at the news a ripple spread, a smile that broadened on every face as the word went round.

"The groom has gone to bed without waiting for the bride !"

Out into the sunshine came the folk and out spread the laughter. Then in a troop they betook them to the Narraways' house, anxious to see how the lawyer bore with this jest.

But at the house the jest had no point, it had lost its savour before it reached, and none there had time nor mind to consider it, to laugh or to resent the defalcation of the groom, for the bride was gone. Last night she had fled ; one had set a ladder against her chamber window and broken it open from without, and when they came for her in the morning she was gone. Frantic was the search that was made ; frantic but quiet withal ; the lawyer would avoid public scandal and public noise, he was bent on the marriage going

through, and would, if he could, have it in spite of all. The girl should be found in time, he said, taken to the church and his will fulfilled as it ever had been. But this time it was not so, and when the folk, all alauding and awondering about Master Maxworthy, came to the house, they heard the news, and the laughter died though the wonder grew.

Now Tobiah the Dissenter heard nothing of this, having other fish to fry just then. He knew, and it was enough for him, that there would be no marriage ; Mistress Matilda had early that day assured him she had arranged to prevent it. Though, indeed, he needed no other assurance than the knowledge she had returned in time, being full well aware that she was one who would use arguments Solomon must perforce attend to. She had also then told the Dissenter one other thing, a fact concerning the house where he dwelt and the foundations thereof, which was before unknown to him. It was this last which kept him busy over his own affairs that forenoon.

He went abroad, it is true, but only to see his worship the Mayor and sundry of our councilmen, and, his business with them done, he came home with all celerity and without tarrying to speak with any one. Having entered into his house, he made fast the door ; then he carried upstairs two buckets of pigs' victuals. These he balanced with care on a top window sill, a very seemly place for them, seeing how the stuff smells to heaven and, being thus placed above all, none can be offended by the fumes thereof. Then he sat himself down in the upper chamber and waited.

At noon came certain from Lawyer Narraway to take possession of the steep yellow house and to forcibly eject the dweller therein, if he and his movables were not

already out. The lawyer had given orders that, befall what might, this was to be done and at this hour ; and as no contrary order had been given, out set John Barley and others. To them business was business, and if twenty young brides vanished from the scene, it did not put back the hands of the clock or keep orders unfulfilled ; moreover Barley had no love for Tobiah the Dissenter.

Strut, strut, strut up the street they came, augmented on the way, as is only natural, by certain of the idle and curious. Whack ! on the nail-studded door. No answer from within and no sign of life John Barley stepped back on the wooden stairs which led sideways from the door to the street, and he looked up at the window above. Clearly he perceived that the house was inhabited and accordingly addressed him to knocking again. Whack ! Whack ! Whack ! At each knock more boys and such like collected till there was a good crowd below—they were well below for the door stood more than a man's height from the cobbles, and none ascended the stairs but Barley. Anon, he still getting no answer, gave over knocking, and drawing a document from his pocket roared aloud to Tobiah how that he must at once come forth, quit the house and deliver up the key.

At the roaring Tobiah looked out of the upper window, not thrusting his head out too far because of the pigs' victuals.

"Why this unseemly riot ?" asked he, then casting his eye over the assembled folks he observed : "There would seem to be over many masterless men in the town, or else a great flock of jackasses seeing how many have collected at the braying of one."

At this Barley broke forth into a fresh roaring very

incensed. He also explained how he was come from Lawyer Narraway.

"Ho!" said Tobiah. "I might have hoped, had I not known you overwell, that you had come to repay me for the keep of your old mother, she who it, doubtless, displeasures you to know did not die in the ditch o' Easter, as it would seem you thought, or maybe intended."

John Barley's face went a purplish red and the idle boys laughed gleefully, and some applauded Tobiah, and some sought to hearten the other. But neither the two paid any heed to them, and Barley, ceasing formalities in wrath shouted to the Dissenter, "Come you out of this house and that immediately. If you tarry I will break open the door and drag you and your gear into the street."

"Do you try that," returned Tobiah grimly, "and you will most assuredly find yourself behind a door which cannot so easily be opened and that soon. And," he added looking round on the crowd, "those that stand idle by lending aid by their countenance and disturbing the town peace with unseemly noise are like to suffer in reflection. For, as a man cannot touch pitch without being defiled, so likewise he cannot bray in chorus with the chief Jackass without coming in danger of the end of the whip lash."

"Boo!" cried the boys. "Boo! Boo!" and sundry even called the worthy man names as "Black Gander," and "Master Busy-body-caught-in-a-trap."

"This house is Lawyer Narraway's," Barley cried, "and any who abides here without his will is a malefactor and a law-breaker, and those who lend aid in removing the same. —"

"Commit trespass," said Tobiah; "for though the

house is Master Narraway's, the foundations thereof and that whereon it stands are mine, and none, neither he nor his representative, can enter upon them to take possession of this lath and plaster which is stood thereon, without my will and permission."

"What!" roared Barley. "What!"

Tobiah showed a folded parchment. "Know all men," said he, "that this house is built on the remains of the old town wall—hence it is raised so high above the street and not from any pride or desire to be above its neighbours—and this piece of wall, extending from the gray boundary stone on the right to Master Richard's warehouse on the left, and from the kennel in the front to the party wall which encircles the yard, formerly the property of Simon Scroat, at the back. This portion, I say, has to-day been granted by his worship the Mayor and his aldermen in council to me, my heirs, executors and assigns, to have and to hold free and at the option of no man for ever."

And Tobiah unfolded the parchment so that all could see the great seal of the town. "Tell Lawyer Narraway," said he, "that unless his title to the Kingdom of Heaven be better than his title to the entry of this house, he is like to find himself very poorly placed in the next world and in the ill company of such bellowing bulls as John Barley."

And as he spoke he leaned far forward, perhaps the better to be heard. But his shoulders were broad, and as he stretched they struck first one bucket of pigs, victuals and then the other. Swish! They went into the crowd, spilling their contents to the right and to the left; the one to the left lighting wrong way up—nigh empty by that time, which some thought a pity—upon the head of John Barley.

"Alack!" said Tobiah as he looked down. "What a lamentable waste!" then he shut to the window.

There are some who may say there was stuff for a goodly lawsuit in this matter of the foundations and the house; doubtless they speak truly, the stuff whereof lawsuits are made is common as cobwebs in autumn. But most hold that Tobiah had the better case, for foundations are to be had without housen, but not housen without something whereon they stand. And nothing can be had without possession and possession cannot be had without entry, nor entry on another man's property without trespass. But the matter was never argued, for Lawyer Narraway had no heart for it, moreover, the heat of his anger against Tobiah was cooled and turned to another quarter. Indeed, none of our folk gave so much heed to the matter as at another time, having more than enough to keep their tongues wagging in the subject of the wedding which did not take place.

For six days Lawyer Narraway searched for his daughter, and on the seventh he got news which made him give up the search and command others to do likewise, forbidding his wife to so much as mention the girl's name. At that same time Nathaniel Narraway was searching for his son, and at about the same time got news of him, for it was discovered that the young couple had gone off together. This information, when they got it, made the two fathers black angry; so angry that they at once sought each other out, each bent on charging the other with complicity and also on assuring the other that nothing was gained thereby as no penny of his money should go to the naughty pair. This they

did with great heat and decision, and affairs for the young couple looked dark indeed.

Mistress Maxworthy, who had details of the business, told them to Tobiah.

"Tut!" said Tobiah. "A pair of fools, or two pairs, one old and one young. The old trained the young amiss, the young took the bit between their teeth. The girl's a silly chit, the boy a soft-head, and he the most to blame to take a wife he cannot keep. They have made their bed, they must lie on it. I go to see they lie decently and to see that he does keep her now he's got her."

"I blame the girl," Mistress Matilda said, "to run from such a house as my brother's to none at all. I must see how she fares, a girl who was to have sat in my honoured mother's seat cannot be living unseemly under hedgerows."

In time they found the young couple, and, while Tobiah exhorted Nat, Mistress Matilda spoke plainly with Meg. Afterwards Tobiah found suitable employment for the young man, bringing the two back to our town for him to pursue it; and Mistress Matilda purveyed household gear and linen stuffs to the wife, and often, too, good roast meat and plums and pears and what not—she was ever a wonderful manager, and one house was not enough for her. But of these doings neither Daniel Narraway nor Nathaniel knew, and certainly their wives did not, even though the young couple dwelt on the outskirts of our town, for none who knew of it mentioned it to their parents.

So a year passed, and Nathaniel and Daniel grew grim and gray for want of the young hands which bind old men to life; and Bridget and Mary wept oft o' nights, when their husbands were asleep, and carried ever

with them the ache of heart that only mothers know.

At the end of that time a thought came to Mistress Matilda Maxworthy. She had during the late spring months helped Meg to fashion sundry small garments all white and fluffy. And she had, when June days came again, held in her arms a wondrous Thing, warm and pink and marvellous cuddleable. And when she held it, though she was a lone woman and one who had never felt any desire for lover or husband, a thrill shot through her and she found herself very loth to let it go, but whispering to it, and kissing it, and rocking it to and fro as a woman ever rocks a babe. Then it was the thought came to her, that if it felt thus to her who had never borne one, to cuddle a babe, what must it be to one who was a mother, one who could call the child grandson? No sooner had the thought come than off she went to Mistress Bridget; and the next day, when she could get conveyed thither, to the mill where dwelt Mistress Mary. Now, these two were good wives and true, and somewhat timorous, but love is stronger than fear, also Mistress Maxworthy was a woman of parts, afraid of no man and very well able to conduct a campaign in the open or otherwise. One cannot tell how things befell, but this much is known, there was soon much happiness and more visitors at the small house on the outskirts of our town. And of sunny afternoons, when goodman Daniel was busy drawing wills and goodman Nathaniel busy with his weaving and his overseeing, two grandmothers sat in an upper room, while a young mother fondled her babe and there stood by a grim old maid who was wondrous deft with the child.

On the first Sunday in July, Tobiah the Dissenter made a fine discourse to the folk; the text thereof was sundry words of the Wise Man, and also joined with

them a saying of the Psalmist, "Children's children are the crown of old men" and "Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them, he shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemy in the gate." Mistress Mary and Mistress Bridget were much stirred by the discourse, they wiped their eyes once and again, and looking covertly across smiled at one another. But Daniel and Nathaniel looked straight before, as if they heard and saw nothing.

On the coming out of the folk, Tobiah stopped the lawyer, Mistress Bridget being at the time detained by a gossip for whom Daniel would not stand; he had grown distasteful of all company of late.

"Master Narraway," said Tobiah, standing in the way before him, "the Lord has given you a crown, you may wear it or you may avoid it, preferring to busy your self with the muckrake, raking in filthy lucre, hatred and loneliness—but it is there. I bring you word from the Lord that it may be found in such a house in such a street. The house, moreover, has a gate, wherein you may speak with the enemy, who is also your brother, without being ashamed, if you choose to take your crown and to bless the Lord, as is seemly, for that He has filled your quiver."

"What?" said Daniel. "What do you mean?"

"My meaning," replied Tobiah, "is plain," and with that he left him.

By diligent walking the worthy man soon caught up with Nathaniel, and, having dismissed Mistress Mary, gave much the same message from the Lord to him and then left him, also with a matter whereon to think.

That afternoon, when dinner was done, Daniel in his house and Nathaniel at the hostel would seem to

have settled themselves to slumber. Mistress Bridget went up to her chamber, and Mistress Mary told her husband she would forth to see a friend. And when her spouse was composed, Mistress Mary went forth, but bearing with her a small smock—it was not every day she could get to our town, so she must perforce bear when she could, notwithstanding the day, her gifts to her grandson. And Mistress Bridget, when her goodman was settled, came down from her chamber, and, taking a basket of summer fruits, set forth likewise.

But Daniel did not sleep that afternoon ; maybe an indigestion troubled him, or maybe he was curious as to Tobiah's meaning and what it was that lay at such a house in such a street, or maybe it was something else, at all events something kept him disturbed ; he could not rest, he tried and for some time too, for he was a determined man and not one ready to give way to any weakness. But it was of no avail ; he could get no peace within or without, so at last he rose and went to the stairs to listen. All was silent above—and with good reason—assured of this he fetched his hat and went out quietly.

Nathaniel also could not rest that afternoon, and though he tried he also gave it up, and that sooner than his brother. “ I will take a walk,” said he ; “ my dinner demands it of me,” and he set out, though he wished that he knew whither his wife was gone ; he had more fancy for solitude than company and no desire to meet her. For a little he strolled here and there as one aimless, but at last it befell that his feet took him to such a street. And—as the street was short and he walked fast when he found he was there—very soon he found himself near to such a house. And there in the gate was the enemy, who was his brother, even as

Tobiah said ! Nathaniel looked up and Daniel looked round, but it was too late for either to draw back. They met in the gate, but they did not speak, both were somewhat confused. But that does not show the Dissenter in error, neither brother had taken a crown, and neither blessed the Lord that his quiver was full.

That afternoon Tobiah the Dissenter walked forth, righteousness calling him. For a while he busied himself here and there, but as the afternoon advanced and the shadows grew long he came to this same small house. It stood in a quiet some street ; at this hour there seemed no one about, folk were either abroad taking the air in the near fields or else still sleeping within doors. So quiet it was that one could almost hear the hum of the bees in the lime tree that smelled so sweet behind the house. It was a very small lime tree in a very small yard, but it made pretence to the young folk that it was a garden. Tobiah came to the door and lifted the latch, that door stood ever on the latch, for there was welcome in this house wherein dwelt poverty with sunshine and heart happiness. But there seemed no one there to-day ; Tobiah walked in and found the living room empty. A door at the farther end stood ajar and he opened it, it gave on to the yard where the lime tree grew. There they were, under the small tree, which was scarce big enough to shade them all. Meg on her father's knee with her hair pressed against his cheek. Nat by his father, watching while the old man held the babe. Mistress Bridget and Mary talked with Mistress Maxworthy of baby gowns and pap stuff and such like women's talk.

"Ha !" said Tobiah standing to regard them.
"Verily this looks like a Christening party."

All turned at his words and all started somewhat,

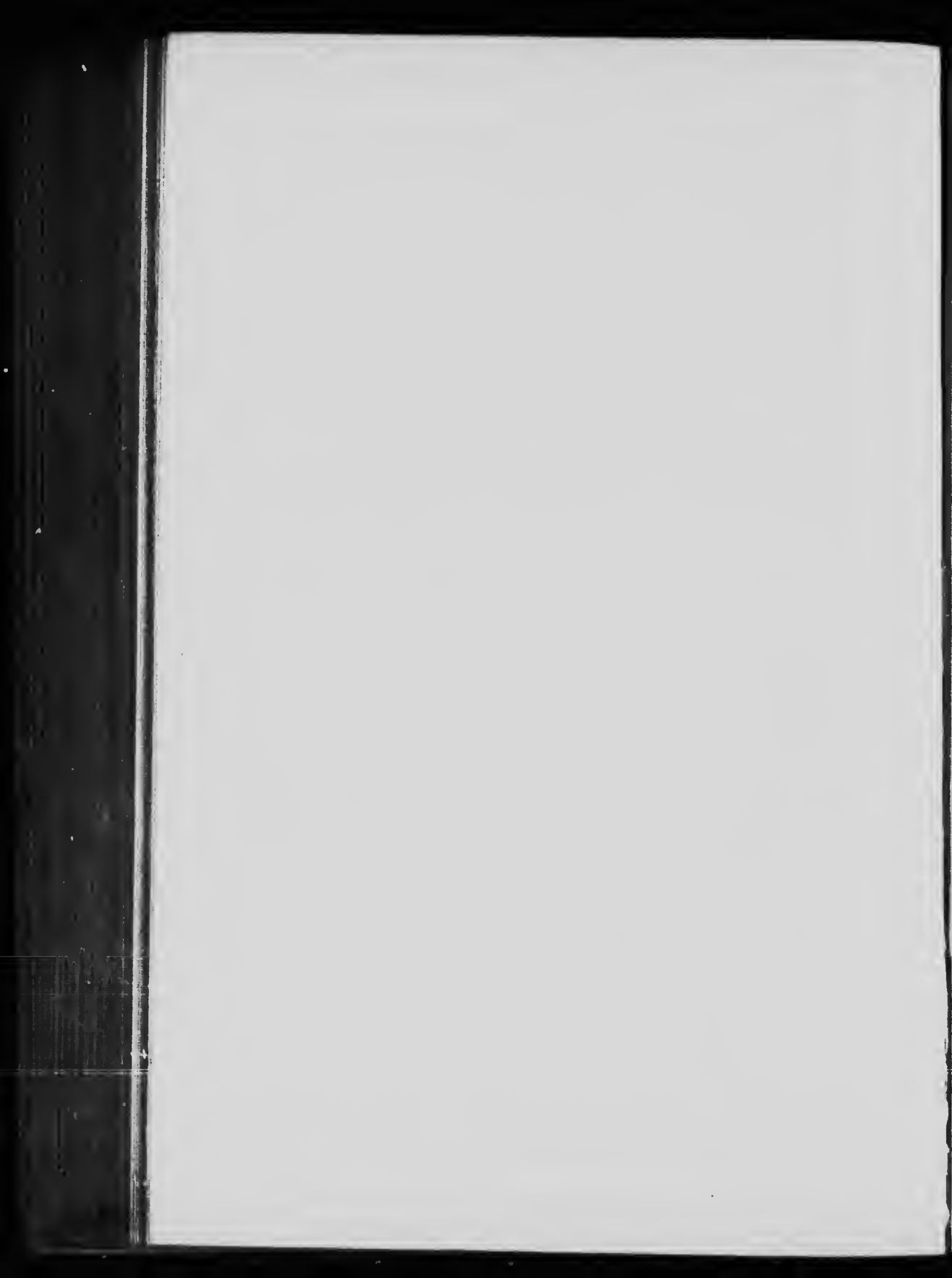
save only Meg who, keeping her place on her father's knee, cried—

“Nay, dear Master Tobiah, it looked not so till you came, for there was no godfather before.”

But at the word godfather Nathaniel and Daniel looked away, clearly each thought the child should be called by his name.

Tobiah, however, had other views : “I am no godparent,” said he, “I hold not with such things, moreover, my name might prove but an unhandy one. Solomon Maxworthy is the godfather for this infant, since the Lord prevented him from being father to it ; and the boy shall be called Solomon in that he is the wisest Narraway that yet has been, for does he not establish his kingdom firmly and seek peace and pursue it ? ”

And thus, in due time, was the child named, Solomon Maxworthy and his sister Matilda standing sponsor to him, the which added eventually to his material wealth as well as his spiritual well-being. And on the day of the christening Lawyer Narraway made over to Tobiah, for his life time only, the narrow plaster house, the foundations whereof he already possessed. It is thought this was done at the instance of and to pleasure Mistress Meg, but be that as it may, it was done and also the peace of the Narraways established not to be again seriously broken to the knowledge of any.



The Mad Lady Caryll

Thus did the worthy Tobiah work in this business of the Narraways to the great satisfaction of all, and thus was his intervention in the affairs of a married couple once more shown to be greatly to their profit and that of others.

In the next following matter, that of the Mad Lady Caryll, the Dissenter was rather called to hold his hand from meddling between the husband and wife, and he held it when a more foolish person might have made haste to do otherwise. There are some, doubtless, who will call the good man into question for his doings—there are ever some such cavillers. But what of that? The cause of righteousness was served as all godly men will perceive; let those that love it rest satisfied, and for the rest—the condemnation of fools is praise to the wise man.

I

HOW CATHERINE DE GRAY TOOK SHELTER

THAT day the snow began to fall early, quite soon after Miss de Gray took the road. At first it seemed but a small matter, light flakes drifting aimlessly and almost ceasing awhile, but as the carriage drew more eastwards it increased, and the servants became aware that not only was it a much greater matter here, but also that the going was bad by reason of a previous fall. When at midday a halt was made at the *King's Arms*, that great inn on the London road, there was some consultation as to whether or no they should push on that day ; or rather, the servants consulted whether their mistress would be persuaded into abiding where she was.

She was not ; after inquiries she learned that the roads were quite passable, also that there was more snow imminent, the which, if it came, would make travelling worse to-morrow than to-day. She had no wish to stay where she was till the weather abated ; already, owing to mishap, she had been a day longer on the road than she reckoned for, and she was wishful to reach her journey's end to-night. At her sister's house, whither she was going, the children had games and junketing planned for this evening, and as she knew, much wished for her presence. Accordingly, she ordered the horses to be set to and stood waiting

by the fire in the upper room where she had taken her repast.

She was a fine woman to look upon, no longer in first youth, being on in the twenties, but perhaps the finer for that. It was a wonder to some who knew her face and the gifts of her mind, and also that she had a small fortune to her name, that she was still unwed. But such was the case, and though she had been much in town and other places where the world may be met, no breath had ever touched her name and no gallant had long cherished hope of her. It would seem she was one who knew her mind, and in youth, when she was fresh from her governess' hands and should certainly have known nought of such things, she had said she would not wed where she did not love. Her suitors could only think she was keeping to her childish word, and she did not in them see the man of her heart, which each and all found strange.

To her now, as she stood warming herself, came her maid with wraps and cloaks.

"It is passing cold," she said.

"Yes," her lady made reply. "It were well to bring more cloaks."

"It snows thick and fast," the maid said with depression.

"And will faster to-morrow," the lady answered.

Abigail turned away with self-pitying sighs; and because she knew that, in spite of her discreet age and long service, her advice would not weigh with her mistress, she vented her temper on her niece, Kitty. Little Kitty, round-eyed and bashful, was travelling in this company to Miss de Gray's sister, where she was to be nursery girl to the little folk Miss Catherine loved. It was not for her to say anything to Aunt Abigail, an

awesome person who had given her the rudiments of good training. So she very meekly listened to all that was said, and only grew more fearful at hearing of the perils of the road. By the time the horses were ready she was terrified indeed, and had ado to keep her teeth from chattering as she sat, squeezed small by Miss Abigail, looking wonderingly now and again at Miss de Gray, or what might be seen of her above velvet and fur. To her mind there was not in all the world another so brave, so fine, so fair as that lady.

Darkness closed in early ; still the snow fell, and though one could not see it it rustled on the frosted window pane. The carriage went on ; it wallowed sometimes and sometimes rolled, and more than once came almost to a halt, but it still made progress. Those within heard the men crack their whips and encourage the horses, and saw the lamplight a dim blur in the surrounding dark. Once, it was after four of the afternoon, they left the road and never found their mistake till they stuck fast. Then, after a great delay of pulling and hauling, and all to no purpose, one of the men was despatched to the handiest farm to borrow more horses.

He was near a half hour gone ; to those in the carriage it seemed longer far. Kitty trembled so that Mrs. Abigail felt her and reproved her sharply under her breath—poor woman, she was herself not much better.

“Are you cold, child ?” asked Catherine.

“Oh no, ma’am,” the little maid replied, and would have courtesied had there been room ; indeed, she did make a movement so that her knees struck against the lady opposite.

Catherine took a warm cloak from beside her. “You had best put on this,” she said.

And when the girl bashfully refused, and Mrs. Abigail said she had no need to be cold, seeing she had a fine plenty of underwear, Miss de Gray put the garment round her.

"Do not be afraid," she said kindly. "There is nothing to fear, for see, if the roads are bad for us they are bad for others likewise; there is little danger of being stopped by rogues in such weather as this. Very soon we shall be on our way again."

And soon they were, for a strong team came from the farm and pulled them from the drift and took them into a road of sorts. The farmer told them where they were, which was not where they had supposed, and also gave them some directions for getting into the right way again. But the directions were not of the plainest; in good sooth, the worthy man had no clear knowledge of anything far from his own door; he could only tell them "more or less" and "thereabouts," and give such directions as "turn by Old John's wall," and "pass Plym's new farm at the corner," landmarks not to be recognized by strangers at such a time. So it befell that the carriage went on and on through the labyrinth of by-roads, to come at last on a main road, quite other than the coachman thought. Away down this they went, eastward and eastward instead of south; out into our open country, where there is little shelter and the snow had been falling these two days. As may be guessed, it was not long before they had left the road again, and not long before the horses were once more floundering in drifts. But now there was no farm within reach and no helping team, the carriage must be unloaded, lady and maids got out, and the straining horses do the work themselves.

Mrs. Abigail stood with the baggage, sourly enduring, and little Kitty with her, all a-shiver, but Catherine went to help and direct. She was ever ready to do that on necessary occasions, even in emergency handling pistol and sword like a man, for all the quietness of her way in ordinary. In the which facts Mrs. Abigail found explanation of her mistress' celibacy; for, said the good woman, who had but a poor opinion of the masterful sex, what should a lady with a fortune to keep her, and strength and skill to take care of herself, want with a husband?

At last the horses had done the work and the carriage was clear; the men dismounted to lead the poor beasts now, the women got back into the carriage a good degree colder, and still more uncomfortable by reason of the snow they brought in on their petticoats and which melted about their feet. Catherine, aware of the condition of her companions, and having seen for herself the exhausted state of the horses and the strangeness of the open country, perceived that it would be folly to push on further.

"At the first house we come to we will stop," she said, "no matter what it is or who lives there; they can hardly refuse to give us shelter on such a night."

But it was long before they came to any house at all, so long that Kitty, who had become hopeful at the words, had sunk again into a drowse of cold and fear before they came to a sudden halt—the halt of intent, not the unpremeditated stoppage in snow to which they were only too used now. A bell rang, its clang woke the girl, for though it sounded hoarse it was close at hand. In a little a door or shutter was opened, and soon after gates swung wide, perhaps not unassisted by coin from the coachman, who carried a purse for

such purpose. The chaise turned in, swayed, and then went up a long drive, bordered, it would seem, by thick trees, for more than once bare branches swept the closed windows. But now a house was reached; an ill-lighted house, lonesome and not hospitable to see. Another bell rang, another pause, then a door opened and a streak of light issued forth.

Catherine let down the window, then opened the door and stepped out. There was nothing friendly about the aspect of the place, and maybe she deemed it wise to show herself if she hoped to claim shelter. A manservant stood on the threshold, respectable and old, but by the time the lady was out he had refused all hospitality on behalf of his master and mistress.

"Who is your master?" Catherine asked. "Will he not give us shelter for the night? My horses can go no further and my maids are ill with the cold. For myself I do not mind, but for them it would be cruelty to go on."

The old man hesitated; clearly he did not know what to do. "There is no inn near," he muttered doubtfully to himself. He was one who often spoke his thoughts aloud, a habit learned perhaps from living with those who did not give heed to what he said. "There is nowhere—and she——" he looked at the lady on the doorstep and the pale faces dimly to be seen in the travelling carriage.

"Bear my compliments to your master and mistress," Catherine said.

"Sir Charles," the old man replied, "is from home, and her ladyship——"

"Will not refuse shelter to three women; bear my compliments to her."

"It is useless," he protested ; yet he looked reluctant, as if such rudeness were against the grain with him, as, indeed, it is with all good servants. Truly, it would seem two minds struggled within him, and at last the one vanquished the other and training got the better of caution. He held the door wider and invited Miss de Gray and her following to enter, muttering something to himself the while to the intent that "it cannot hurt" and "none will know."

But Catherine heard him and waved back the two who were in haste to descend from the carriage. "Nay," said she hastily, "I'll not come secretly into any house ; if it is not her ladyship's way to open her door to strangers in need I will not enter, I cannot creep in privily. You must bear my compliments to her and ask her if she will shelter us."

"Certainly, ma'am, certainly," the old man replied, and only waiting to hear the name, departed at once. Good soul, he was too used to making believe and seeming to obey orders that could not be carried out to make any bones of such a trifle as that.

Catherine stood within the hall place to wait. It had a dreary look, albeit it was large and finely proportioned ; there was no fire on the hearth, and but two candles in a bracket casting grim shadows from the antlers and weapons on the walls. It was well-kept, there was no dust about or sign of decay, the which in some sort added to the dreariness, seeming to speak not of neglect or no inhabitant, rather of a pinched life and a cold-hearted race. Without the snow fell, soft and thick ; the coachman on his box beat his arms for warmth, and a tired horse shook his head so that the harness rattled. Then into the silence that followed came the sound of steps, the old servant

back with his message, and with him a housekeeper, old and staid as he.

For herself Catherine could have borne with the rudeness of refusal, for the aspect of the place chilled her, and the cold whiteness without seemed not less friendly. But for her following she could not but be glad that the message was one of courteous invitation. Abigail's ears caught its purport almost as soon as her mistress, and she and little Kitty were out of the carriage quickly enough. Quickly, too, the men were finding a way to the stable yard and the heavy door was closed, shutting out the white night. Abigail and Kitty were borne off to servants' quarters, there to be warmed and welcomed with a rubbing of hands and hot drinks and a wealth of pity, which cheered the older woman much, and showed her what a martyr she was. Poor little Kitty was somewhat past this comfort and, besides being well kept in her place, was ready to cry with cold and fright and the strangeness of it all.

For Miss de Gray there was no cheer or welcome, to her the house still showed the same grim face. The housekeeper brought her polite excuses, her ladyship was a sad invalid, unable to quit her room; she prayed her fair guest to excuse her presence and accept what hospitality her house could give. Catherine bowed to this; she wanted nothing but a little warmth, a little food and bed, and these, doubtless, could be afforded without disturbing the sick lady further.

Aye, but it was a chillsome house! Chillsome and drear! Maybe the absent master and sick mistress made it so, Catherine strove to think it, yet was not sure. Long cold passages there were, and empty

stairs and shut doors ; everything orderly, but gray and cold and unfriendly as the sheeted dead ; no one had lived here, no one laughed, no one loved. The room where she was lodged was as the others, all in order and fine repair, but so cold, so cold. No garments had rested in the chests these many years, no woman's face looked back from the mirror, no warm body lain in the bed. The housekeeper herself attended and did what she could for comfort ; but comfort did not dwell here, and in a while Catherine dismissed her, preferring to be alone.

Left to herself she stirred the fire to a brighter blaze, thinking it might seem company ; but it put no warmth nor heart into the place. Then she went to the window and looked out at the night ; still the snow fell, soft and ceaseless. All was very quiet without as well as within ; she was lodged, it would seem, in a far wing, remote from kitchen and stables and all sounds of life. She dropped the curtain and came back to the fire, drawing her *négligé* about her ; she had no thought to dress to-night, supper would be served her here by and by ; after that early to bed. She sat down, sipping the hot posset which had been brought her and wondering who dwelt in this chillsome house—a woman old and ill, no doubt ; a husband no longer attentive and much away.

There came a sound from the corner beyond the fire, a small sound like the creak of a door. She looked up sharply, a face was peering at her out of the shadows. The door that before was closed stood ajar and some one was looking round it—a woman with an idiot face, loose-lipped and with eyes light and vacant, yet malevolent too. The fire flamed up for a moment and showed her plainly, showed the bedizened neck

and the tow-coloured hair and the bows and taws that adorned it.

Catherine sprang to her feet. "Who are you? And what do you want?" she asked.

The face contorted into a laugh, and there was wickedness in the laughter and meaning too, then it drew back into darkness.

Catherine sprang to the door and seized it. "Who are you?" she repeated.

But the creature did not answer, only laughed again in the distance.

Catherine snatched a candle from the dressing-table and with it searched the room beyond. But there was no one there, it was only a small closet leading from the greater chamber. The outer door stood open, showing which way the intruder had gone. Catherine went to it and looked down the passage beyond, a long, long gray passage, all empty right down to the bend at the far end. She held her light high and looked before her, even went some paces, half inclined to follow, for she was angry and filled with an unreasoning repugnance. But she did not do it, for, calling to mind the sick lady, she feared to make any disturbance in the house. So, after standing awhile looking and listening, she went back to her chamber; and when she had searched both it and the closet very thoroughly, she fastened the doors and sat down by the fire, not the better pleased with her lodging by reason of this interruption.

She sat a little while and was growing perhaps drowsy with waiting supper, and wondering when it should be brought, when there came a tap at the outer door.

"Who is there?" she asked suspiciously, but the

voice of Mistress Blundell, the housekeeper, reassured her and she opened.

The old woman seemed flustered, but she presented a message of the greatest politeness, her ladyship's compliments, and she prayed the honour of Miss de Gray's company at supper.

"But," said Catherine in surprise, "I heard she was sick and could not leave her apartment."

"Indeed, ma'am, she oft is," Mistress Blundell replied, "but she is better to-night and she prays your company."

"I fear she is putting herself about for me," said Catherine, in kindly concern. "Do not, I entreat you, let her do it; assure her from me——"

"Nay, ma'am," the old woman said earnestly, "it is to please her she is doing it," and there was that in her tone which carried conviction, and even then seemed a curious thing.

Catherine protested no more, but prepared to make a toilet. Mistress Blundell lent her assistance. "Pray, ma'am," she ventured, "may I make bold to entreat you to don a fine gown if you have one in your baggage; it pleases her ladyship much to see a smart gown; she is strange at times, a little strange, little things please her."

Catherine readily agreed; "poor soul," thought she, "doubtless she sees few things that are gay, shut ever within this grim house. And she put on the brocade she had brought to pleasure the little ones, who also liked to see folks fine. When she was dressed Mistress Blundell accompanied her to the stair head, but then left her to go down another passage.

The stairs had a turn in them, one could not see below till one came to it; when Catherine came there

she stopped suddenly. The hall beneath was changed in aspect, a fire blazed on the hearth, a great chair was drawn before it, so that what erstwhile was desolate, now looked cheerful. One was standing before the fire leaning weary arms on the chimneypiece. His back was to the stairs, and only a little of nose and chin was to be seen ; nevertheless Catherine knew him, would have known had she seen less than that ; aye, if she had met him in the dark, her soul would have felt his presence.

It was three years now since she had seen him, years which had brought her to sober autumn. Three years ago an accident on the road had taken him hurt to her door, and for weeks he had lain ill beneath her roof. Halcyon weeks, the love summer of her life, come when she was no young maid, but a woman in rich maturity. But in time he recovered and went away ; and since then never in word or deed, never in script or fact had he crossed the threshold of her life again, he had dropped out as a stone drops out of sight into a well. At first she had waited his coming in quiet confidence and hope, for though he had breathed no word of love or tenderness or even compliment, yet she knew he loved her even as she loved him ; frankly and freely, if silently, heart was given to heart, as it can be when youth is past. So she waited, but he came not. And at first she found reasons and excuses very ingenious, as even wise women will ; afterwards, when the bottom was out of all these, and hope dead, she grew angry and bitter, and thought hard thoughts, as even loyal women may. Later she put the whole from her, as some brave women do, seeking no explanation and accepting for herself the solitary fate and the second place of cherishing the children of another, those little children

with whom she should have played that night. To-night, when she saw him, this man, in the hall now bright, so lately grim, a vision in a vision conjured glow !

And as she stood, brought to a pause, he turned and their eyes met.

His face went white, white as a man who sees a wraith.

“ Catherine ! ”

The voice was hoarse with the anguish of one who sees a ghost of the dead rather than with the passion of one who sees the living ; but at the sound of it youth came back to her and light. She paused a moment with the love-look on her face that is sometimes seen on the face of a bride who gives and receives tranquil and sure. Hers was the big heart that can forgive, the big faith that can trust, the love which is not for yesterday, nor to-day, but for ever.

So she stood, and he stood too, his hands pressed hard on the woodwork and the lines of his face growing deep and set. Grimly he grasped the woodwork, grimly looked at her as if there lay between some gulf that must not be overpassed. She came down a step ; his hands fell, he moved. Nearer he came, nearer, like one under a spell stronger than his will ; across the glowing boards where the firelight danced to the stairs. She came down to meet him. The boards were crossed now, the stairs descended ; they were close together, eyes looked into eyes, hands almost touched hands.

“ Catherine ! ”

“ Charles ! ”

Then suddenly, as if by magic he grew stiff, stiff as if death seized him ; he rested where he was ; nay,

he even drew back imperceptibly, the passion, the very life in him gripped and held by anguish of remembrance, remorse. He shuddered away like one who dares not look, reeled so that he must catch the stair rail for support and stood head bent, back bowed, an almost pitiable figure.

Came a bustle of steps, Jacobs, the old servant, hastening with eyes wide, surprised, and put about by unexpected sight of Miss de Gray below stairs. She turned to him with dignity, and bid him lead her to some withdrawing room ; she was a lady born, knowing well how to hold herself before all eyes, even though her heart might break. The old man led her to a great apartment and she seated herself in an armed chair. Gay and bright the room was as a fine madam's room should be, yet still was it as if the sheeted dead lay there under the candle glow, nay, it was as if they had crowned a skull with flowers and decked it with a wedding veil.

Anon, came Sir Charles ; Jacobs had been to him with hasty words of explanation, which held no meaning for him, and then he must have him to the room where the lady sat. He came unresisting ; gray was his face as a man in mortal pain, unsteady his gait, so that he felt for the door to keep himself straight before the servant's eyes. He lay hold of a chair away from the one where Catherine sat.

"I did not know that you were here," he said jerkily, as one who must say somewhat.

"I took shelter from the snow," she answered, numb and serene. Oh, the wondrous control of woman ! "I had no knowledge, it was a surprise——" she broke off, there was a rustle of silks without and Jacobs flung wide the door. In came a lady all gowned

in yellow, ablaze with gems, and adorned with feathers and flowers. Her face was painted and powdered, her lips drawn up and her eyes bright with intelligence of sorts—yet was it the idiot face which had peered in at the closet door.

Catherine rose to her feet. Sir Charles drew back and for a second the look he wore was terrible to see. Then he laughed the reckless laugh of one who has come to the last.

"This too, is a surprise," said he. "A pleasure for which I had not looked. Miss de Gray, I have the honour to present my wife."

II

HOW TOBIAH THE DISSENTER WAS BIDDEN TO SUPPER

NOW Tobiah the Dissenter had occasion to go far afield on the business of the Lord. He was purposed to spend the day on the business ; to pass the night with certain of his persuasion in the village of St. John, and on the following day to proceed yet further and so fetch a compass back to the town. But the Lord willed otherwise. The business kept the good man late, so that after he had started for St. John it was not long before he perceived that, what with the darkness and the snow, he would do well to seek shelter nearer at hand, and postpone pushing further till the morrow. Accordingly he bethought him of the nearest place, the lonely house where dwelt the mad Lady Caryll. It was to be quickest reached by crossing open land, a feat difficult for some, but the Dissenter was ever a mighty man of his legs and was, moreover, not often mistook in ways as touching this world or the next. So he set out, sure of shelter and welcome from Jacobs and the worthy Mistress Blundell, who were neither of the sort to turn a good man from the door on a foul night ; that is, one who might be entertained in their quarters and none the worse, rather the better therefor.

Of the mad lady herself Tobiah took no thought,

neither of her nor Sir Charles, their presence or absence in the house was naught to him. Concerning their tale he knew as much as any, more than some, though he was not one to endure idle gossip. All the countryside knew how Sir Charles, when very young, little more than a youth in fact, had married the lady, doubtless in his calfhood thinking he doted on her doll's face, but very eagerly and skilfully pushed into it by that wily hag, my lady's mother. Never a word did she say to the groom of the madness that was in the bride's blood ; she left it till after the ring was on for him to find that the father had died mad, and the girl herself was more than passing strange at times. But soon enough he found it, and when the child was born my lady went clean out of her mind. By the mercy of God the babe died, but my lady's mind never came quite to her again. At times it seemed clear enough and she would show a plenty reason, though certainly of a sort she were better without ; wanton and yet malevolent spiteful, very sharp of wits but green jealous. Less on account of her madness than on this kind of soundness Sir Charles had the lady live in the lonesome house, himself visiting her at times as duty dictated, but keeping her thus shut away to secure her a safe and decent life, and to protect his pride from the wounding of publicly showing her. All this Tobiah knew and saw in it plain argument against marriage in haste, for the stroke pressed with bitter heaviness on Caryll, a man who knew keenly the desire of a wife in his arms and children about his knee ; one not given to debauchery and securely bound to this madwoman. This Tobiah knew, and, as I say, saw the hand of the Lord in the matter, but Sir Charles and her ladyship he knew not, having neither part nor lot with such fine

folk, unless circumstances should call him for admonition.

On this snowy evening, when the Dissenter decided to go to the lonesome house and no further, Sir Charles, as has been seen, also arrived there. He was expected early in the New Year, but when, two days ago, the snow began, the servants hardly thought he would come till the roads were clear again. Nevertheless, he did, to the distress of Jacobs, who had earlier admitted to shelter the stranger lady and her following. The faithful man debated with himself whether or no he should tell his master of his doing, and decided it were better to put it off till the morrow, seeing that Sir Charles was now cold and weary and in no humour for talk ; also that he could not for himself find out the lady's presence till the morning. But in this last Jacobs erred, for Lady Caryll knew of the coming of the uninvited guest. She was not apprised by Catherine's message, that had not been borne to her, but she heard by chance some small sounds of the arrival and sought information concerning it.

"Catherine de Gray," she repeated when the name was given her, "Catherine de Gray," and her eyes gleamed wickedly, though she cast down her lids so that her woman should not see. Let it be said that her disease was now more of the moral nature than of the wits.

She remembered the name very well ; three years ago her husband had abode long under the roof of a woman so called. He was hurt at the time, so it was reported to her and maybe truly ; but she was without principle herself, so always ready to suspect another, and also mad jealous. At once at the sound of Catherine's name a hundred unclean thoughts came to her. As

soon as might be, she quitted her apartments and went to judge of the lady's looks, peering in at her from the closet doorway. And the sight confirmed her jealousy and she hated her, as the sick sometimes hate the sound, with a hungry hate that craves for blood. For a little after that she sat quiet in her chamber, pleasing herself with plans of what she would do to this woman, fair and sound. To her thus employed, came noise of another arrival.

It did not reach Catherine, lodged in another wing of the rambling house ; but Lady Caryll heard it ; moreover it quickly explained itself to her in the person of her husband who came to pay his respects. She said naught to him of Miss de Gray, only watched him cunningly, and put a question now and then, which seemed to him, who had no key, so meaningless that he thought her worse than of yore. But if there was madness in her talk, there was method likewise, for no sooner was he gone than she made ready. Very sure she was that he and the woman were here by collusion, and she determined to also take a hand in the game. Accordingly she decided that Miss de Gray should sup downstairs. Nay, she was certain that she was already prepared to do so, and she herself was told the contrary but to deceive her. She stamped and raged when Mistress Blundell maintained otherwise.

" I tell you, woman, she will sup below ! " she cried. " Hold your tongue, I tell you she shall and she will, and I will, too, though you shall not tell Sir Charles."

The last she said with a drop in her voice and a cunning look in her eyes. Mistress Blundell, desirous to pacify her, was obliged to take her ways to Miss de Gray and make what message she could, entreating her to supper below. Trying also, to give some hint of her

ladyship's malady, though fearing to speak too plainly lest the guest should take fright and refuse to go below. But Sir Charles she did not tell, nor Jacobs either in her fluster and worry; hence it came about that all were ignorant even of the reason for the lighting and decking which had to be done as if by magic to my lady's whim.

Truly indeed then, could Sir Charles, when Lady Caryll swept in upon them, say that it was a surprise, an honour he had not looked for.

"I thought to pleasure you," said she in a high thin voice that tinkled with inward laughter, "but I vow there is more of surprise than of pleasure in your eye. Am I *de trop*, Madame?"—she faced abruptly upon Catherine to ask this.

"No, Madame," Catherine answered, "I looked for your coming."

"*De trop!*" Caryll said with a laugh. "Nay, we wanted you to make the party complete, we were gay before, don't our looks show it? But we are gayer now——"

There came the loud peal of the outer bell, all heard it and—"Who have we here?" Caryll said, and he went to the chamber door, "Let him in, Jacobs," he cried with fearsome mirth, "Be he Death or the devil he shall sup with us to-night, we have need of a fourth."

Now the newcomer was none other than Tobiah the Dissenter, just arrived after some struggling with the weather, and when Jacobs saw him he was somewhat put about by his master's order.

"But, sir," he ventured, "a good man, but——"

"Have him in, I say," cried Sir Charles, and himself came into the hallplace. "A minister?" he said, "Gadsooks! But hell's in jesting mood to-night! Welcome, reverend man, you are very welcome."

"I give you greeting in the name of the Lord," said Tobiah somewhat sternly, for he liked not the tone nor the manner of the speech.

"Greeting by all means," Caryll replied, "but more suitable in some other name. Hasten, sir, the ladies wait."

Thus it came about that Tobiah was led to the great withdrawing room, there to be presented in all form to the ladies. And if he thought it scandal, as he certainly must, that honest women should so bare their breasts, he had not then opportunity to say it, for at once they went to supper. A monstrous fine repast it was, with a glitter of plate and a twinkle of candle light which danced all a-wink in the mad lady's diamonds and shimmered and sheened in the pearls that circled Miss de Gray's neck. But ill was the company about the board and ill the feeling in the air.

Tobiah fell upon the viands with good will, having first asked a blessing—as he would had he sat down to dinner with the devil. He was a famous trencherman and did full justice to the dainties, being hungry by reason of the cold and walking. But the others ate little; Sir Charles almost nothing, though he emptied his glass more than once, and talked the while, reckless and gay with a bitter twang in his unnatural mirth, like a man whose last stake in life is gone. Catherine de Gray answered him now and again, eating somewhat, though it was plain to see spirit and not appetite compelled her. But more often she spoke with Tobiah, talking to him and keeping to it, as one clings fast to the last solid when the earth has blown up and all elements melt with fervent heat. But my lady was truly gay, she ate nought and made no pretence, as if she desired not to eat in her present company and also as

if she had food of mind which well sufficed her. Mirth shone in her gleaming eyes and mirth in her high-tinkling laugh; and when none joined with her, she laughed the more, and it had a sound that was not good to hear.

Thus through all the endless long meal till the servants had left the apartment and they four were alone at the lighted table set island-wise in the room of shadows. Tobiah looked from one to the other and it seemed to him they waited, Sir Charles with eyes that blazed like coals, Miss de Gray gazing ever steadfast before her, and Lady Caryll who laughed. Now the good man was not of a foolish sort, nor one to give place to weak imaginings in himself or another, yet he liked not altogether the present party, though without knowing well why. The longer he sat the less he liked it, the more perhaps because he could lay hold on no reason and could not tell in what way to give battle to the devil, if indeed, he were there. He moved in his chair, he thought to rise and break the spell, but Lady Caryll's eye turned to him sharp and bright.

"How like you your company?" said she in a mocking voice.

"Not greatly——" he answered bluntly.

"Nor I," said she, preventing what more was on his tongue. She leaned to him so that her painted face and bare breast were over near. "Am I not complaisant?" she asked, tapping him with her fan, "to entertain thus my husband and his mistress?"

"It is false!" Caryll said sharply, but instantly recovering himself and turning to Tobiah he said, with the quietness of one who explains—"You must not heed what she says, she is out of her mind."

"Out of my mind I might well be!" Lady Caryll

cried, "More than enough have I had to make me so, cooped ever within this lonesome house, denied the sight of man, forbidden even my husband's arms, while he—he takes his pleasure with another!" she flashed wicked eyes on Catherine as she spoke.

"It is false!" Caryll said, and one knew the storm was brewing.

"False!" she scoffed. "False! He abode weeks under her roof, he has her here now, they meet by collusion in this house, the house where I am—they think to——"

"Silence, woman!" thundered Caryll in a terrible voice.

For answer her ladyship burst into a wild laugh, "I, his wife," she cried, "I—'Whom God has joined——'"

"Nay," said Tobiah, "it is not so clear that the business was the Lord's, if report is to be believed, my lady Jezebel, your mother had more than a hand in the joining."

To this neither husband nor wife gave heed; he made a sign to Miss de Gray to go and her ladyship saw it.

"Go, wanton!" she sneered, "Go and wait your lover!" and she gripped something she held in her lap.

Catherine de Gray rose to her feet. "You are mad and do not know your words," said she.

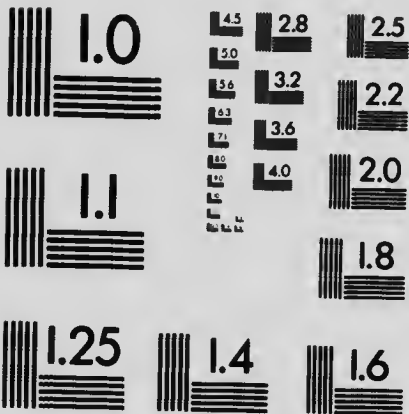
"I know my words very well," the other returned. "I know, and you know, and all men shall know that they are true!"

"They are false," Catherine said, "But were they true, what then? Who should blame me or blame him?" she looked round from the mad woman to Tobiah, aye, round the room, as if all her world were



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there and she defied it with proud defiance and a great light. "What if they were true? He loves me and I love him, as God meant men and women to love. And he is bound to the body of this death. God help us all!"

Her voice broke away, but the mad woman sprang forward with a sound like a beast.

"Harlot!" she howled, and flung a small vial at the brave fair face.

It missed by the smallest inch, for Catherine, by a miracle almost, had warning to swerve just enough. It passed her and struck against the panelling behind and broke into a hundred pieces, the spirit within burning dark stains on the woodwork.

Caryll had sprung to his feet; he caught his wife in his arms, "Go!" he cried to Catherine, "Go! And make fast your chamber door!"

For a moment Lady Caryll struggled in his grip; Tobiah saw her twist and bite like a mad thing then, her clawing hands overturned the candlesticks and all was in darkness and the rank smell of the smouldering wick.

Now there are some who may take upon themselves to blame the Dissenter for what afterwards occurred; but that is ever the way, there are always some who find a man's conduct awry. Of these things the godly Tobiah recked nothing then as ever he acted according to his conscience.

It seemed best to him on that night to abide in the hallplace and not retire to the fine chamber where Jacobs would have bestowed one who had supped with his master. But the Dissenter preferred to draw the great chair to the fire and sit there; he thought, were he located thus in the centre of the house, he could the more speedily be there if any occasion arose. Accordingly he established himself, but without saying any-

thing to Jacobs of what had occurred at supper and without making inquiries concerning it either. For, in such matters, the servant is of no avail and the master had withdrawn himself with scant ceremony. Therefore the good man sat by the fire and pondered awhile. But he had done a good day's work as well as a long tramp in the cold ; moreover, he had had a fine supper and the fire, though low, was warm. It befell in a little he dropped asleep, so sound that no small matter could awake him.

For a while he slept dreamlessly, as good men—and those of strong constitution—do. But at last a sound reached him. At first he thought he was in a blacksmith's shop listening to the smith ring and try some sword blade he was at work upon ; but gradually he became aware it was not quite that, rather the ring of sword on sword, and in his drowsy mind he thought one fought with his adversary the devil. He opened his eyes and looked. So sound had he slept that he could not at first recall where he was, and when he did recall he was still a-puzzle. He had fallen asleep in an empty hall, dim in the low glow of a fire. He awoke, in darkness certainly, where he himself sat, for the fire had caked and gone out, but the upper end, that which lay behind his chair back, was all ablaze with light. He turned him in his seat and looked round to see. All was transformed ; candles blazed in bracket and sconce, a dozen, nay a score of wax lights making the place brighter than day. In the centre of the light on the smooth polished boards were two women ; silken petticoats were below their waists, but above each wore a shift loose at the throat and leaving the sword arm bare, and each used a rapier passing well, and they were Catherine de Gray and the mad Lady Caryll.

Now Tobiah was not one to approve of carnal weapons ; in forcible persuasion and necessary warfare he was ever one to trust to the arm of the Lord—and his own right hand. Certainly he was not a man to approve of women doing bloody battle, to the shame of their sex and, usually, the mishandling of weapons. Nevertheless there are times and seasons. *Vide* Judith in the matter of Holofernes, and Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. When Tobiah had made quite sure that he was truly awake and not dreaming, he drew himself up on to the seat of the chair and looked over with discretion.

Ring ! In the silence of the house sounded steel on steel ! Flick, flicker, in the candleshine the light danced along the gleaming blades ! Thrust and parry and thrust, two women on the polished boards : one quiet and wary, watching, defensive, knowing her life hung on her watch. Oh, a brave woman was she ! The other mad, mad with fury, and impotent jealousy, blood blind and furious. And behind them, hard pressed against the wall, was the old man Jacobs, numb with terror, too numb to move, too numb to see, wide-eyed, speechless, clinging to the wall with sweating hands.

Thrust ! went the mad lady's rapier, but Catherine's guard was there. Thrust again ! She was pressing her hard—it were better to act on the aggressive, Tobiah had a mind to say it, when the blade slipped under the other and Catherine touched Lady Caryll's breast. It was only a prick, scarce drawing blood ; yet when the mad woman felt it she threw up her arms and, staggering, fell forward upon her own blade, and with a sickening thud tumbled a heap upon the floor.

Catherine's sword arm dropped as if it were broke,

and her blade rang as it touched the boards. In the silence it made a horrible noise.

"My God!" whispered Jacobs by the wall, and clung to it fear-smitten.

Catherine did not move, for a space that one could have counted she stood in the terrible quietness. Then she began to draw near slowly. The mad woman lay a-huddle on her face, as she had rolled; the sword had snapped when it had entered her breast; already the blood was oozing and spreading, a dark-coloured stain. At the sight Catherine halted; her face went dead white, a meaningless look came on it and she sat down slowly upon the floor watching, fascinated, the spreading stain.

III

HOW THE LITTLE MAID KITTY TOOK FRIGHT

THE little maid Kitty was that night lodged in the closet that led from Miss de Gray's chamber. Catherine had willed it so, for she saw earlier how the girl was timid of her strange surroundings, and how Mrs. Abigail, in her virtuous intent of instructing her aright, was perhaps a thought hard on her. Betimes in the evening did Kitty retire to the small apartment, and there she was when Catherine came upstairs ; she came forth to see if the lady needed her, but she was dismissed.

"I want nothing to-night," Catherine said, without turning her head.

Her voice was strange and her manner somewhat curt, and Kitty noticed it and wondered. Perhaps Catherine noticed too, for she added : "Go to bed, child, go and sleep well."

Then she closed the door between the two rooms and Kitty, as bidden, went quickly to bed. But Catherine de Gray stood staring down at the fire.

"Make fast the door," he had said, and anon she crossed the room with swift quiet steps and looked to the fastenings of bolt and lock.

"Make fast the door"—against what ? She was back by the fire and she put the question in her mind. Against the blind rage, the furious jealousy of the mad

woman? Against the passion that was in his blood, in her own? Ah no, not that! Not that! She sank down upon her knees before the fire, fighting in her soul for him, for herself and for her faith. The log on the hearth split open, showing its glowing heart—she had riven her breast that night and shown her heart. What a challenge had she given, what a truth avowed! How had she confessed, and what had she offered to him? To him that was bound to the body that was worse than dead!

She clenched her two hands together and knelt staring into the fire heart, and the slow tears gathered in her eyes—tears that came from the depths of her soul, hot with agony, to lay burning in her eyes from which they could not fall. Tears that were for him, not herself. What was this to her compared with the long numb pain she had known in the years which were fled? Nothing, no nothing. But for him? "Ah, my beloved! Ah, God! God!" And perhaps there was near to her heart that night the rebellion of Job—"to curse God and die," if so be she might purchase freedom for this other.

Silent was the house that night, silent as the grave; without the snow fell thick and fast; within stillness lay like the hand of the dead. In the far corners of the room was grayness with the quiet grayness as of the ashes of yesterday; only by the hearth was heat, life that had agony in its glow. Steps came adown the passage without, not the light shuffling tread of the mad lady nor the firm step of Caryll's feet, but a man heavier and older. Catherine listened. The steps ceased now; but none knocked for admittance or spoke with her, so she thought he must have turned off some other way. She rose and went into the closet, for she remembered

she had not made fast that door. The little maid was sound asleep and never heard the shooting of the bolt. How peaceful was she, how ignorant, how happy ! Catherine stood a moment shading the light and looking down at her. Then she moved away with a proud lifting of the head. It were better to have lived and loved, to have sorrowed and suffered and known ! The snail on the wall has peace, the cow in the sheltered home pasture, but the soul that has suffered, the heart that has loved—they have lived ; life is a sounding of deeps, a voice in the wilderness crying, a reaching of highest and lowest, a giving. “ At least,” she said, “ at least I have lived.” And she put out her light and sat her down by the fire in the gray grim room, thinking, thinking, but of what she thought a man cannot say.

And after a long time, though at what hour she knew not, she heard voices without her door. At first she could not distinguish them nor what they were, but in a little she did. It was Jacobs the old servant and the mad Lady Caryll who spoke.

“ Nay, my lady,” the old man was saying, “ I may not let you pass, Sir Charles forbade me to let any pass this threshold to-night.”

Catherine could not hear Lady Caryll’s answer and her mind jumped away to the thought of the man who had set this guard for her safety, when he could not guard her himself for fear of evil tongues.

“ Nay, my lady,” the servant was repeating, “ it cannot be.”

“ Fool ! ” her ladyship’s voice made answer in wrath. “ You can take it to her yourself, ’tis but this letter to her.”

And it would seem Jacobs was persuaded, for in a

little there was a cautious knocking, and when Catherine answered a letter was pushed beneath the door to her. She took it up and, carrying it to the fire, read it by the flickering light. Thus it ran—

“I require that you let me in. You are a stronger woman than I and need have no fear, and if that is not sufficient to give you courage, I pledge you my word to do no sudden violence.

“You have done me the greatest wrong one can do another, and I demand satisfaction. Were you a man you could not refuse me this poor reparation. As a woman you shall not refuse it.

JULIANNA CARYLL.”

This she read and stood staring. A challenge was it? A challenge to fight a duel to the death as gentlemen fight over points of honour? It was a wild, a wrong, a crazy thing. Crazy? Lady Caryll was crazy. Yet, sharply the thought came to Catherine, were she a man she could not, as the epistle said, refuse, though the challenger were mad and the charge false. But she was a woman, she need not fight—and she would not. She moved to the table, she would write, refuse the mad request and at the same time declare that she was innocent of the offence. But when she was sat down the impossibility of writing became plain to her. She could decline the challenge, but she could not say that she was innocent so as to carry conviction to one mad jealous. A while gone she had openly and fearlessly declared that she loved the man—and she did love him, and with what a love! Could she expect cold written words to undo the effect of hot spoken ones in a jealous

and diseased mind ? She threw down the pen and going to the door opened it.

"Is Lady Caryll without ?" she asked. The lady was and old Jacobs too, poor fellow, he was in distress enough with his company and his charge. But his distress was increased an hundredfold when his charge opened the door and his present company came swiftly forward.

"Nay, nay," he cried. "My lady, you said you would not enter ! Madame, Sir Charles commanded——"

But both disregarded him : "Silence !" cried her ladyship. "This is no affair of yours ! My sweet gossip here wants a chat with me."

And Catherine said. "I must have two words with my lady."

She held the door for the other to pass in, which she did, Jacob still protesting. Then the door was closed but not locked, for the satisfying of the old man, and the two stood confronting one another.

For a moment Catherine hesitated for words, but Lady Caryll was at no loss.

"Well ?" said she in a smooth light voice, "are you ready ?"

"I have something to say to you," Catherine returned.

"Nay," the other answered, "nothing to say, only to do," and from beneath the loose *négligée* she wore she produced two swords.

Catherine drew back a step. "Fight ?" she said, "Do you think I called you here to fight ?"

"Certainly," her ladyship made answer and she measured the swords together—then sneeringly she asked. "Are you afraid ? Can you not use a sword ?"

Catherine could, for her father had himself taught her this along with many other things he would have taught the son which fate denied him.

"I likewise can use one," Lady Caryll informed her. "Would you know what taught me? Hate! And I began to learn on the day when I first heard that my husband went to abide with you. On that day I set to getting a master of fence, for I said, 'One day I shall meet this——'"

But here Catherine cut her short: "You shall not say it!" she said. "It is not true! You think it, I know; that is why I see you, to tell you you mistake."

"I do not mistake," the other answered contemptuously, "there is no mistake here; you have committed that for which there is no forgiveness—were you a man and I a man one of us would end it with blood, and being a woman——" she thrust her face suddenly forward and spoke with a veritable cold fury of hate—"being a woman, do you think to go free?"

Came there just then a tap at the door and Jacob's voice without, "My lady, madame, I make bold to ask how long will the talk last?"

"Long!" snarled Lady Caryll, "Get you gone."

But Catherine went to the door and spoke meekly—"We will not be long," said she, "we have some few words to say, then you shall attend her ladyship to her apartments."

Lady Caryll who had drawn near the fire moved impatiently, and when Catherine turned from the door she signed to her to come near for fear of being overheard.

Catherine came; "I have already told you," she said, "you are mistaken, I have done no wrong."

"No wrong!" the other cried. "To what then did you confess this evening at table?"

Catherine flushed, but answered with unflinching eyes, "I confess that I love and am loved. But no word of it, no sign of it, ever appeared till you forced it forth at that hour."

Lady Caryll laughed a mocking laugh: "'Love and am loved,'" mimicked she, then leaning forward again with bitterness she asked, "Is not that enough? You love? I mourn. You are loved, I am shut within this house of gloom. You have his presence to delight, his memory to cheer, his future coming to give you hope—I have—the Shadows,"—she waved her hand tragically as she spoke.

But after a little she seemed to grow more calm. "You think I have lost my wits," she said, seating herself by the fire, "I know it is said that I am mad o' times. Am I?" She seemed to ask the question of herself. "I will tell you what it is, I hear more than others hear, I see more than others see, see sometimes when the Shadows grow large, creep close—whisper—whisper."

Her own voice sank almost to a whisper as she looked round at the dim corners where the shadows lurked. Catherine looked too, and there stirred something of pity in her; she shivered a little, though she did not fear.

"You tremble?" my lady said, mistaking her. "Why? Are you afraid of shadows? my friends, my quiet friends. If you lived with them as I live, you would not fear them, they would grow large to you, they would talk with you too, out of compassion."

And again Catherine shivered and the pity grew; but Lady Caryll hardly noticed her now, she was

thinking her own thoughts, she even for a moment forgot the swords which she had brought, and which lay beside her. She rose and began to move uneasily but silently about the room, fingering this and that.

"There is a blank time in the past," she said at length. "I cannot remember, they tell me I had a babe and killed it. I don't know—I did not choose—I did not make blackness. Why should I suffer for it, why should he be estranged from me? Tell me that, tell me, I say, you who love him, who have taken his love!"

She advanced upon Catherine as she spoke. And Catherine had nothing to say, not because she had no defence to offer, but because she had begun to forget herself in pity for the poor crazed soul. But Lady Caryll would seem to want no words; she retreated again as quietly as she had advanced, walking backwards till she touched the table where the mirror stood; then she turned and caught sight of her own reflection. For a moment or two she looked at it, then she began to speak as if addressing it.

"And so she loved him and he loved her, and they committed no sin," she said to it, then she turned her head sharply and demanded with bitterness of Catherine, "What have you taken from me? And what have you left to me?"

But Catherine had no answer ready, for verily there are sins of soul as well as sins of body; and because her heart could not in all sorts acquit her she could not meet the strange light eyes. For a moment they were turned glitteringly on her, then they shifted again, Lady Caryll looked back in the mirror.

"But that is no sin—no sin," she whispered to the reflection. "A preacher said—I don't remember when, ever so long ago—'Whoso looketh on a woman

to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her.' " She turned about again suddenly. " Have you looked upon my husband ? " she asked.

And Catherine bowed her head : " I have loved him," she said.

Lady Caryll nodded : " But you have committed no sin," she said in the same monotonous voice. " No sin, no wrong."

She drew a step closer and looked down at the bowed head. " How near have you been to him ? " she asked in a thrilling whisper. " What did you read in his eyes ? What did he read in yours ? "

For a moment Catherine looked up and saw the light shifting eyes, the wild hair, the darkened soul, and saw in mind the man she loved, the man who loved her ; then she covered her face with her hands. " God help us all," she said brokenly.

Lady Caryll moved softly away again and took up the swords. " Those who commit the unforgivable sin fight," said she, " blood cleans honour, blood. We must fight."

She offered a sword to Catherine. But she made no move to take it. " Of what avail is it ? " she said numbly.

" Avail ? " the other answered with sudden passion, " it is satisfaction ! Satisfaction," and she carressed the sword blade. " You owe it me," she said. " I claim it as my right, shall I not have my due ? "

" Ah, but it will mend nothing ! " Catherine protested. " How can I fight with you, his wife ? "

" How can you not fight ? " Lady Caryll answered, " with me whom you have robbed ? " and she threw off her *négligée* as she spoke, pressing upon Catherine.

Catherine rose to her feet : " I will go away," she

said, still hesitating from the sword. "I will go and see him no more."

"Of what avail is that?" Lady Caryll cried. "You cannot put back what you have stolen, you cannot give it me again, and——" she turned suddenly and thrust fiercely at Catherine—"you shall pay for it with your life!"

Catherine parried the thrust: "Hold!" said she authoritatively. "We cannot fight here, my maid sleeps in the closet."

Lady Caryll lowered her blade at once. "Come to the hall, then," said she. "Come! We shall be undisturbed there. Jacobs? Ah, yes, he can come too, it were better so, 'tis more in order."

She opened the door as she spoke and found the old man still on guard outside: "Jacobs," she commanded, "follow us, we have need of you in the hall."

Jacobs wavered a moment, altogether astonished at this bidding. But Catherine de Gray came forth and shut the door after her, evidently intent on it, too. In much of a daze the old man followed, clearly it seemed his duty lay in that way since his orders from Sir Charles were to watch over her safety. Thus the three of them set out together.

Now the little maid Kitty slept heavily that night, for she was very weary both with the fatigues of the journey and the strangeness of the present lodging. Even she slept through all the talk which passed between Miss de Gray and Lady Caryll in the adjoining room. But some small sound of it must have penetrated to her brain, for towards the end she began to be troubled with an ill dream which wore her sleep thin, so that, when the outer door slipped from Catherine's

hand and closed somewhat noisily, she woke with a start. For a moment she lay wondering what had woke her, trembling still from her dreams and from all the fearsome tales she had that evening heard of the loneliness of the house and the madness of Lady Caryll. And as she lay so she heard steps without the passage which passed by the door of her closet and a voice which was Miss de Gray's, say "your ladyship must lead, I will follow." Then the steps grew faint and died away.

Kitty listened, listened ; but there was no sound of returning and no sound at all in the big chamber beyond her own where her mistress should sleep. For a moment or so she lay listening ; then, the great quietness frightening her, she arose and cautiously looked into the chamber. No one was there ; in the firelight she could see that it was empty, the bed unslept in, everything in order save that the brocade gown lay on a chair and the string of pearls on a table—Miss de Gray had gone—she was gone with her mad ladyship !

Poor little Kitty was scared indeed ; frightened at first to move, for fear some bogey thing came from the shadows to catch her by the leg ; frightened afterwards to abide where she was thus alone, and this second fear drove out the first. Hastily possessing herself of a candle, she opened the door, and finding the passage without clear, made her escape. Away she sped, not sure in her mind where she was running or what doing, only anxious to get away from the room where the mad lady had been, where she might come again, and where the silence and shadows lay hold on one like creepy things. So she ran, perhaps thinking, if she thought at all, to find her way to the servants' quarters and there throw herself on the sympathy of some

wench no braver than herself. But nowhere near the servants' quarters did she go, and not far did she get before, some draught blowing her candle out, she stumbled against a chest by the wall and fell headlong.

The noise of her fall echoed loudly in the silence, it sounded to her as if it must rouse all the inmates of the house. But it did not, it roused only one, and he, it would hardly seem, had been sleeping, for almost on the instant of her fall a man, fully dressed, opened a door at hand and demanded, "Who is there? What is it?"

Kitty did not answer, she was too much afraid, till in the light of the candle Caryll held she had seen him plainly. She did not know that he was the master, she was even too scared to guess it, but she perceived that he was a man of flesh and blood, albeit he looked ill and old and stern, with heavy shadows about the eyes and deep lines at jaw and brow.

"Who are you?" he asked, looking down at the trembling girl.

"Kitty, sir, please you," quavered she, "I—I ran away—I was feared—The mad lady——"

But at that he cut her short. "The mad lady?" he said, "have you seen her?"

"No," Kitty answered, "No—but she came past the door, she has taken Miss Catherine away."

Aye, but his face contracted then, and with a fearsome look, "Where?"

"I know not," Kitty said, and then her words dried up, because of something so terrible in his fierce dark eyes.

"You must show me, girl," he said, and he took her by the arm.

Quiet now with a fear that was greater than her

former trembling, Kitty came, and quickly she found herself back in the big room she had passed through. The door stood open as she had left it ; when Caryll saw " he said, " Where is Jacobs ? "

" He is dead, sir, I do not know," Kitty answered near tears, " he is not here "

" Gone too ? " Caryll muttered and pushed the door wide.

Kitty went in at his bidding, but he remained on the threshold. There was no one within, that was at once apparent.

" What is that ? " Caryll said as his eye lit on the letter lying on the floor.

Kitty brought it to him and when he saw that it was his wife's writing he had no scruple to read it. Kitty stood dutifully holding the candle for him, watching while he read ; for a moment he read, then he gave an inarticulate sound and without a word turned and set off down the passage as hard as he could go. And Kitty, white-faced and round-eyed, stood staring, not daring to follow.

Now Tobiah had been somewhat overlooked by all the members of the household. Jacobs had completely forgot that the Dissenter was in the hall when he, high stupid with fright, was forced by Lady Caryll to come thither with her and Catherine de Gray. The poor man shook with fright as he kindled the wax lights at the lady's imperious bidding, and when he saw the swords displayed and the two take up their stand he grew numb with terror, stuttering speechless. He was unable to call aid, had he thought any within call ; able only to watch with staring eyes while the light shot along the blades and the two women figures move

a little as they fought a fight that seemed as if it were to the death. So till the last terror came and Lady Caryll fell a huddle on the floor and Catherine de Gray, after a moment that seemed eternity, sat down near to watch, vacant eyed, the slow spreading stain.

But now forth from his chair stalked Tobiah the Dissenter.

"Ho!" said he, "Is this how you purpose to spend the night? Is this some play acting that you settle yourselves to watch?"

Catherine did not look his way, only shuddered like one who is mortal cold, but Jacobs left the wall and staggered to him, "Oh, sir, reverend sir!" blethered he, clasping Tobiah about the knees.

The Dissenter shook him off. "Keep quiet, fool," said he, and went to Lady Caryll.

"Is she dead?" the servant breathed.

"Aye," said Tobiah.

"Oh, oh, oh!" began Jacobs in a wail, but Tobiah pulled him up. "What's to do?" he asked. "Why this lamentation for one who is better gone than here? She took her own life it is true, but, her mind being gone before, the Lord is like to take that into account. Come, no whimpering, stir yourself and fetch a cordial."

"Mistress," said he to Catherine and getting her to her feet, "get your wits together."

It is a wondrous thing that a woman who can face death bravely, nay, court it for herself and threaten it to another with muscles of steel and nerves likewise, should yet at the sight of blood become weak as an infant and foolish as an idiot. Yet so it is. Tobiah had little patience with such things, and with stern words and a cordial he set to shaking Catherine to her sober senses again.

"See, you, Mistress," said Tobiah, "you were best in your chamber, and without women either. Women servants have ever inventing wits and clapper tongues, and it is no business of any that you have quitted your apartment this night. Do you hear me? It is no business of any whether you were here or there, in your chamber or another—they will be ready enough to place you in another. Master Jacobs, take her up, and see you, brother, you and I are sole witnesses of this night's business. Take her up, I say, and then call Sir Charles." But Jacobs did not obey, for before he could move Sir Charles was among them.

"What is this?" he said, but his eye sought the white-faced woman who stood where Tobiah had propped her, not the one who lay on the floor. And though, like all his sort, he masked his soul, one could see, as his eyes lit on her, half the tragedy and all the fear had fled from them.

But Catherine did not answer, though her lips moved no words came. Jacobs also was too overcome; but Tobiah was ready with what was seemly.

"Sir," said he, "the Lord has visited you to-night. He gave—at least we must suppose so, since both good and evil are from His hand—and He has taken away. We can still bless the name of the Lord."

Caryll drew near and looked at the woman who lay dead on the floor and the Dissenter went on to explain—"Your lady has perished by her own hand. Why I cannot tell you, whether by accident or design or under the influence of some fit—but perished she certainly has. I who have spent the night in yon chair, saw it but was not in time to prevent. Master Jacobs and Mistress de Gray were also upon the scene before the end, but not in time either——"

He doubtless had more to say, but Catherine cut him short. "Nay," said she, "but you shall hear all," and she told Caryll briefly what had befallen, the blood coming back to her heart and the life to her brave proud face as she confessed—"I slew her not," she said, "it was but the veriest prick I gave her. I cannot tell why she slew herself then, by accident or no, but this is true, I have unsheathed sword against her, your wife."

Caryll had stood still not looking towards her as she spoke, now he came to her and taking her hand in his led her to the stairs.

"Will you not go and rest," he said.

That was all and his voice was very gentle. But Catherine's eyelids quivered, so that the tear drops hung on them, overflowed and fell down her cheeks; then with bowed head she went up the stairs.

"Mistress de Gray," said Tobiah in the hall, "were certainly better within her chamber. It were a mistake she ever quitted it to-night—and mistakes should not always be blazoned abroad, they oft serve as bad examples to others. Moreover, in such matters," and he indicated the whole entirely, "the testimony of women is of no use and should not be given, the testimony of Master Jacobs and myself is all that is needed, sound and of avail."

Sir Charles bowed: "I am of your mind," he said gravely, then he smiled, the first time for long. "Sir," said he, "I am happy indeed that my roof has this night sheltered a gentleman of delicacy and honour," and he wrung the Dissenter's hand even as he had been one of his own condition.

Owing to the wisdom of Tobiah the reputation of Miss

de Gray was left as fair and unsullied as it deserved to be. All and sundry heard how the mad Lady Caryll came to the hall and slew herself before Tobiah, dozing by the fire, knew rightly what she was about. All knew that and could not but see the hand of Providence therein, but none knew more, not even the maid Kitty. To her the Dissenter talked with suitable gravity, warning her not to tell what little she knew; showing her plainly that wagging tongues were the beginning of mischief for maids and mistresses also. And seeing that Kitty was much afraid of Tobiah and also much attached to Miss de Gray, she was careful both to ask no questions and tell no stories concerning what befell at the lonesome house that night.

And in due and decent time Sir Charles and Catherine were married and lived very happily.

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The Black Dog of Yarrow

If any find fault with the doings of the good man Tobiah in the matter of the mad Lady Caryll they are plainly without perception. Was it not true that he and Jacobs were the sole witnesses of the tragic happening? Catherine de Gray was in some sorts an actor—and an actor is not an audience. And was it not right to withhold from meddling in the affairs of this husband and wife, even if by so doing the marriage of Catherine was promoted? Tobiah perceived that she was of the sort from whom come the mothers of heroes; and that sort should ever marry and have children for the honour of this great nation and the good of all men.

Thus is it plain that the Lord was with Tobiah in this matter, as He was with him in the next, which is recorded—namely that concerning The Black Dog of Yorrow.

I

WOUP THE MOLE-CATCHER

THIS befell on a certain night in autumn. It was the last day of the October fair, an occasion for much unseemly drinking and other wantonness in our town.

Woup the Mole-catcher sat in the *Three Feathers Inn*, a place of ill repute, and drank the last that he could afford. With him were other fellows of the same kidney, and also Mother Lee; a beldame who comes to our town at fair time and goes again before the justices can lay her by the heels on any of the counts of which she is suspected. All were far gone in liquor, saving only the old woman, into whom one might pour drink all day and every day and no one be the wiser or the worse, save he who paid the reckoning. Very boastful and pot-valiant were the men, and counterfeit doleful the old woman. She had a complaint against the folk of our parts, for none would hire the girl Judith, who, she said, she had brought with her to the fair for the sole reason of thus providing for her. The girl was with her now, seated in the far corner of the same settle, taking no part in the drinking or the talking, and not very plainly to be seen, for the smoky candle flare scarce reached to her. A straight-limbed, proud-looking wench, she seemed, for

all that her feet were bare and her kirtle old ; her eye was indifferent and coldly scornful, as if she recked nothing of what passed around, and her face as stormy and as beautiful as a wild day's sunset ; not one was she for chance kissing in handy doorways.

"Would any believe it ?" said Mother Lee. "There's never a one in this town as would have her ? Comes me Mistress Cowley, 'I could not have a wench of those looks under my roof !' 'He ! he !' says I, 'you are right, mistress, good Master Cowley might tire of screech owl faces did he have anything fairer whereon to look.' Comes me old Dame Flint, 'The wench has a temper, it's in her face, I would not have it in my home !' 'Right you, too,' says I, 'there's not room in your house for more tempers than's there already.' Comes me Madame Ferbelow, 'Lord ! a beggar ! I could not hire a beggar !' 'Right, Madame,' says I, 'twould ill become you, like hiring your own kith and kin.'"

The men laughed maudlin, but the old woman grew doleful. "And so the day's gone," said she, "and the girl still on my hands. Is there none here wants her ? I warrant you she's strong and handy, her temper's a lamb's, and as for her looks, you see her."

They did, for they stared at her curiously, while she looked beyond them or at them, unseeing, indifferent, counting them no more than the hogsheads that stood behind.

The landlord, to whom Mother Lee now turned, began to excuse himself, saying the wench was not one for his business. Another began to talk of his wife, and gave it with well-pleased pride that she was unreasonable jealous of him with all women. A third said he was a poor man and kept no maid. At that

one made an unseemly jest, and a second capped it with another, and so on and on till somehow it came about that Woup the mole-catcher was pushed forward and boastfully said none should gainsay ought that he did, he would take the girl in despite of any.

At that Mother Lee went to the bargain. Oh, a wily old woman was she! Sharp as a ferret, and not more to be trusted. In a little she had sold him the girl with a higgles and a haggle and the necessary preamble; and the price was a crown piece and a glass of Hollands, for that he had her and married her there and then. Maybe none there had much thought of marriage at the outset, but there was present Jack Parson (he who is now in prison for debt, and like to remain so). He was for making them man and wife before the company assembled; and the company, being very merry with drink and shrewdly prompted by Mother Lee, eagerly agreed thereto. For Woup himself, sober, he would not have been near a match for the old woman, and drunk, he was but as clay; moreover, he was pot-valiant and pot-amorous now, and so quite ready. As to the girl, she said neither "yes" nor "no," and seemed to be complete indifferent. Quickly the matter was arranged, a space cleared, and the couple stood together before the stained table where two dips were placed altar-wise. Jack Parson said what words he could call to mind over them, and gave the girl an iron door ring, while the landlord drew ale for to drink to them after, and the shadows on the wall seemed all hands and mugs as the drinkers paused, leaning forward to see.

At this time Woup lived a good three miles from the town. To get there one must cross the heath, a matter none so easy in daylight, but worser still in

dark, when a man were more like to find the bogs than the way. Remembering tardily the distance to be travelled and the already late hour, Woup gave the order for the homeward march within a while of the ceremony's performance. He saddled his ass and shouldered his sack, and one, sportfully providing him with a spare halter, he fastened that about the girl's waist. Away they went, he riding, a trifle unsteady, but puffed out with vainglory and holding her halter, while she walked beside as coldly quiet as she had been all along. Through the town they went; there were folk about, but bent on their own concerns, and for the most part not extraordinary sober; none heeded the two; it is doubtful if the girl had cared greatly an they had, she was past so small a trifle.

The night was very dark, the sky of the velvet blackness one sees o' times in October. An unsteady wind sobbed heavily, sometimes shaking a bush eerily and rising suddenly with the beat as of great wings; anon sinking to a wet sighing breath, like a living thing invisible. Up the lane beyond the town the ass plodded, the man singing a line of song now and then, lines with a tag for one who had a woman for himself. The girl walked beside, splashing through the pools and puddles which lay in the road. Once the ass lifted his head—he smelt rain coming; indeed, any less besotted than Woup might have known rain was near, and an increase in the wind too; but he heeded it not. At length they came by a gateless gap to the heath. Here already they felt the rising wind, but neither spoke of it, and when the girl made as if she would bear away to the left, the mole-catcher jerked the halter and tugged her off towards the right.

It was monstrous bad going ; the ground in parts very soft and much encumbered with low gorse and small tangly growth. The ass stumbled often, putting a foot now and then in a hole and catching it now and then in the furze. Woup called him to order each time with an oath and a blow ; and when the girl did likewise he treated her the same, proud to show his mastery. She, for her part, said nothing, not even to guide him in the right path, though it is possible she could have found her way. Thus they went until she plunged to the knees in a morass, when, the donkey doing likewise, the party came to a sudden stand.

Woup hit the beast a great blow with his staff. "Go on !" he roared, swearing thickly.

"Fool !" said the girl, and her contemptuous voice smote coldly for the first time into his blustering. "The beast cannot go, we are in the bog."

"What !" cried Woup. "What ! Fool, you call me !" and he aimed a blow at her. "I've bought you," he told her ; "you don't know your master yet. Call me fool ! You'd be better kissing my boot. Kiss my boot," this he commanded with authority, the idea taking his drunken fancy.

She did not obey, and he kicked out at her, but at that moment a light sprang up away ahead of them, a blue, unsteady light that wavered lividly in the darkness, dancing now high, now low on the boggy ground. At the sight Woup gripped the ass's mane, for even he knew it for one of the goblin lights that haunt the marsh.

"Out, out !" he cried, in a sweat of fear, and he strove to turn the beast.

In time and with floundering he did it, the girl lending neither help nor hindrance. But when they were on

firm ground again and Woup able to look to the left as well as the right, behold ! There also was a dancing light ! Not ones nor twos did he see now, but threes and fours ; nay, dozens there seemed, advancing upon him in battalions, dancing, bowing, retreating, and advancing again.

"Oh, Lord !" he cried. "Oh, God a-mercy ! Oh, Beelzebub !" and other ejaculations. Then, "You witch !" he yelled, turning upon the girl, who still made no sign ; "this is your doing. I know it, else you'd be afeared !"

"I can lead you forth an' you will," she said coldly.

"Lead, lead !" Woup entreated ; "and the devil take you after !"

Accordingly she led, going a little before with a hand on the ass's bridle, though Woup still had hold of her halter. Slowly and carefully she went, picking a firm path in the morass, heedless alike of the dancing marsh lights and the rising wind. At last they were clear of the bog, and, a curve of the ground hiding them, the marsh and its lights sank out of sight behind. All around was dark now, vague and black on either hand the land stretched, vague and black the shrouded sky, lying so low that one could scarce tell where earth ended and air began.

The mole-catcher muttered an uneasy oath ; he knew not at all where he was, and, the freshness of the night and his late fright having somewhat driven the liquor from his head, he was growing both morose and doubtful.

"The rain begins," the girl said, but more as if she were speaking to herself than him.

"What's that to you ?" he demanded, jerking her

nearer with the halter. "D'ye call the rain as well as the goblin lights, witch?"

As he spoke the first drops splashed upon his hand; and the first were quickly followed by others. He turned his ragged collar about his ears and urged the ass to a trot, regardless of what difficulty the girl might have to keep up with him. On they stumbled as best they might, the rain increasing and the wind rising; soon they were wet to the skin, and so beblinded that they lost all notion of where they might be and all hope of winning to the other side the heath that night. Thankful were they indeed when they stumbled upon a small hut built by some herd long ago—thankful and quite ready to abandon all hope of getting further. It was a rough place of branches and wattle, somewhat ruinous, and by no means weather-proof; still it was shelter of sorts, and the dead heather and bracken within were but moderately wet. Into it they pushed. Woup made the ass fast near the door, then felt in his sack and took out some bread and cheese and a candle end. This last he lighted, and when he had it held to the girl, leered as he eyed her over.

"Not so poor a bargain to look at," he said, "but needs a taste of stick, a good taste."

He flung some of the bread and cheese to her with a jest. But she would not eat it, and at once his humour changed. He lowered at her. "Quarrel with victuals, do you?" said he. "That'll come cheap, but I'll have you to know you'll not quarrel with aught I send. Take your eyes off me. There's more than a flavour of witchcraft in your looks. I'll out it with a stick unless you mind."

The girl neither moved nor spoke, which angered Woup. "Drab!" he cried. "D'ye think I paid a

good crown for this, for a trollop that won't mind her master ? I'll teach you, you'll see ; I'll teach you ! " and he up with his stick.

But she did not flinch, and he began to jeer at her. " What, you'd like it ? " he said. " Well, you shall have some, and then we'll to bed in the corner. "

" Never ! " she said, in a voice that was just a snarl, and her lifted lip showed her teeth so that in the flickering light her face had a look like to that of a wild cat.

Woup drew back a second, yet he was in a great rage, his drink-begotten dignity outraged. " You snap at me ! " he shouted, and seized her by the shoulder.

She twisted from his grip, and through her poor gown he felt her arms hard as iron bars and nigh as strong.

" Look you, " said she, " it were well you understood. I do not live with you. I may this night abide under your roof, that is as may be, and that is all. "

" All ! " roared Woup. " All ! You are my wife, d'ye hear ; you are my wife ! " .

" Your wife ! " she retorted, and taking from her gown the iron ring she snapped it in her terrible fingers. " There is an end of that wedding, " she said, and flung the pieces from her.

At this Woup was near blind, and quite beside himself with rage. " We will see to this ! " bellowed he, and ran upon her.

But at that moment there came a sound without, one stumbled against the door, feeling for an entrance. Instantly Woup extinguished the light ; this rather from habit than from any present need of secrecy ; his doings were not now, as most usual, such as required to be hid, but on the spur of the moment he forgot that and so put out his candle.

" Thanks for your light, " said a voice at the doorway,

a harsh voice, but one having the mincing tone of the gentry. "It has served me as a good guide and just lasted long enough."

There was a movement, the new-comer leaned forward, and without hesitation lay hold of Woup. The girl was so still none could have told her presence in the dark; the mole-catcher would have concealed himself similarly had he been able.

"Let us have light," the new-comer said.

"'Tis all gone," Woup whined. "The last expired when your honour came in."

"Light your finger tips then," the other said, "or your nose, doubtless, there will be heat enough there. Come, a light!"

And very soon Woup found means to kindle one; but when he had it he almost dropped it for surprise and, maybe, fright, for he saw that the new-comer was no other than the Black Dog of Yorrow. The girl even started; she also knew the man, as, indeed, who does not? There is not within many miles, perhaps not within the land, such another, so reckless, so bold, so much feared alike of man and woman, regardless of God and the law, and afraid of nothing that goes above ground. Erincourt, Master of Yorrow, is his style, but the Black Dog he is called, for that his ancestors had such a beast to their crest, and that he himself is black of hair, and dog, or, more truly wolf, indeed. Small wonder was it then that Woup, who was villain enough after his small sort, trembled before this one as tremble the little imps before the high Lord Lucifer. The girl did not tremble; she looked at him, but never moved in her corner, eyeing both men watchfully, but with the old veiling indifference back in her face.

Erincourt, when the light fell on her, smiled faintly. "A woman?" said he. "My ears then did not deceive me; I thought I heard some whispered tenderness when I stumbled against your shelter."

Her eyes shifted to the stick and back again, and for a second the fierceness and glow of battle came back to her. It was gone almost before it was there, but the Black Dog had seen it, and he glanced from her to the mole-catcher, and his faint smile broadened.

"She is my wife, sir," Woup snuffled. "My new-wed wife."

"And this the nuptial chamber?" Erincourt said. "An ill-timed intrusion of mine, a third is not always wanted then, but sometimes——"

He broke off to look at the girl, perhaps seeking to see the hid soul leap again to her eyes, but he did not see it, she remained still as stone.

"She is an ill-conditioned baggage," Woup said spitefully, "no better than she ought to be, lord, when I took her."

Erincourt was busy making his horse fast near to the ass. "A baggage?" said he, carelessly. "Every man's wife is that for some one, wise men take no wives."

"I was in liquor when I took her," Woup muttered, "it was out of charity, your honour, a good crown piece and a glass of hollands I gave for her, sir."

"A longish price," Erincourt said. "But she has beauty of sorts," and he looked her over. She did not move or abate the proud indifference of her glance, and he asked, "What had you to say to the bargain?"

"Naught," she answered; "it is naught to me who is the buyer."

"The newness is off the selling, perhaps?" he suggested.

"No," she answered, "and that you know."

"I? I have not seen you before."

"No, but God or the devil has set eyes in your head, you can see as few can."

"The devil has put a tongue in your mouth," Woup broke in, fearful for himself at her boldness, "and that one which wants slitting," and he struck her a blow on the lips.

At the blow the wild-cat look came again to her face, and went as swiftly, she saying nothing. But Erincourt caught Woup a buffet which sent him rolling.

"You forget yourself, rascal," he said haughtily, "violence is disrespect to my presence."

The mole-catcher picked himself up, he resented the blow, but not to Erincourt, rather to the girl, whom he deemed the cause, and who he would pay by and by.

"I did but strive to teach her, lord," he whined. "She needs teaching, I forgot me of your lordship's presence. I'll not offend again, she can wait till later on."

He looked vindictively at her, but the Master of Yorrow only laughed, as if he pictured to himself that time and what might befall. Then he stopped.

"You bought her for a crown and a glass of hollands?" he said. "I will give you two crowns for her."

"Nay, sir," Woup protested, while his little eyes gleamed mercenary, "two crowns for a man's wife! His new-wed bride, not this four hours wed—his bride, mind you."

"His bride," the other said contemptuous, and when Woup would have spoken, he said, "Well, fool, you can please yourself about the crowns, I'll please myself with t'other half the bargain at any rate."

"No!" the girl said sharply, but the mole-catcher cut her short.

"Hold your tongue!" cried he arrogantly. "I bought you and I can sell you if I choose. If the gentleman wants you, if he has a fancy that way, who am I to stand in the way? Two crowns, sir. It isn't much, if it were three."

"Two," Erincourt said, and threw them contemptuously to him; then he rose and went to look out.

The wind beat about the little shelter, tearing now and then at the frail wattle, and finding its way through a hundred chinks and interstices, so that the small light flickered and wavered and almost expired. The rain was ceasing, blown away by the uneven and increasing gusts, and though it still came in at the door gap, so that the beasts there were wet on the far side, it had much slackened.

"I think we might start," Erincourt said to the girl. "You, I take it, do not fear a damping, and the sooner we go the sooner we are there."

The girl did not move, and the officious mole-catcher took her rope in his hand and jerked her to her feet. For a moment she pulled away; but it was two to one, and she knew it, and knew also she would easier deal with one if he were in error about her willingness.

"Put her up before me," Erincourt said, and when he was mounted Woup obeyed.

Then the horse's head being turned, they went into the night, she and the Dog of Yorrow; she sitting before, he with an arm about to keep her firm. So out into the black, black night, on to the open heath where there was neither landmark nor shelter, and the wind sobbed and laughed and whispered wild things

eerily. The horse stretched himself out and *gallop, gallop, gallop* they went, over soft ground and hard, over break and bush and standing pool. And for long neither spoke a word, only each was listening to the beat of the hoofs, and to the wind voices and the talk of the night; each felt wild pulses stirring, each heard and hearkened to the voices that dwell in the dark.

At last she turned. "You have spent your two crowns for naught," she said. "You have nothing for them."

"I have this ride," he answered, his body swinging easily to the swing of the galloping, "this ride, with the wind and the dark and a woman who is of them in the crook of my arm."

"It is all you have," she retorted. "I will be naught to you, now or ever."

"What?" he said gaily, as he steered the horse from a tarn of ill-shining water. "What, didst fancy yon rascal so much?"

"No," she flamed on him, "I would have escaped him as I will escape you, by another way, truly, but as surely. Lock me in how you will, yet I will out."

He laughed, and the sound of his laughter mixed with the wind. "I lock no locks," he said, "no woman is worth the trouble of keys and locks."

And the pool being left behind, he set the horse to the full stretch of his stride, so that again they fled away across the black plain; on and on, till it seemed the clouds stood to see. And ever under his arm he felt her heart beat, and ever she felt the warmth of his body thrill through the cold of hers, like fire, like lightning heat, like something that tingled and ran.

And so they went, these two, headlong and heedless ;
while deep in each there stirred that which belongs to
the far beginning of things, which wakes again when
night calls the primal in man to play.

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II

THE BLACK DOG OF YORROW

A WHILE since it had pleased Erincourt, Master of Yorrow, to give harbourage at the Hall to certain priests. This not from any more sympathy with the old religion than the new—neither being greatly in his way—but from a desire to vindicate his gentle right to entertain whom he would beneath his roof, and also because it was a thing liable to be called into question. The contraband guests were by now all gone and safe across the seas ; but of that, it would seem, those in authority knew not, news of that sort travelling slow, and great men, or at least those in great places, being slow to turn round. At all events, one of these same priests, being suspicioned in some matter of conspiracy, what must happen but a sending to Yorrow to rout him out. This on the last day of the October fair, when the suspect was safe gone a week past and the Master of Yorrow was from home.

A strongish party was sent to Yorrow for some one had given a hint that the Master might be a somewhat flagrant law-breaker, if so be he took to breaking laws. The men came to the village at nightfall and, having refreshed themselves and the officer having learnt what gossip could tell him, set out for the Hall. They were reinforced now by rabble collected on the march, and also with some others who had reason against the Black

Dog and who, encouraged by the strength of the party, had joined themselves to it with the hope of paying off old scores.

These worthies found Yorrow Hall an easier nut to crack than some of them had feared, for, though the servants would not open to them, being more afraid of the absent Master than the command of the law, they were yet able to force an entrance. Servants are mostly a timorous folk, notably those who serve such a master as Erincourt, and especially when he is away, leaving no one to direct. So it befell that the party effected an entrance; and, a rare time they had, searching for priests, and, though finding none, yet finding other matters equally to their mind. Thus, unhindered by any, for in a very little time the servants were all fled, fearing equally to be caught by the searchers now or caught by the master later. So that night there was other noise than the blustering wind about the great house of Yorrow where there should have been nought but the tossing of bare branches and the whistle of rain. Lights flared in unshuttered windows, went to and fro within and flickered without, showing as stars that faded and failed and grew to glow again in the dense darkness of the woods that surrounded the house.

Erincourt, Master of Yorrow, with her he had bought for two crowns before him, came a-down the road which led from the heath to his own abode. Sharp the horse hoofs rang on the road and loud blustered the wind in the trees. Round to the left they swung, leaving below on the right the village of Yorrow, bearing to the left where in the black of the woods they sighted a twinkling. Another and another! Flaring faintly, flickering, dying, twinkling forth again. A sound too, other than the roaring of wind in tree tops,

a commotion which grew on the ears and to one at least told its tale. Erincourt drew rein in the thick of the trees.

"I must ask you to forbear awhile," said he. "It is ill manners to thus twice hold you back on the threshold of the nuptial chamber, but a little matter calls me."

"What?" she asked, and she kept her seat, from which one may guess she did not think an opportunity of escape thus carelessly offered worth seizing.

"A trifle of argument with some ignorant knaves who have the temerity to think a gentleman may not entertain whom he will beneath his roof."

"Priests?" she said; all the country round knew of the doing.

He told her "Yes, and they have gone these three days past," he laughed.

"You will tell these folk so?" she asked.

"Not I! A whip, or if need be something more forcible, is the language for rabble. D'ye think the Dog of Yorrow explains himself to such as they? Slip down and wait here till I have done the talking."

She obeyed him; but she did not make off, either she was sure he would catch her again or else she was curious to see what transpired. Certainly, so soon as he moved she followed, pushing through the bushes in his wake; moving so quietly as not to be heard above the tramping of his horse and the noise they approached, and so quickly as to be not long after him in reaching the space before the Hall. Arrived there she at once perceived that the matter was greater and had gone further than he thought. She kept herself in the shelter of the bushes, but eyed the crowd she could almost have touched. Hither and thither they ran, all unaware of any approach, shouting to those at the open windows

and doors and holding their torches and lanterns high, so that, by contrast with the darkness behind, the place was bright as day.

Into the circle of light rode Erincourt, riding neither fast nor slow, showing neither excitement nor anger, and drawing rein when he reached the centre. Dead fell silence about him, dead as if each man had been struck to stone. He looked round hand on hip, and the girl saw the look and the laugh in his eye and knew that this at least was a man.

"Ho, friends!" said he lightsomely. "It grieves me that I was not here to meet you, but I hope I may make amends now. What," he asked with mock astonishment, "are you not grieved too? No one has aught to say? Come, come, let me give you a welcome, belated but a right fitting welcome."

And still there was a laugh in his voice, a creeping laugh which was like the caress of a whip lash being unfurled. But no one had a word to say, only one at the edge of the crowd moved towards the darkness.

Erincourt saw him. "Stay," said he with authority. "Stay, all of you, you must not go now that your host has come."

His tongue curled on the words gleefully while his eye darted to and fro, singling each face and storing it in memory. And each man, as the eye lit on him, felt shivered and afraid as if his name were writ in fate's book.

No one moved or lifted hand against him, and none spoke word for himself or another; those in the darkest thought but of slinking off, and those in the light turned and twisted as if careful only to get away.

"They are all afraid," thought the girl who watched, and she felt a great contempt.

But there was one who was not afraid—certainly he also was one who did not know. The officer in command of the party looked out of window, and seeing Erincourt below called, "Seize that man!"

None obeyed, and Erincourt looked up with an insolent laugh and a jest that was cutting, though perhaps not decent on his lips.

Red flamed the officer's face, and out of the window he swung; but not alone, half a dozen of his men were after him, for they knew the Black Dog by repute.

After that there was trouble.

The girl in the bushes could not tell how things befell. All was in darkness, for the country folk fled away with their lights so soon as Erincourt was unhorsed and his eye off them. Great was the confusion, and great too the noise of strife, but she was not by that affrighted. Rather she pressed closer as the fight waxed, her eye, used to the dark, able a little to follow one figure at least. Ah, he was down now! He rose no more! She left her ambush, drawing from her bosom a knife hid there for other purpose. Swift she struck with it and drew it out, and the blood ran warm on her fingers; swift again, and now she left it, knowing her better course. She stooped and lay hold of a coat whose texture she had felt before that night; she had it firmly, she seized the body, lifted it, pulled, dragged it into the bushes and undergrowth, into the wet dark of thick-growing things, so to safety. While the fight waxed and the tumult grew in the darkness near at hand she sat in a hid hollow, her skirts spread wide as she crouched on the body of the Black Dog of Yorrow.

Light does not come early at that season of the year; very pale and chill it is when it does come, and it comes slowly, as if darkness were loth to leave the

world. Lothindeed did it seem that night to the girl who sat in the sheltered hollow with the wounded man for company. Very long was that night, years long it seemed since the last sounds of strife died away, and the party, bearing with them what hurt they had, departed, believing their quarry had made off. Leaving him, though they knew it not, under the girl's poor kirtle until the silence emboldened her to move and cover him with the cloak he had put about her when he bade her dismount and wait for him. That was all she could do for him save roughly staunch the bleeding she could feel in the dark, take his head in her lap to give him more ease, and soothe him with the stroking of strong fingers when he moaned or stirred. More than that she was afraid to attempt in the dark for fear some one of the men had been left on guard ; so she waited. And at last the light came, very faint and pale, reaching but wanly to the covert where she sat. A bird twittered here and there, all else was very still ; so still that she was emboldened to reconnoitre. Slowly she drew herself out of hiding, very stiff and cold from the long watch ; cautiously left the shelter of the bushes and crept to the house front. There was no one there and no sign of any except in the disordered garden and trampled paths. In the air was the scent of trodden marigolds—hardy flowers which bloom far into winter's lap ; on the ground dew lay thick and the wet of last night's rain. The wind had dropped, and though at this early hour the day was quiet and gray, like a bride whose wedding has not come till the autumn of her youth, one could believe that by and by the sun would shine pale and gentle as it does when the year is advanced.

Quietly the girl approached, stole in at the open

door, half expecting to discover one who dozed on guard within ; but there was no one there, no one at all. She stood a moment to listen ; there was no sound nor stir, all was still and deserted. She looked in at a chamber, then another and another ; but still no one and nowhere any sign of life. There a curtain torn, there a chair overturned, some little token of last night's spoilers, but not so much as might be, for the shadow of the Black Dog had gone before him, enough to make the spoiling half-hearted. She went upstairs to the floor above ; but all there was as below, never a sound of life, all empty in the soft dawn, all quiet and fresh smelling from the air which came in at the wide-thrown windows. She went to the stair head and looked down, listening. Then she called aloud : " Who is here ? Who is here ? John, Charles, Ann ! "

No one answered nor came to her, and being satisfied that she was indeed alone, she set about preparations. She chose a room well hidden and easy of defence by reason of the small passage leading to it. Having made this ready she went out again, bearing with her wine, overlooked by last night's spoilers, and things suitable to the fashioning of rough bandages.

Skilfully did she make Erincourt as fit as might be to be moved and then she moved him. He was in part himself, recovered by the wine, but in the main she was compelled to carry rather than lead him. Into the house, to the hallway where they rested, and up the stairs, for the room she had chosen lay above ; she was fearful of being surprised did she let him lie in a lower chamber. The stairs were wide and shallow, stairs a man might drive down were he drunk enough, nevertheless, the task of getting the Master up them was no light one, and taxed even her great strength to

the uttermost. Slowly she did it, very slowly, with more than one pause on the way ; the morning mist had all cleared and the sunlight shone faintly in before she was able to sink breathless on the floor of the retired chamber with all accomplished.

But she did not give herself long for repose ; soon she was about again, for she must fetch the wine and the clock from the bushes, and in all ways hide the signs of the presence of any. And not too soon, either, for she had not much more than returned to the upper room when she heard steps below the window—sundry of the searching party come to look for signs of the Master of Yorrow. She held her breath to listen, then took up her position by the door, armed with Erin-court's heavy pistol. She glanced towards the bed, fearful lest the man who lay there should betray his presence by delirious ravings—like as not he would. She was ready for it, though she hoped it would not be ; in any case she could keep the room a while, one could hold that passage against several. So she waited.

The steps and noise drew near the housefront ; the searchers looked in the bushes and speculated where the man might be. They paused by an open door, and looked in at a window once, then one entered the hall and peered round.

"There is no one here," he said, "none has been, the place is open as we left it."

"He might be hiding," a second suggested.

"Hiding !" the first cried. "Who hides with open doors and all the ways free and unguarded ?"

"Nay," another voice said, "the Black Dog of Yorrow is not one to hide. He has gone further afield for purposes of his own, doubtless we'll find him as soon

as we want, or sooner unless—as is very like—it happens that he finds us.”

This much she heard and no more ; the steps moved away, grew faint as the men went around the house, and at last died out altogether. For half an hour she stood by the door, pistol cocked, ears aslant, but she heard nothing, they had searched all round and gone away. So she stole out again and took survey from this window and that, and, as at the first, found no one. After that she grew bolder and, as it were, took possession of the quiet house, albeit, she left doors and windows open as she found them, seeing that therein lay safety. There was food in the house, a plenty which had outlasted the spoilers, for many of doubtful character had free feeding in Yorrow kitchens, and larders there were ever overstocked. Fine linen too, she found, and it grieved not her as it would have grieved a more housewifely soul to tear up good gear to fashion bandages. She kindled a fire on the cellar flags for to boil the water she needed, standing by in the smoke to see that the stone arch above did not crack. She feared this less than the risk that any should perceive by a legitimate chimney’s smoking, that the house was inhabited.

Throughout the day she tended Erincourt ; with a watchful care did she do it and skill, learnt perhaps of Mother Lee (who was reputed a witch by some, and certainly, when she chose, could work both charms and cures). He was a wonderful bad patient. Was he conscious he was monstrous difficult to handle ; and was he unconscious and in weakness and pain, he was worse, for he was little used to these things, and resented that he must suffer them to the excluding from his mind of all other thoughts ; moreover, it is said he had a

temper which the lesser devils might envy. And when he was delirious and out of his head he was most difficult of all, for then he was either violent, having the strength and rage of a madman, or else quieter and talking and chattering of things to make timid folk shiver and modest ones blush. But the girl had courage and she had set her hand to this matter, so she abode by him, watchful and attentive and full both of resource and knowledge.

Darkness fell early, but she was fearful of having a light till late, and then only a small one, and behind closed shutters. And although it was by now passing cold, she was afraid to kindle a fire until she had made sure the night was to be both black and moonless. All through the long hours she watched by Erincourt ; and the fire burned low and red, and noises, like the stealthy treading of the night, came in at open doors and windows, whispered at curtains and key holes, and crept breathing along floors. Erincourt shouted and laughed sometimes, and sometimes as strangely fell to silence ; and in the silence there was ever the stealthy voices, light feet of bloodless folk on the stairs, faint sighs from heartless breasts in the corridors, and the voices of shapeless things, dark-dwellers who have no name. So the night passed.

The next day was a day of rain ; thick and fast it fell on the southern wall, splashing in at the windows, lying in pools on the floors and dripping disconsolate from curtains. Gray was the sky and gray the land, and the last leaves fell from the naked trees and lay sodden and dead on the wet black ground. And still the house stood open to the rain and the weather, a desolate house this weeping day. Erincourt lay as before, not better and not worse ; at times himself

and once or twice angry, curious to recall what had befallen and the cause of all. But this Judith set aside, deeming it better: he should not trouble with it now; she found him soon occupied with anger and impatience at his own hurts and also ready to drowse, which is nature's remedy for a chafing spirit. In the afternoon, as she sat watching, she thought she heard some slight stir below. She opened the door to listen; that yesterday's investigators had gone away was no surety that others would not come—it would seem one had come now. She took the pistol and stole quietly out.

There was one below, one who moved quietly and furtively even as she had; by which token she reckoned he had no business there. Cautiously she betook herself to the gallery which ran athwart the upper part of the hall and from which one could look down. From thence, keeping herself hidden, she looked and saw in the hall-place a man who stuffed into a sack what of movable gear was left by those who had gone before; and the man was Woup the mole-catcher.

There was at the corner of the gallery where Judith stood a fine ornament, a dragon carved from a solid piece of oak and kept in place by being set on a spike which ran up its centre. With both hands she lifted it off, it was heavy but she cuddled it to her and waited. Woup came up the hall and with joy sighted an old dish of silver which had stood there from time immemorial, and which none of the former comers had dared to carry off, for they knew not when or how the Black Dog might appear. The joyous mole-catcher lay hold of the thing and Judith leaned forward for a moment. The dragon took a flight through the air, and with precision fell on the head of Woup the mole-catcher.

With never a sound or an upward look he fell, and

Judith, seeing it, vent back to the chamber satisfied. Let those who say she was a brute savage and no woman remember she had not had the advantage of the weekly expounding of the Word and the wise ministrations which are the good fortune of our folk, some of whom—I name no names—are inwardly little or no better, however well whitened they may appear in their outer parts. Also let it be remembered that the Lord, in His strange wisdom, has planted in woman an instinct, like a tigress to defend its cubs, to protect even with ferocity that helpless thing, be it old or hurt or young, which she has taken under her care. And if Judith sat herself down in the retired chamber without any compunction at all and well pleased to think of the alighting of the dragon on the mole-catcher's head—well, she did, and that is all.

At twilight she stole out and found her way to the gallery again. It was dark there, but the hall was much lighter by reason of the open door. The man was not there. She went cautiously down, stopping to reconnoitre now and then, and searched the hall; but he was not hiding there. He had truly gone, she found the prints left by his wet feet near the door and they pointed outwards. He had recovered from the blow and fled, doubtless in terror, for he had left his sack behind. She lighted upon it and carried it away to the room where Erincourt lay. But in her heart she wondered what tale he would tell and how long it would be before others came after him; how long, too, she might hold out against such.

The morrow dawned, a fairer day, after a night of weeping rain. At first it was gray but gradually the sun came out and drew forth wet and pleasant odours, and lay warm and tender on all things like the sweet

smile on a tired face. On that day Erincourt began to mend. He was a strong man, though he had mishandled his body ; his wounds had been well if roughly treated, and certain cooling and healing drinks, such as gipsy women know, forced upon him whether he would or no. On this morning the fever left him and he fell into a deep sleep, from which he did not wake till after midday. Then, as he roused, he came for the first time to a full consciousness and mastery of his senses. Also, at the same time, a full consciousness that he was very weak.

Long he lay staring before him, puzzling as to what had befallen, where he was and what was that which sat close by the chamber door ; most often his eye wandered to that. A woman it seemed, poorly clad and young, with head dropped back in uneasy sleep. Women had come athwart his life and passed, as they will in the lives of men ; some had laughed, some had wept, all had feared in the end ; none would dare sleep thus within reach of his hand (unless held fast in his arm). One had not feared him, he remembered ; he bought her for two crowns—a waste she had told him, for she would escape his hold. He had set her down, careless whether she went or stayed, when other matters called him. The call ! He remembered, he remembered all now with an increasing pulse—the crowd by the house, the fight, the fall. He strove to raise himself but could not. He recognized the room where he lay, it was in his own house ; he was in bed, well bandaged, and it was afternoon ; and the figure by the doorway—he recognized her too, it was she he had bought ! At that moment she woke and at once rose and, without waiting to brush the sleep from her eyes, began to set about this and that.

"What has befallen?" he said.

But she hushed him. "First you must eat," she said, and gave him what food she thought he could best take.

He watched her as she flitted to and fro, and as he watched his puzzle grew and at last he stopped her.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"To tend you," she answered.

"But why do you tend?"

"There is no other," she answered, and told him how the house was left empty.

"The rats are fled from the ship they deem sinking," he said, and laughed; then he asked, "Why are you not fled?"

"You were hurt," she replied, as if that were explanation enough.

But it was not enough for one who had never before had nought he had not paid for in one sort or another. "You were not afraid to be here alone with me?" he said after a while, and when she shook her head he asked, "Dost know who I am? The Black Dog of Yorrow? Perhaps you deem me too hurt to hurt?"

Again she shook her head.

"Explain to me," he said; "I bought you for two crowns and you told me you would escape, yet when the chance came you escaped not?"

"It was not that way I thought to go," she answered, "the knife which would have let me out when I needed I left in another. But be quiet, there is no more to be said; were you my enemy I could not have let you fight alone, one to six; and were you twenty times the Black Dog I could not leave you hurt; moreover, as I tell you, I fear you not, I too am of the night."

With that he was for a while quiet, for though all

was not clear, it seemed to him he had heard the ring of true metal. So they remained a time in silence while the afternoon sun slanted and slanted, each one with his thoughts. With Erincourt's there ran a new thread, the true metal had waked something in him, something men may say that could not be for the Black Dog of Yorrow.

"I have been out of my head," he said at last, "I talked—and——"

He stopped half ashamed, in a way that fitted him strangely, but she only said, "I have not lived in delicate places, moreover, by now I have forgot what you said."

He nodded gravely, the metal rang truer. "How came such as you to be with that rascal?" he asked.

"My foster-mother sold me," she said. "Oh, yes, I withstood, but in the end gave way. Why should I not? Life is done for me, he who should have wed me left me for another fairer of face; all is one to me now, save when the taunts of some stung me nigh to murder. I escaped them in going, and, as to Woup, I would not have lived with him, I meant to give him the slip, I would soon have done it had he not sold me afresh."

She spoke hardly, but the bitterness of her heart was plain to see; he looked at her musing: "One left you?" he said. "One forgot you for another?"

"Why not? You have left women in your time, you have forgot?"

"Not such as you," he said, and fell silent again, but looking at her, ever looking thoughtfully.

"Tell me of it," he said at last, and his tone was newly gentle.

"There is nought to tell," she answered, "it is the

old tale. There was a man, one Will, who said he loved—and in good sooth, I believe, according to his lights he did. But his lights were not my lights. We were to have been wed, and there were some of the folk who envied me and some who looked askance. Of that I recked nothing, for I was set on the man; had he asked the eyes from my head or the soul from my body he would have had it then. Aye, but I was a child! I thought that was love, that blindness! And that love was life!”

She laughed with a bitter derision at herself, but it was a little laugh and somehow wondrous pitiful. Erincourt heard it and it stirred him, though he knew not why.

“This man left you?” he asked, “having taken heart and eyes and all you would give he went?”

“That is it,” she said; “he grew weary, though I think this may be said for him, I believe that he also grew afraid, but at the time I knew it not, I knew not then that I was fearful nor that he could fear. Chiefly, though, it was that he was weary and had seen a fair-faced Molly who took his straying fancy; one, too, who had a certain dower. So he left me; he told me he must be gone a week on matters touching our wedding, and he went and came no more. And one evening at the end of the week I overheard two who talked in a lane, speaking of how he had, two days gone, wedded this Molly. And for a little then it seemed that the ground rose up before me, and the greenness around—it was in May month and everything was very green—turned to mist. But it passed quickly; I lay me hold of a rose stem, so that the prickles ran deep into my hand, and that, in a sort, fetched me back to where I was and who. I went

after the two and learned from them what they knew. I do not think they suspicioned that the matter was aught to me. I held my hand shut so that they should not see the blood on it, and kept pushing a thorn into my flesh to tell me that I must be quiet and speak stilly. When I had heard what they could tell, I pulled out the thorn and set out to make sure for myself. It was a long way to go, for this Molly dwelt in a farm three miles or more from there. I was not there till after bed time, all was dark, lights were out in the house and everything still. A great plant with woody stems grew athwart the wall; it had flowers, but I know not what; there was in all the garden a sweetness of flowers—I can no more abide the scent of flowers, rather I would have the bitter smell of the herbs that grow at this season—I climbed by the tall plant to the upper storey and looked in at this window and that. So till I came to one where the casement was open and the curtain flapping in the air. I pushed it back and saw by the light of a night lamp, the man I sought, asleep. I drew myself to the sill and looked and looked. And in time my looking pierced through his sleep and woke him, so that he looked back at me. Then did his face change; it became one fear, the poor, the pulsing fear, the meanest, the cowardest fear, that lies to the strong; betrays the friend, crushes madly the weak—this showed suddenly in his face as a light shows up in a dark room. And the scales fell from my eyes and I saw what had been hid from me before—that he, this thing I had worshipped, was no man but the veriest clay, nay, mud from the bog! He made me ashamed for his abjectness; he could not stir hand or foot, he would have melted through the bed an' he could. I could have crushed him in

one hand where he lay ! The young wife beside him stirred and he nigh choked her in an anguished clutch which strove to hide her presence from me, though his every line proclaimed aloud that his fear was for himself not her. The clutch woke her and she, catching sight of me, shrieked. At that the end came, for he was beside himself with his terror ; he seized the pistol which was beside him and fired, but with a hand that shook so that he missed aim. I was but little hurt in the left shoulder, and easily lowered myself to the ground and went away.

After that I do not know how things befell ; it had gone dark for me with a black darkness that gloomed with the red of blood, it was as if the end of all things had come. Blindly I found a way up the valley, walking in the stream, for it was possible they would hunt for me with dogs on the morrow. It was very dark, there were trees thick about the banks ; and very noisy, for the stream was not like those hereabouts, but ran chattering over pebbles, sliding over big stones and tumbling into pools, always talking—I hate those noisy streams and the close, close darkness ; better I like open spaces where there is nought under the black night but the winds of heaven. The stream voice was unfamiliar to me, it chattered and laughed, and sometimes with its current plucked at me as if to draw me back, back to do vengeance, to murder. All the night under the trees was full of those babbling noises. But I went on, I would not stop, I would not think. And at last I came to the end, where the ground rises and grows open and clear, and the noise grows faint and ceases in the big quiet. Then all at once I could go no further, I stumbled to my knees and sank down where the grass was long and wet with

dew. I lay me all the night there, I think I lay me in hell."

So she spoke, and when she ceased, bringing her eyes from a long way off, Erincourt still looked upon her.

"What befell on the morrow?" he asked, "did you go back and kill the man?"

She shook her head: "Why should I?" she said; "that he had been false to me and left me could have been wiped clean that way, but that he was coward and fool and veriest runagate, all that I thought he was not, could not be altered by blood. Rather it was a sin of my own more than his. There was nought to do, it was the end of life for me, it seemed so then. On the morrow I went back to my people, and they, sundry of them, when the news was known, treated me according to their minds, taunting me and scoffing at me at first; after, when in rage I forced them to silence, fearing and hating me. When we came south, as we do in autumn time, my foster-mother, thinking it safer, said she would hire me out. At first I withstood her, knowing over-much of her dealings; but afterwards I gave way, for, as I say, what did it matter? And if I found myself ill-placed, what then? This thing at least I have learnt, I can hold my own with most if occasion arises. So I gave way, and she took me to the town, and in the end sold me to Woup the mole-catcher, of whom you see I am already quit."

"And that is the end?" Erincourt asked.

"That is the end," she said, and moved to the window.

He watched her, a strange new pity in his heart, a rage with the worthless husk who had served her so; an impotent rage that could ask for no remedy, for,

for the root evil, the fact that he was a poltroon, there was none in heaven or earth. And with the pity and the rage there grew too a great regret, vague and shapeless, but growing, ever growing ; a loneliness and a regret for himself more than her. Softly the wind whispered about the deserted house, softly stirred dead leaves without and sent a bare branch tapping against the casement. The sun had gone from the room, but still the day was fair, and without on the grass the light lay in little patches of gold. Judith, standing by the window saw it, and something within her moved in tune with the gentle season. She turned her head and met the sympathy in the man's look, and it was as new to her to receive as for him to give.

" I do not care so greatly now," she was stirred to say. " The thing had to be soon or late. Had he kept true to me and I wed him I would have woke to find—I would have found that he who was beside me, he to whom I was bound, was *that* ! It was a bitter and a black night, a wild night ; such blackness and turmoil as was on the heath when we crossed ; such tumult and such glare as were about this house when we came here. But it is gone ; all is gone, all is still now, see how still ! And for me, too, the night and the storm are overpast, I think. I am old and tired, I think, dead leaves rustle about my feet, hopes I am rid of and fancies dead. What then ? I must go on, life is not gone."

" No," he answered, and something within him understood. " Maybe dead leaves and dead years are about my feet," he said, " I also have forgotten and am forgot."

And he, too, heard the breeze that whispered sadly about the house where they were lodged, two alone in

this little chamber in the great house open to the winds of heaven.

"Light a fire," he said, "kindle a fire on the hearth ; a fire is good company when the storm is gone and the leaves fall. Warm yourself by it and warm me, and we will speak no more of what has been but of what yet shall be."

III

TOBIAH THE DISSENTER

NOW Tobiah the Dissenter, that godly man, was never one to intrude in the affairs of any unless he were called by the Lord, or man working under His guidance. But when he was called he was not slow to go. Accordingly, when on the day that follows after the last of the October fair, a day of repentance and sore heads for some of our folk—when, as I say, he walked the streets that day and one came to him he gave ear. And when he learnt that Woup the mole-catcher lay at a tavern near, very low indeed, he at once went to him. It was at the *Three Feathers* that the mole-catcher lay, and very low he certainly was. He had spent the most part of the night before wandering on the heath, being seized by a panic after he was left alone by his bought bride and her new purchaser. In this state he had gone forth and wandered till almost morning, becoming chilled to the bone. Then he had repaired to the *Feathers* and there drunk the major part of his two crowns. Now he was so overcome that the landlord, believing that his last hour drew near and fearing to have him die on his hands, had gone out into the street and asked help of the first likely man. And, guided by the Lord, he had asked it of the likeliest of ail, to wit, Tobiah the Dissenter.

Tobiah came and gave what assistance was in his power ; calling in the aid of suitable leechcraft, but not on that account relaxing his own efforts, which were as much spiritual as temporal. Owing to wise treatment, Woup soon showed signs of improvement, although it was not till the next day that he properly told his tale to the Dissenter. Then, indeed, he did tell it, and a very fine business he made of it. If he were to be believed he had been villainously deprived of his new-wed wife while taking shelter from the storm.

"She went willingly enough, the hussy," he said, "no force or compulsion did my lord use. He threw me two crowns, then ' Up lass ' and away to his house at Yorrow."

"Infamous !" said Tobiah, "an open shame !"

"Shame it is !" Woup answered, "and anon she will come back, when he is tired of her, and the old beldame Lee will try to palm her off on another. Shame and to spare ! But I will be even with them, I will lie in wait for her——"

"Nay," said Tobiah, "that is not the righteous course, the matter requires other treatment than that, and you are scarce the man to give it ; I myself will look into it."

Woup thought otherwise, feeling that he himself was the very person ; he said so. But Tobiah expounded to him.

"Your own conduct," he said, "is not above suspicion. In the first place it is apparent you were in liquor at the time of the wedding ; now drunkenness, at all times an unseemly and hoggish sin, is worst of all at a wedding, notably a man's own, when he needs to have his wits about him. In the second place it would

seem you made but little fight to withstand the ravisher ; the which was not only cowardly but also unwise, seeing that the woman was present and the baggages are ever quick to observe a man's weakness and to use it against him. No, no, you are not the one for this, even if you were not, as you are, prepared to enter upon it in a fierce and unworthy spirit, desiring rather carnal vengeance than the betterment of the parties concerned. But I, I am the man ; leave it to me, and I will deal suitably both with the woman and with the man."

"The man !" Woup cried—he had himself no wish or intention to deal with that part of the affair—"none can touch him, it was the Black Dog of Yorrow !"

"What of that ?" retorted the Dissenter. "What is a black dog or a black bull or a man of black heart either ? The Lord has given me many victories over the Evil One, it is not for me to doubt His power now. I will, as I say, search into the whole matter."

But Tobiah found obstacles in his way, and those unexpected ; the first was that the Black Dog was not to be found ; and the second, which was like unto it, was that the girl, Judith, was not to be found either. The second was not in all sorts surprising, but the first was, for Erincourt was never addicted to concealing himself or his wrongdoing from any, friend or foe, and was most usually only too easy to be found. Tobiah made sundry and various inquiries and learned nothing of avail. But he was not one to accept uninvestigated the testimony of others, notably that of a strutting officer so beblinded with the glitter of his own gold lace as to have neither sense nor observation left for aught else. Accordingly the good man determined to himself go to Yorrow on the next day.

But, so it befell, another went before him, and that was Woup, the mole-catcher. He went on the same day as he told his tale to the Dissenter. He told his tale in the forenoon, and in the afternoon, while Tobiah made inquiries and attended to sundry of his own affairs in the town, Master Woup got news of the affair at Yorrow ; of the attacking of the house and of the pleasant profit sundry might have made then. Oh, but his mouth watered thereat ! And being ever valiant before and after the event, many names did he call those who, frightened by the shadow of the Black Dog, who was not there, had failed to make this profit. Woup was by this time much recovered and indeed fit to be about again. He had thought to return to his own dwelling that day, but, meeting with one driving a small cart in the direction of Yorrow, he changed his plans and got that one to take him on his way. Arrived on the outskirts of the village he descended and made his way to the Hall ; the which he found, as others had found it, open and, to all seeming, empty. He, unlike they, was well pleased to find it so and made his way in quietly and, as we have seen, began at once to secure what he could. In the which congenial occupation he would, without doubt, have been busy for a day or more had not the dragon, descending from the darkness above, lighted on his head and lain him low.

But the head of the mole-catcher was one of some thickness ; it needed more than a dragon of solid oak to crack it for good and all. So it came about that in time he recovered himself, coming back to such sense as he had and, opening his eyes, began to peer round him owlishly. It was by then growing towards twilight and there were gray ghostly shadows in the

hall, which at first awakening seemed to him an unfamiliar place, though in a little he remembered it and its situation uneasily. Two dead leaves, which had drifted in at the open door, fluttered after one another adown its length, moving and stopping unsteadily as live things. Woup raised himself on an elbow and looked about, listening fearfully for sound of occupants and wondering what had struck him. Then all at once he saw it ; in a shadowed corner it lay, the hideous grinning dragon, all crouched together as if it but waited his rising to spring again. Woup clasped his hands while the sweat broke out upon him, but the thing did not move, only grinned on. Cautiously he rose, but with a swiftness which evaded the monster, evaded all the other evil things which peopled the deserted house in this dripping twilight. To his feet he got, down the hall and through the open door, so out to the garden he fled away.

In Yorrow village (where the mole-catcher abode that night) a tale was soon abroad how already Yorrow Hall was haunted. A poor man who crossed the garden, his near path would seem to have led that way, had chanced to look in at the open door. And a thing, doubtless the familiar, unless it was the soul of the Black Dog, had sprung out upon him, lighting upon his head and near slaying him. This poor sufferer, whose name was Woup, abode all the next day at the village, telling and retelling his tale to all wondering listeners and not forgetting to profit, if it might be, by their sympathy.

But in the afternoon comes there another listener, none other than Tobiah the Dissenter on investigation bent. He asked news of Yorrow Hall and the Black Dog of the first man he met, and so of course heard the

wondrous tale. Straightway to the inn was he led, there to hear it first hand of the sufferer.

"Poof!" said Tobiah, when Woup, not overpleased to see him, had told the tale. "What is this? An evil thing lighted on you? I can believe it, and it had not far to fly for it was begotten in your own mind, and its father was Strong Drink and its mother Ill Conscience. Monstrous ready breeders, those two, and a fine strapping family of hobgoblins do they rear for the man who is trundling down the broad path that leads to hell fire. See you, Master Woup, I have been inquiring in the town, and though I have not yet found the whereabouts of your Black Dog or his female companion in wickedness, I have found sundry news of you, which is not to your credit. There are matters of yours on which I need enlightenment and assurance. Among others I have not heretofore been able to learn where you were wedded to this woman or by whom."

"By a parson," Woup said sulkily; he was glad that the Worthy Man had not been able to learn this much and that those who were present at the bargain had for their own sakes held their tongues. "I was wed by a parson and before witnesses, I can show them."

"I rejoice to hear it," said Tobiah; "by and by you shall show them. In the meantime come you and show me this monster thing haunting Yorrow Hall."

But this Woup flatly declined, he had no mind to risk dangers in company with the Dissenter, whose presence, though it might minimize the risk would certainly do away with any chance of profit. The refusal did not, however, trouble Tobiah, he would as lief have the man's room as his company, and he set

out for the Hall alone, strong in the righteousness of his cause.

It was later when he got there than when Woup came yesterday ; but the day, being fairer, twilight had not begun to fall and he could see from a distance the open windows and doors. He also observed, for he looked sharply and closely, a thin thread of smoke which ascended from an inconspicuous chimney.

"Ha ?" said he, and drew nearer, but on the grass where steps made little sound. "Woman's work," he said to himself as he entered the open door ; the simply cunning defence that invites attack and so misdirects it, smacked to him of the wily weak sex. In the hall he saw the oaken dragon and took it up—one never knows when such things may prove useful in argument. Then with quietness and caution he made his way to that part of the house where he deemed the smoking chimney might be. It took time and searching before he found anything, for the house was intricate, but at last he came to the passage which gave on to the little retired room.

But he did not quite surprise the two who were there ; almost he did, for they were deep in talk and so not watchful. But just as he entered the passage a board creaked under his foot. On the instant the door at the end opened and the girl stepped out, closing it after and setting her back against it before one could have a glimpse of the room beyond.

"Ha !" cried Tobiah, "I thought so much !"

But she did not answer, she was ever a quiet some woman, the deceptive sort of whom timorous men had best beware. She eyed Tobiah over with the alert, inly watchful look which had first drawn Erincourt's attention to her ; and stood, strong shoulders against

the door, bare feet firmly planted ; light but strong as drawn steel, and armed with the heavy pistol. An ugly antagonist even for a strong man in this narrow place.

But Tobiah was well satisfied to see her and reckoned nothing of that : " I thought I would find you here, Mistress," said he.

" Me ? " she said ; she was surprised that any should search for her, it was Erincourt she expected to be in demand. " What do you want with me ? "

" Your person," Tobiah replied, " you will come your ways with me to the town ; there to answer charges of adultery and other things preferred against you by one Woup, a mole-catcher."

" Woup ! " she cried and laughed. " He gave you commission to me ! Did he likewise give you the wooden beast you carry, the one that lit on his head when he came a-pilfering yesterday ? He left his sack then, tell him he shall have it if he comes to fetch it."

" With Woup," Tobiah returned tartly, " I have little to do, as yet ; my commission is from on High, and you will come with me to answer it."

" I think not," she said quite gently. " See you, if Woup wants me and thinks he has any rights to me, let him come and say so. Tell him, when he has earnt, or stolen, two crowns, the sum for which he sold me, to go treat with the purchaser, if he can find him, and afterwards let him come and speak with me."

Now Tobiah, as is well known, had little regard for carnal weapons, and he certainly thought nothing of a pistol in a woman's hand. There is little reason to doubt he would have attempted to close in upon the girl Judith now and persuade her forcibly and without further waste of time had not her words brought him to a halt.

"Sold?" said he. "How sold, and to whom? Explain yourself, Mistress."

"Which shall I explain?" she asked, "the first selling or the second?"

"Both," said Tobiah, "all."

Accordingly she explained, briefly enough; telling him if he wanted proof of the first sale, he might find Parson Jack; and if proof of the second, he must find one who saw Woup the day after and could say if he were as sick as two crowns' worth of liquor should make him.

Tobiah listened, greatly astonished, but in time convinced by the clear truth of the tale and the girl's indifference whether or no she were believed. At the last he slapped his thigh in wrath.

"This is a pretty business," said he, "for a Christian town! Pretty in good sooth! But I shall look into the matter, I will see that some wrong-doers are brought to justice! Mistress, I crave your pardon, I have done you a wrong in thought, as others have in fact; come with me."

But that was what she would not do; she feared not, since the May night of her awakening, the wronging of any in thought or in act; she reckoned to hold her own with all, and she would not leave the Hall at the good man's bidding or another. At this Tobiah began to grow suspicious.

"Why are you here?" he asked. "If the Black Dog bore you off against your will, why do you abide in his house?"

"Because it pleases me," she answered, careless of logic seeing she held the good argument of the pistol.

"That is nothing," said Tobiah, yet he was at a

loss to understand. "He is not likely here," he speculated, "he is not one to hide behind any woman's skirts—Mistress——"

It is doubtful how long they would have held parley before they came to try forcible persuasion; an end was put to it by one from behind the door Judith guarded, calling, "Come in here! Come and bring the man with you."

"Ha!" cried Tobiah, and sprang to the door almost before the girl reluctantly opened it.

"I would have kept him out while the house stood," she said reproachfully as she entered, "he should never have known you were here, now all is lost."

"Nay," said Tobiah, "rather something is found, for do I not see before me the Black Dog of Yarrow? Smitten by the hand of the Lord and lain helpless by the heels?"

"Yes," Erincourt made answer, "something of that you see, lain by the heels he certainly is, and saved by a woman——"

"One," Tobiah interrupted sternly, "that he bought, contrary to the law and in pursuance of wicked thoughts and intents."

And again Erincourt answered "Yes; bought she was, because her beauty pleased a passing whim; left because other matters pressed; a woman who has done what no other would have done, served and saved and tended, alone and fearless; a woman beyond price, true steel."

So he spoke with a sudden ring in his voice, and the girl at his side caught her breath; something in her answered to something in him as steel to magnet and ragged rock to thunder clap.

But the worthy Tobiah said severely: "Do you

repent you of all the evil you have done, purposing to amend your life ? ”

“ Nay,” Erincourt answered with a laugh, “ not all, that were too great a matter. Of some I repent, that which makes me unfit to so much as unfasten this lady’s shoe. And for amendment, I am not ingenious at that, but if she will be my wife I will make her what amendment I may. Tell this to Woup the mole-catcher, tell it to all and sundry ; tell them to come when they will, the Black Dog of Yorrow is ready to give audience, to hold his house against any and to uphold the honour of his wife against the world, aye, and the devil.”

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Richard Marvell of Tall Trees

This amendment of Erincourt of Yorrow was an amendment of the flesh rather than the spirit ; but when the one is not immediately forthcoming is it not well to encourage the other, trusting to further motions of godliness ? Tobiah the Dissenter saw that it was, and though he had no vain delusions about the complete reformation of these two, he lent countenance to the union. He admonished them of course, striving to show them right paths, but he also gave what assistance he might to the furtherance of the match. Also, knowing that he was a threshing instrument in the hands of the Lord, he was careful to see that Woup and other wrong-doers met with their deserts.

Thus, once again, was the worthy man called upon in the matters of a husband and wife, or rather two who were misnamed husband and wife ; and though in this case he served to separate, not to unite them, was not the cause of Righteousness prospered truly ? In his dealing with the affair of Richard Marvell, the record of which here follows, his proceeding was altogether different, but the end, to wit, the furtherance of virtue and right doing, was equally prospered.

THE WEDDING MORNING

THIS is the true history of the wedding of Richard Marvell of Tall Trees. Tall Trees is a good farm, large but snug, and when Richard came into it, which he did when he was still young in the twenties, it was in so flourishing a state that many a squire had fewer of this world's goods than he. None the less, when he sought a bride, were it folly for him to lift his eyes to the gentry and above all to Mistress Dulcina. But nothing less than this did the fellow do.

Now Dulcina, who had an indifferent nobleman to her cousin and a small fortune to her name, had come, either by reason of a family squabble or else for the good of her complexion, to repose herself some months in our parts. She resided for the time at the old Manor which is within a ride of Tall Trees ; a lonesome place and somewhat dreary to the town-bred lady even at that spring season. She must have found the days dull enough and the time heavy on her hands. The squire's round, it is true, came about her as bees about a honey-pot, but she had had a plenty of such attentions and better administered before, and they diverted her but little. So for a week the hours dragged, then it chanced that she encountered with Richard Marvell. Marvell was a properer man than any round ; hand-

some, well taught, straight alike in mind and body ; properer than any of the squires in his appearance, and as good as the best of them in his behaviour and, withal, not handicapped, as they, in a lady's favour by being so cocksure of his acceptancy. Dulcina looked graciously upon him ; he was a novelty to her and she was languishing for entertainment, the entertainment provided by something new and strange ; best provided by something handsome and earnest and vastly appreciative of her fair self. As for Marvell there is no need to speak of him, he was young and ardent and all ignorant of the ways of the world ; he was smitten at the first glance, in love at the second, over head and ears at the third. Dulcina's beauty, her grace, her graciousness, her fine lady ways, her air and her pretty condescension dazzled him, bewitched him quite. Soon he was as much her slave as either could wish. After that the days dragged less for her, indeed hardly at all ; she whiled away the time very pleasantly with her new amusement, wearing simple gowns, eating curds and cream and playing that she was in Arcady, till, as she vowed to her maid Kate, she was more than half in love with the fellow and the life—for the nonce.

But he, knowing nothing of Arcady or the ways and doings of ladies of fashion, had the folly to think she was serious as himself. He was in dead earnest and he never dreamed but what she was too. And at last, emboldened by her kindness, he had the presumption to seriously press his suit. This befell on the day that she was persuaded to visit the farm of Tall Trees. It needed little persuasion to get her to that visit ; indeed, she was anxious to come and make, as it were, a royal progress through her rustic lover's ramblesome old house, she was quite curious to see it and to have

him humbly offer his best to her for a sunny hour. So, when with diffidence he asked if she would one day honour his roof, she accepted graciously and readily too.

On the appointed day she set forth in a chaise and pair, attended by the maid Kate and the female cousin who companied with her in her present retirement—one Miss Ann Twinger, a discreet maiden of forty and up. The two followed when Marvell took Dulcina about his house ; and snickered the one to the other when he showed her presses with oaken lids her small hands could not raise, and linen stored by his grandmother, concerning the texture and value of which my lady knew and cared no more than she did of corn or seed grass. She, for her part, looked at all with a sweet attentive air, and listened in the kindest way when at last he called a halt and spoke for her ear alone.

Kate and Miss Ann, more especially Ann, grew impatient while they waited. They were not playing at being in Arcady, and there was no handsome yeoman to beguile the tediousness of the time for them. Kate sighed as only waiting women, who are denied other means of expression, can sigh ; and Miss Ann sat down on an oaken bench with folded hands and that prominent air of enduring patience that cries aloud of martyrdom. But both expressions were wasted on the air alone. Richard Marvell saw nothing, being completely absorbed in the momentous subject of his talk ; and Dulcina cared nothing, she never took account of the feelings of others. At last, however, in her own good time, she turned to leave ; she made gracious adieux to the master of Tall Trees and let him put her into the waiting chaise. Miss Twinger followed and

Kate after a word to the driver, and off they went. Dulcina waved a white hand to Marvell but her face was turned from him, he did not see the mirth that had begun to convulse it so soon as the chaise hid her from view.

"Oh ! oh !" she cried as the wheels began to turn. "Oh !" and broke into the laugh she could hold no more. "Oh, Ann, Ann !" and hiding her face on that virgin's shoulder, she laughed till she sobbed.

"Bless us," cried Miss Ann. "What is the matter ?"

But in vain she asked, and in vain patted the panting girl's back, Dulcina laughed without speaking till she was near choking. Kate slapped her hands and spoke of cutting her lace out here on the highway, then at last she began to find words.

"Mistress of Tall Trees !" she gasped as she waved them aside, "Mistress Marvell of Tall Trees ! To count o'er that linen and call the chests mine ! Cousin Ann, wilt have butter from me and eggs too, when I bear them to market ?"

"What !" cried Ann ; then as her mind began to take the meaning she exclaimed with indignation : "He ! He dared to offer himself to you ? He spoke of wedding—he—that impudent clown ! Lud ! From whom are we safe—our very grooms will be seeking kisses next ! I see no cause for laughter, rather for proper pride and plain speaking ; some gentleman ought to go to the presumptuous fellow with a horsewhip !"

But Dulcina thought otherwise, to her gay mind it was the rarest comedy she had ever seen. In time Ann came to the same way of thinking—she was one to trim her mind to suitable winds—and Kate naturally was not backward to follow where her mistress led. In a

little all three laughed together as Dulcina recited with proper feeling all Marvell had said, all he had dared to hope.

"As for me," she cried, "I know not what I replied. I was fit to die of laughing, yet I kept a straight face and modest mien; it would have been a thousand pities to spoil so rare a play by failing of my part."

"You encouraged him!" cried Ann in decorous horror. "You suffered him to take your hand? Fie, fie. No man should touch me!"

"Touch!" cried Dulcina with a toss of her head. "No, indeed! He kept his distance, of course. Indeed, I believe he is as fearful of me as any mouse of cat."

At that they all laughed again and with much merriment beguiled the drive.

All that day and the next they disported themselves with the happening, Dulcina reciting to them afresh Marvell's words and embellishing them with others of her ready wit's providing. And then anon the three of them would play that she was indeed mistress of the farm, busy with dairy and poultry and concerned with brewing and baking—the which, in truth, were no more than words to her, but which, with the story of the man's love made an agreeable play for a long day. But on the evening of the second day Marvell came to the old Manor. It was at twilight, and as chance had it, Dulcina was alone in the garden. He saw her gown among the bushes, so he left the path and came to her unannounced.

"Oh!" cried she with her hands on her heart and a fluttered air, "how you startled me!"

But if one might judge by her face the start was not a serious matter and the flutter more air than anything

else ; Marvell did not judge, he did not even stop to think, he humbly asked forgiveness, then spoke of his errand.

"I have come for my answer," he said.

"Your answer ?" she repeated in pretty puzzle. "To what ? A thousand pardons, but I cannot call to mind what you asked—will you say it again ?"

"You cannot remember ?" he cried. "Nay, you cannot forget, not truly forget."

"I have," she pouted, she was not used to contradiction. "I do forget—unless it was some matter of eggs, brown or white, was it that ?"

"Nay, Mistress," he answered, "it was a matter of hearts and lives."

"Of hearts and lives ?" she said lightly. "One might think from your gravity it were a business of sickness and death at least."

"Is it not grave ?" he asked, "Is not love serious ? I love you with my heart and strength and soul, and you——" he spoke with the sure certainty of passion, and with his eyes fixed on hers where he thought in the dimness to read her soul—"and you love me—is not that serious enough ?"

She dropped her eyes shyly, "Yes," she said, and in truth it would have seemed so to her a very tragedy had it been true. "Yes—but—you go too fast," she broke down in charming confusion. "You must not talk like this," she said, "you must not indeed, I cannot permit it—I do not understand——"

But he cut her short, "You must understand," he said. "I told you of my love—and for your own, you feel it in every limb and show it in every glance—you love me, and I love you—Dearest !" he caught her hand, "had I a crown to give I would but too lightly

give it, as I have not—as I have not—will not love suffice us ? ”

He bent over her to whisper with deference yet with passion too, and though she fluttered she did not free herself. The very newness of his sincerity, the very simpleness of the man who could presume to think one in her station serious, tickled her ; moreover, what a scene was this to enact afterwards ! It were a sin to deny herself and others the pleasure of a full ending, so she fluttered but did not escape. But like many another who finds a thrilling pleasure in playing with the dangerous, she did not reckon on the strength of the thing she had raised. “ How can love suffice ? ” she said. “ You must not hold me so fast.”

“ Nay,” he answered, and he dropped her hand but only to take her in his arms. “ I will teach you how love suffices,” and he kissed her lips.

“ Oh ! ” and Dulcina gave one stifled gasp of rage.

But what would have next befallen and how she would have repulsed this outrage one cannot tell, for at that moment Miss Twinger came upon the scene.

“ Dulcina, Dulcina ! ” she was crying. “ The air grows very chilly, it were wiser to come within doors—What, Mr. Marvell ? ”

She exclaimed this last as she distinguished that Dulcina was not alone in the gloom.

Dulcina found her voice, one strangled by rage and shame. “ Go ! ” she said ignoring Miss Twinger and pointing with a trembling finger at Marvell, “ Go ! Go ! Go ! ” and she stamped her foot for very fury.

He turned on his heel and without a word obeyed. Then she sank down on the ground and, bursting into tears of anger and mortification, wiped her lips with a fragment of lace and cambric. “ He kissed me ! ” she

sobbed. "He dared to! He actually dared to! The impudent, insolent, presumptuous clown!"

I need not tell you that in Miss Ann, Dulcina had as sympathetic an auditor as heart could wish; and when her mind was sufficiently calmed to think of vengeance, as spiteful a prompter as even her sensibilities could desire. It took salts and a cordial, aided by fanning and much sympathy, before Dulcina was sufficiently herself to think of punishing the offender. Indeed, even then she was inclined to stand on her dignity and let the creature alone. So overwhelmed was she with the mortification that for a moment she even thought of removing the light of her countenance from the polluted neighbourhood without taking vengeance at all. But Miss Ann and maid Kate were of another mind and soon they prevailed, comforting and encouraging Dulcina till she was even more ready than they to mete out punishment to Marvell.

"To humiliate him!" she cried, with her small hands clenched. "If one can humiliate one quite so low. Have clowns pride? It would seem he has, I will bring it down. The insolent presumptuous thing!"

Her breast heaved and her eyes glittered bright as she thought of the kiss again, and she bent the best of her ingenuity to thinking out a scheme. The other two helped her readily, and the three of them spent the evening with their heads together.

On the morrow came a letter from Marvell; it prayed forgiveness for his rashness and haste, but it also repeated again his hope and his love. The three plotters read the letter laughing, and in time dispatched a reply. And if the reception of this reply transported Marvell to the seventh heaven, why, though doubtless foolish, it is not altogether surprising, and it is a folly

men enjoy but once in their lives. Dulcina, in the letter that he read so joyously, graciously extended forgiveness to him, confessed her love with becoming maidenliness of expression—in these Miss Ann had a hand—and promised him his heart's desire on some not unreasonable conditions.

"You say you would soonest that I had no fortune," she wrote, "that is like your generous heart; but I would rather bring my dower to my love, and I have a device by which it can be done. We must marry privately; none must know till the thing is done. I have a relative who can do it as firmly as any archbishop, one on whom I can rely. He shall come to visit me, and the wedding shall be solemnized in the little church near by, as soon as may be. Till then have patience; tell no one and do not seek to see me."

This last condition was hard for a lover to observe. Nevertheless he was ready to comply with it and all others seeing the rewards promised. To the last point he fulfilled the instructions, telling no one and seeking no sight of Dulcina, only going about his work like one who walks in the glory of a dream. Without giving any reason or explanation he ordered the old house of Tall Trees should be scrubbed and scoured and set forth in goodly array. In a little there came a second letter to him, and this one transported him even more than the first, for this one appointed the day and hour when his arms should clasp his bride. "Meet me at the little church," the writer said, "and when my kinsman has read the service over us I am yours indeed." What could any man who received such a letter do but rejoice? Rejoice and see that the home was worthy as could be of such a bride—so gracious, so fair, so sweetly

condescending. And Marvell did his best to see to that, walking through the rooms, looking into this and that, and reversing and revising orders till the old nurse, who had been as a mother to him since boyhood, scented a wedding in the air. But of this the old woman, being wise, said nothing, only grunted to herself in mind, and went over the tally of possible maidens, without deciding on the likely one or assuring herself in what way she would fall short, as all maids would, of her Dick's deserts and her own requirements of his wife.

In the meantime other preparations were being made at the Manor House. The relative, mentioned by Dulcina in her letter, arrived, and was closeted long with the fair lady, and some laughter was there over the colloquy. Next Miss Twinger tripped away to see the curate of the parish. A simple man was he and piteous poor ; he was much distressed indeed when she proffered her request ; it was that a quiet wedding should take place in his church on the morrow. But the morrow was the day on which the curate must trudge eight miles to see his ailing patron, so what could he do ? He dared not disoblige the great man, he was loth to disoblige the ladies ; but the first evil was more to be feared by one in his station than the last—as the ladies privately knew when they set about the business. Miss Twinger expressed some sympathy with him in his dilemma, but encouraged him in the course of duty, only bethinking herself at the last that his going to the patron need not prevent the wedding after all. Her fair cousin, so she remembered, had visiting her a relation, a reverend gentleman of the church who would perform the ceremony to the satisfaction of all parties. Indeed, as she said with becoming reserve, since the bride was a girl in their service

and the groom a man of some condition, and the marriage a matter of necessity, they would be the better pleased to have it quietly done. The curate found himself pleased also, for though he was not bribed for lending his church, he received a fee at once so handsome and so suitable to the occasion as to arouse no suspicions.

Mrs. Tull also had some preparations to make; she rummaged over her mistress' gowns till she found one which would suit. It was the one Dulcina had worn that bright night when Marvell had found her in the garden.

"Let her have that," the lady from her armchair said. "I shall never wear it more—Ugh! his arm pressed there! He will think it a pretty compliment that his bride should wear the gown he first kissed her in!" and she laughed like the tinkling of ice on glass.

The morrow was the wedding day, and Marvell came riding to the little church door. He had a pillion with him, for so had the second letter decreed, the writer saying she had done with chariots and all such things, and hoped henceforth to lead the life of her love and her lord.

The church, when Marvell entered, struck somewhat dank and chill after the sunshine without. It was two steps down from the graveyard, and the flags of the floor were often in a sweat. Very small it was, very poor and bare, scarce the place for the wedding of such a bride. But it was not for Marvell to quarrel with the place that was to give him his love, so readily he stepped within. To him at once there came Miss Twinger, sighing and breathing, "Poor dear Dulcie!" with an handkerchief to her eyes. She bade him draw near the altar and wait there. "She will not be long," said she.

Marvelli obeyed, though he never liked the modest Miss Ann.

"If I were you," that virgin said, "I would not speak with dear Dulcie at first, she is a little low. One cannot wonder—she is leaving so much."

Marvell turned away impatient. "I will say nothing till the service is done."

Miss Twinger assured him it were best so. "If you will hear a word from me," she whispered, "I would say do not raise her veil or—seek a kiss too soon, do not be precipitous, she is low, she is very low."

Marvell muttered something, his cheeks aflame, for he remembered how he had been too precipitous before, and Miss Ann with a cat's smile hastened to the side-door. Soon she returned, escorting, supported on the other side by Kate, the youthful bride. Marvell in his humbleness and his joy did not note the gown she wore nor yet how completely her face was hid by the thick veil of lace. He trembled a little when she was close to him, and it was sweet to him to feel that she trembled too; sweet to hear how in her shyness she whispered her answers so low he could scarce hear her voice.

Soon the brief service was said, soon they were man and wife, and together walked down the dim little church. Miss Twinger caught them up, and Kate too, and with cloaks and hoods they began to be busy with the bride almost before the porch was reached. The parson relative joined himself to them, and with hearty hand-shaking congratulated the groom.

"Come, come," said he to the busy women, "my friend here will grow impatient if you wrap his bride much more. Do you mount," he said to Marvell, "I will set the lady behind you."

This was soon done, and when both were up and ready the horse turned in the homeward way.

"Good-bye," said Miss Twinger, "good-bye! Remember circumspection, sir—and be not too precipitous!"

The last was screamed, for the bridal couple were fast going down the lane. Nevertheless, Marvell heard it, and heard also some one in the church porch laugh, not Miss Ann certainly, for it was sweet as fairy bells and malevolent as imps' chuckle, like *Dulcina* transformed, But *Dulcina* it could not be, for it came from the little dark church, and she was out here in the sweet fresh air; behind him, his own, his *Dulcie* now—*now—now*. His heart kept glad time to the refrain of *now* as he wondered how soon he might venture to look around and claim her sweet lips as his.

At the bottom the lane narrowed till it was little more than a green path with a coppice on one side and fields shut in by a high hedge on the other. Here Marvell looked round.

"*Dulcie*——" he said, and then he stopped. Behind him was no laughing blushing beauty but a white-faced girl he had never knowingly seen before. "Good God!" he said, and his hands clenched so that the reins tightened and the horse was brought to a stand.

"Who—who are you?" he asked hoarsely.

"*Virtue May*," she said, and her eyes wavered and shrank from before his terrible gaze; "your—your wife," she whispered, while a scarce formed fear turned her lips white.

"My wife? I wed you—you!"

She managed to nod, then in an awed whisper she said, "You did not know? Oh, my God! Oh, oh!" and with a choking sob she slipped from the horse to

the ground and, stumbling blindly, sought the shelter of the copse.

For a moment Marvell sat staring after, stunned, numb, like one in a doze. Then he swung himself down, he must follow, he must hear all, he must try to understand. The girl had but just gone among the trees and thrown herself down among the dead leaves and the unfolding ferns. She lay, her face hid on her arms. He quickly found her, and as he saw her thus he wondered in devil fashion how he had ever been tricked into thinking her *Dulcina*. She wore the lady's gown, it is true, and it was not too long for her lank limbs, but it hung loose about her half-grown body; she had not seen more than fifteen years, and she was no lady at all. He stood looking down at her, a feeling of disgust for her struggling up through his numbness.

"What does this mean?" he asked in harsh tones. "What has befallen? Explain. Tell me how I stand."

She did not answer, but sobbed, her face hidden in a very abandonment of shame.

"Answer me," he said, and in his hurt his tone was more sharp than he knew, "are you"—his voice jerked over the question—"are you in good sooth my wife?"

She made a faint sign of assent, but she did not look up. She was afraid, afraid of what she would see, of what would come next. She lay, eyes hidden, as one who waits with equal fear for word or blow. But neither came; for a time that seemed long there was silence in the little copse except for the spring singing of birds, and, more distant, the impatient movements of the horse. She grew afraid of the silence and, in her childishness thinking he had left her without further

words, ventured to look up. He had not gone, he was still there ; he leaned against a young tree trunk, his face gray and drawn, his eyes fixed. For a moment she stared at him in awed fascination, her own grief forgot in the sight of an anguish which had its root in something she did not understand.

But he became aware of her regard and pulled himself together. "A trick," he muttered, and continued to eye her for a moment, then he turned and addressed her peremptorily and with hardly veiled contempt. "How was this trick done?"

"Trick?" she repeated, bewildered.

"Yes," he said with impatience. "How was I duped, by whom, who was in it? Who persuaded you to deceive and marry me?"

She still had not all the meaning of the cruel jest, but she was already humbled to the dust with shame and faltered over her answer. "They told me that you—that you—loved me," she whispered with blushing cheeks. "My lady said that you had observed and—and admired me and wanted to make me your wife—asking her to speak for you. It scarce seemed a likely thing, yet—why should she say it if it were not true?"

Why indeed? Marvell guessed, and his pride and his love were in bitter anguish about Dulcina whom he had adored. For a moment his eyes wavered away from the poor figure among the ferns, he forgot her and her humiliation in his own. But in a little his mind came back to her, he must go to the bitter end with the thing. "You consented to this?"

The hot colour dyed the girl's face which had paled again in watching him. "I am an orphan," she said, "and the servants at the Manor are hard on me and

my aunt beats me when I am at home—I had seen you, I knew you were kind and good—and—and—it seemed so wonderful that one like you should love me. I—oh——”

In her shame she buried her face once more in the cool green fronds. Marvell stood looking down at her, but he did not see her, he was seeing Dulcina, he was striving against sense, almost against hope to acquit her, at least in part in this business.

“Did she—did Dulcina,” he said at last, “did she speak with you about this herself?”

The girl nodded. “She was kind,” she answered; “she said she would give me a gown of hers to wear at the wedding as I had nothing fit of my own. And she told Mrs. Kate to dress me this morning, herself sitting by to see it well done.”

Marvell’s dry lips said “Yes,” no more; there was no more to say; Dulcina stood convicted. Dulcina, his love, and no other. Aye, but that was a black, black moment for him! The blue heavens above the trees grew dark for him, the green of the opening leaves was black, earth and air and sky, past, present and future took on one sombre pall. He turned away for a little, struggling fiercely, furiously with himself; not to overcome his rage and shame and pain, that were impossible, but to a little moderate them, to comfort himself as a man should. And still the birds sang gaily, busy nesting, love-making, carolling to the hen on the nest, the young ones within. And still the impatient horse, which was to bear him and his bride, shook his head and pawed the ground in the lane.

At last he turned back to the girl. She was no longer lying but sitting now on the humble couch of bracken,

putting her hair from her eyes. He could not keep all disgust at sight of her from his heart, even though he now saw that she was the dupe as much as he; more than he, for it was not she who had dared to raise eyes to my lady's level and offend against her pride; she had merely occurred to Dulcina as a suitable victim. And Marvell, even in that black time, could almost find it in his heart to pity her, though the sight of her could not but inspire dislike seeing that she stood for the scourge of his folly, the humbling of his pride, and the fall of his love and his faith. But whatever she was, and however he regarded her, this at least remained, she was his wife, and he her husband who had sworn to love and cherish her. He had wed her, he had put the ring on her finger and set his name to the register—the stranger parson had, as if by accident, hid the bride's name when she put it down; he remembered that now it was too late. They two were man and wife in the eyes of God and the law.

He drew near and spoke, striving to make his voice express no feeling at all. "We had best be going," he said.

"Yes," she answered submissively, "I will go."

"With me," he said, and offered a hand to help her rise.

She shrank away. "No!" she exclaimed. "No! Oh, no!"

"Yes," he said, "you must come with me, you are my wife, you must come to my house."

But she persisted in her refusal. "You did not mean me to be your wife," she said, "you had no thought to marry me, you do not want me. I will go away, you shall not be troubled by sight of me, I can do well by myself, no one will know."

She spoke bravely, struggling with the catch in her voice which came as much from grief for him as for herself, and more perhaps from fear of the world she was about to start forth to face—a terrible thing for one so young and one to whom life has heretofore shown but an ill countenance.

Marvell felt some pity for her and addressed her with more gentleness than he had yet used. "My poor girl," he said, "you have been deluded as well as I and with less reason. It was a cruel and a brutal trick to put on me, but still worse on you. It ends much of happiness and hope for both of us, but it cannot be altered or ended, so we must make what we can of it. Come," and again he offered his hand.

But she shook her head. "No," she said, quiet but firm.

At that he began to urge her more warmly, telling her that nothing else was possible; showing her how she would stand if she refused, and, balking Dulcinea, lay herself open to the great lady's spite. But still she refused. Then he tried to show her the better side of the thing, telling her that no one need know their humiliation, nor that they had been tricked into each others' arms, nor that the marriage was not of their own choosing; for, as he told her, no one knew ought of his intended bride or that he had hopes of Dulcinea.

"But you would know," she said, "and that is enough for me; I have some little pride albeit I did consent to wed on so slight a wooing. You are good to offer to take me to your home; many a man would have struck down one who, even unknowing, had been party to so terrible a deceit; I will not reward your kindness by bringing such a kitchen bride to your hearth."

"Nay," he began, but at that moment the horse, which had at last freed himself, started trotting down the lane.

"One minute," Marvell cried as he heard it, and he went after the beast.

Soon he caught him and brought him back, and, having fastened him more securely, returned to the copse. But when he got there the girl was gone.

"Virtue!" he called, scarcely able to believe his eyes. "Virtue!"

She did not answer and he began to search for her, sure that she could not have got far in the time. But he did not find her; she was nowhere among the trees; no, nor yet to be seen in the fields beyond. He could not find her anywhere.

II

THE WEDDING EVENING

NOW Tobiah the Dissenter had work of the Lord which called him to the Island ; this on the day when Richard Marvell was married. The Island, as all know, lies beyond the river mouth, off the coast which is on the far side of our town. A goodish way for a traveller, thither and back in one day, should he go by the causeway which joins the place to the mainland at the one point. But Tobiah recked nothing of that in the cause of righteousness ; and righteousness plainly called him there that day, for he got news of Peter Cowlin. Now Peter Cowlin, though a young and lusty man, is a ne'er-do-well, and idle at that ; he had never of his own will put his hand to work, honest or otherwise, within memory ; certainly not since he married his old wife Jane—old enough to be his mother, but possessed of a small holding on which they both lived. It is ever folly for an old woman to wed a young man, but there are fools among women. Jane was one, so she married and repented ; and a very ill time of it did she have, for she must do all the work of the place so long as her legs would carry her. But there came a day when they would carry her no more and when the sickness, which had been long upon her, overcame her and she took to her bed in earnest.

The which was painful for Peter, for he knew not how to do anything, and would not if he could ; and painful to her when Peter took the stick to her. But, Jane being a Dissenter, news of this came to Tobiah. Whereupon the good man likewise took a stick, and that not a little one, and set forth to see Peter.

In time, and having discharged what other of the Lord's work he might on the way, Tobiah came to the Cowlins' door. He knocked lustily upon it, and it was opened to him by Peter, dirty of face and aggrieved in spirit.

"I want a word with you, man Peter," said Tobiah. "Come forth. It has been told me your wife lies sick ; we shall disturb her if we hold parley within doors."

Peter came, and the two of them paced down the garden path, where lusty young nettles and the more tender chickweed filled the room of the spring onion and suchlike green food.

"Aye," says Peter gruffly, "the old un's sick, or takes on that she is."

Tobiah nodded. "I have heard the Lord is afflicting her—a somewhat severe affliction, so that she needs good care and good food."

"Aye," Peter said again, but less gruffly and with more whine, for suddenly it came to him that he might get somewhat from the good man, "she needs all that, reverend sir, all that, and how's she to have it ? I'm a poor man."

"You are a poor worker too," said Tobiah.

And Peter's face fell. "I was never made for work," said he, "my back's weak."

"Is it ?" says Tobiah. "Turn you round and let me see."

He turns Peter round and runs his hand over his

back. "It needs strengthening," he says. "It needs physic and linament, a little of the might of the Lord, the bracing up of righteousness," and with that he up with the stick and lays on in the properest fashion.

Aye, but Peter roared then ! And twisted and turned like a worm on a hook or a young cat caught by the neck. But twist and turn as he would there was no getting away from the Dissenter, who verily knew how to lay on with any man when once he took the matter in hand.

"A stick for a dog, man Peter," said he, pointing his words with his blows, "and a rod for the back of a fool ! I have no wish to interfere in the matters of any husband and wife, however ill-yoked, but 'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' He loves you but little yet, having small use for a man block-headed and idle, of slothful ways and dirty face to boot—a brute beast, a wife-beater—and a cumberer of the soil. But He has bade me come hither to bring the hoe and the pruning hook to the vineyard of your soul—if so be you have one—I bring it, I bring it.

"Aye, roar, man, roar if you will—it hinders not me—I can speak to you about it"—and Peter roared like a bull—"and I will speak, good words and seasonable that, falling on the tilled ground of a whipt back, may yet bear fruit."

And he did speak, mighty words and moving, from scripture and otherwise, regarding the fate of such as will not work ; who beat their wives at unseasonable times, and for whom the little devils have in readiness whips with lashes of red-hot chains, well weighted at the end with the weight of slothful sin.

And while he spoke (and forgot not to lay on) out from the house came Jane. She had been stretched

on the bed, too sick one would have thought to move, yet now at the sound of her husband's roarings she made shift to come forth, and stood on the doorstone, swaying. And behold the contrary nature of the female! At sight of the wholesome medicine administered to Peter, instead of feeling gratitude to the Dissenter for advancing her cause and the cause of righteousness, she must set to screaming as if she herself were the sufferer.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried. "He is killing my man! Help! Help!"

And she looked wildly to the four quarters if by chance she might spy any. But there was no one and no help, so she made shift to totter down the path herself. She had some thought, doubtless, of flinging herself on Tobiah, and by her feeble might compelling him to desist; but she did not do it; before even she reached him her knees gave way beneath her and she fell to the ground, nigh swooning with her weakness and her pains.

Tobiah looked over his shoulder at her, then he gave a last and final trounce to Peter. "Sit you there, my man," said he, dumping him upon the earth. "Sit and consider your sins till I come again. Do you attempt to flee—as 'the wicked fleeth when no man pursueth'—you will find that the vengeance of the Lord will overtake you and that severely."

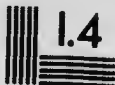
So saying he left him, and going to the woman, lifted her up and bore her into the house. Having placed her on the bed and covered her, he went again to Peter who, with some wisdom, had sat where he was placed.

"Now," said Tobiah to him, "we will to work, preaching is naught without practice—therefore practise, man. Set to on the weeds in the onion bed; after-



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wards attend to the pigs, the beastliness of whose condition only falls short of your own. Afterwards there will be greater matters and further afield. I, in the meantime, go to a near neighbour to fetch some woman to attend your wife and to inquire for some man to oversee your affairs. The Lord has delivered this matter into my hand and it shall be done thoroughly."

And thoroughly was it done, for before long Tobiah had met with Will o' the lean jowl, who dwelt near and who, for the love of God, undertook to say what work Peter must do, and, under Tobiah, keep him at it. A female neighbour likewise was brought to the old woman. She gave immediate relief and did what she could, but, as she said, there was needed a young girl to come and dwell there; to act as daughter to Mistress Cowlin, to tend her in her sickness, and to help with the pigs and poultry and household work.

"Doubtless," said Tobiah, when he was convinced of the wisdom of this, "the Lord will show me such a one. When He does I will straightway bring her here; till then, mistress, give what attention you may."

With that and with sundry admonitions to Peter the good man took his leave and trudged the homeward way.

Dusk had begun to fall before he reached our town; it had deepened almost to dark by the time he entered the quiet street where he dwelt. Just as he turned the corner, and before he came to his own door, one accosted him—a young maid in a fine lady's gown all befouled with damp grasses, a wan tired maiden with satin slippers too big for her, and a face very piteous.

"Good sir," said she timidly, "could you tell me any place where they would, out of charity, give lodging to one who can but pay in service?"

Tobiah looked her sharply over, certainly her gown was against her. "Why have you left the shelter of your mother's roof?" he demanded severely.

"I have no mother," said she, "and no shelter I can claim," and with that she broke down and began to weep, not noisily but quietly, as one who is too tired to do aught else; at the same time she turned away.

But Tobiah stayed her: "You had best come with me, wench," said he, and he took her skinny arm and led her, whether she would or no, into his house.

When he had her within and the door shut upon them he set food on the table. "Eat," said he, "and afterwards tell me what has befallen."

But she did not, indeed it seemed she could not; and Tobiah, perceiving it to be no whimsey but a true case, poured a glass of ale. "Drink this," he commanded, "and afterwards dry your tears and go wash your face."

He compelled her to obey him, and in a while, what with the ale and the morsel of bread and the cool slucing, she was more herself. When the Dissenter bade her to the table again she obeyed him with docility and ate what was set before her.

But when the meal was done he turned to her. "Now, wench," said he, "your tale. I must hear how you came to be in this plight."

"Oh, sir," she answered, "would that I could tell you and ask your counsel! But it is not my tale alone; cruelly have I been cozened by a great lady, but still more cruelly another, so I cannot speak."

"Tut," returned Tobiah. "That is neither here nor there."

Seeing her youth and distress, it was clear to him that the Lord meant him to look into the happening. He

made the same plain to her, and in time, and by persuasion had the story from her, under the promise of secrecy.

He heard her to the end, but not without sundry ejaculations concerning the fair Dulcina, and also more on the folly and pride of Dick Marvell.

"You ran from him?" he said, when she had finished. "You ran and hid?"

"Yes," she answered. "I hid in the ditch which borders the copse. It is deep and narrow and full of wild parsley; I crept into it and worked my way up under the leaves, there lying concealed so that he overstepped me. And when he had gone back to look on the other side of the wood, I came out and ran away.

Tobiah nodded. "You did well," said he, after a pause of thought. "Yes, well; it were better that you should go to seek a living elsewhere for the nonce. You are too young to be wed to any; moreover, it is not fitting that a fool who thought to have a fine lady Spite and Folly to wife, should at once be let off with an honest wench instead."

"Oh, sir," said she, with her cheeks flushing pink, "it is no let off, I am to him nothing but a disgrace."

"Better than he merits," Tobiah retorted, "the Lord, I say, has let him off cheap. Nevertheless, it were better for you to go quietly away for a time; men think but lightly of what's to be had for the asking—or without it."

This the poor girl knew very well; she dropped her eyes in shame, but she said bravely, "I will go. I will seek work, but I do not know where, there is little I can do, I fear me."

"Hum!" said Tobiah, and for a space he looked at her frowning, stroking his great nose in thought.

"Over tender," he said meditatively, and seeming to address himself more than her; "over ready to yield, perhaps, not the best to take the whip hand with Peter, still, it would seem of the Lord's sending." He roused himself and spoke more directly to her. "I was on the lookout for some such a one as you," said he; "I expected the Lord to send a wench who could be a daughter to a sick woman, give help with pigs and poultry, and see to it that a sluggard keeps his nose at the grindstone a bit. It would seem that you are she."

"Do you mean," cried the girl, her face dimpling with hope, "that you think you have work for me?"

"Aye," said Tobiah, "that is it, 'tis no bed of roses, I warn you; Peter would be a thorn in any bed where he was placed, still it is an honest living and you can have it. You will have work, not the least to keep Peter at his, you'd find it easier to do all yourself, but that is not to be, d'ye hear me? You must do yours and he must do his. For the rest, it will be well enough for you. You can abide with Jane Cowlin snugly, calling yourself for caution's sake by your name of May, and none will be the wiser or the worse. Master Marvell can mourn alone for the vicious piece of flummery that he has missed. To-morrow I will bestow you with Jane."

And on the morrow he bestowed her even as he said. To the much satisfying of Mistress Cowlin and also of Peter, who had hopes when he saw another, who might perhaps work for him, put into the house. This hope, however, was not fulfilled, for Tobiah repeated his former warning to the girl, promising himself to come when he could, and look into matters, and if need be

give Peter the encouragement of forcible persuasion. With that and advice to go for Will o' the lean jowl, if she found other encouragement necessary for Peter, the Dissenter left her established.

But of this, of course, nothing was known in the village where stood the farm of Tall Trees, nor yet in the old manor, near to where the wedding had taken place. These two lay in the rich country which is inland from our town, very far from the Island.

There was, however, excitement of sorts in the Manor House on the day of the wedding. Those who had planned the business were but newly come back from the church, and had not near done laughing, when there arrived a messenger all spurring hot. He brought news of the death of a kinsman of Dulcina's, and private word from a well-wisher that she would do well to come with all speed, both to mourn and to secure the inheritance which should be hers. At this, as one can believe, there was at once such a packing and a preparing, a fainting and fanning, and a cordial giving ; all the fuss and to-do of getting a fine lady under way. Owing chiefly to the offices of the parson relative, it was done at last, and done so expeditiously that they actually took the road that afternoon. Before the sun was down Dulcina and Miss Twinger and the rest had left the manor without as much as time for a thought of Richard Marvell and the bride they had given him. Later, when she was in London town, Dulcina remembered to regret that she had not made her vengeance complete by giving publicity to the affair, and by, in person, wishing the groom joy of his bride. But the matter soon passed from her mind, for, what with claiming the inheritance, squabbling over it, and then preening herself on her enhanced value in possess-

ing it, she had so many other matters to occupy her mind.

Thus it came about that the lady did not hear in what way her scheme had fallen short, nor how, on his wedding day, Richard Marvell came home alone. Silent and gloomy he was when he did come home, and for many days thereafter; but the cause was known to none. Only the old nurse in her heart hazarded a guess that some maiden on whom he had set his fancy, on whose promise even perhaps he had counted, had with amazing folly repulsed him. There was no more talk of preparing the house; little used rooms were left again, and things took their usual course, and all seemed as before. Marvell made some search for the girl, Virtue, but he spoke little even of the search to any one, and gave no hint of his interest in the girl. And as she was not forthcoming, and as she was also of no importance, that small matter soon dropped from folks' minds.

So hay time came, and harvest, and fruit gathering, and autumn ploughing, and then Christmas, and nothing was heard of Virtue, save only by the good man Tobiah, who visited the Cowlins as opportunity allowed, and who at Christmastide, being well pleased with Virtue, gave her a seemly gown of homespun, she by that time having grown and shot indecorous far out of her garments.

III

THE FIRST HOME-COMING OF THE BRIDE

WHEN two full years and something more had passed the old nurse of Richard Marvell died. She had ruled Tall Trees with a rod of iron for many years and long, but at last her hand grew weak (three days before her death) and finally she relaxed her hold. At the last she called to her Marvell, whom she loved as a son—better far than her own son, who, indeed, had been of but little account and ran away to sea thirty years back, and a good riddance and no loss!

“Dick,” says she feebly, “you must get ye a wife. Forget the fool that flouted you two years gone—she was not worth her salt. Get ye a good wife, sober and sound.”

To this counsel Marvell said nothing for very astonishment, wondering how much the old nurse knew of what had befallen that spring two years ago. And wondering still more at the wise silence of the woman, who had held her tongue both from telling and asking so long.

Well, the old dame died and other folk began to talk of the wife Marvell must surely take now. Many had wondered privately why so well set up a man had not wed before—no hint of that other wedding having ever

crept out. Now, however, folks spoke openly about the pity of Marvell's single state ; and it was clear to all maids and matrons at least that there must be a woman to rule at Tall Trees. But time passed and no sign of courtship was made ; it even looked as if it were not so clear to Marvell as to others that there must be a mistress at the farm.

Now after a while Tobiah the Dissenter began to perceive that it were well if he were stirring. It was clear to him, considering the nature of man and of woman, that in truth the farm should have a mistress. Yet, should Marvell take a wife it were sin, and should he take one not wife it were still sin ; and did he leave the place without a woman in command, with the lads and maids that must be there—there was very like indeed to be sin. Seeing this Tobiah made the journey to the Island and betook himself to the Cowlins' house there to have speech with Virtue May.

"See you," said he to the girl, "the time has come when you must go to Marvell and the farm of Tall Trees."

"No !" cried she with a start and a flush, "no, never !"

"Yes," said Tobiah, "yes, certainly," and he expounded to her the reasons why. But she, though heretofore she had shown herself docile enough, was now obdurate and not to be convinced.

"Nay," said she, "I do not again go unsought to any man. Moreover, he were better alone than with an unloved kitchen wife by his hearth."

"Tut," said Tobiah, and "pooh !" and "bah !"

But Virtue was not moved by that, and when he urged her further she protested more firmly, saying that Mistress Cowlin could not spare her now. Which,

indeed, was true enough, for the old woman was bed-ridden quite, and looked to the girl for everything as to a loved daughter. Tobiah said he could find some other to take her place here, but still she refused to leave, and, to his wrath, the good man could not make her. Also, as she reminded him, as he was pledged to secrecy, he could not go to Marvell with tale of where the lost wife was and suggestion that he should use his power and bring her home. So it befell that, in considerable anger, the Dissenter jogged back again with but little accomplished.

But just before harvest Jane Cowlin died and Tobiah at once sent word that Virtue must return to him in the town for to seek other employ. It were not decorous, he said, for her to abide in the house with Peter. To this she willingly agreed, for Peter had wasted no time in thinking that, Jane gone, he could not do better than marry the girl. So, as soon as might be, she gathered her belongings together and set out for the town. And Peter, within a week, had courted a strapping wench, daughter to Will o' the lean jowl. Her he subsequently wed, and was thereafter kept by her in very good order indeed.

By this time Virtue was grown both tall and comely, near a head taller than the little fine lady whose gown she had once worn. Her lean body had acquired roundness and her arms strength, and in her face there was sweetness and truth. It would not be hard to find her some new employ now, for she was well taught in several things and patient as well as strong. But Tobiah said that before she set out to seek other service she had best abide a little in the town, dwelling in his house and doing some certain sewing and mending which had accumulated there. Readily she agreed to this, for it

was pleasant to her to see the life of our town and also she had a heart full of gratitude to Tobiah ; who, indeed, both in admonition, guidance, and good deeds, was more father to her than any other she had known. Accordingly she settled herself with cheer and for the first day, a Friday, sewed blithely. In the evening Tobiah said—

“To-morrow we are bidden forth.”

And when she looked up with surprise he explained : “I am called to preach in a near village on Sunday, and am bidden to go thither the day before ; you will come with me, you will be welcome, they are harvesting at Tall Trees——”

But she cut him short : “No,” she cried, “I cannot go there !”

“Why not ?” said Tobiah. “Do you think any will ask you to abide ? Certainly they will not, none wants you there, and Marvell will not even know you from Eve. It were well, mistress, to wait till invited to be in such haste to decline permanent lodging.”

There was certainly some truth in this, Marvell would not know her now ; she had grown past recognizing. Nevertheless, though she was sure of this, she was that evening quite determined not to go to the farm. Yet next morning, the morning of a very bright and sunny day, mind you, a veritable harvest day, she changed her mind. At least, so she told herself, there was no harm in seeing the house which might have been home. One thing she entreated of Tobiah, who was well pleased with this change of mind, that he should call her still by her second name of May.

Somewhat reluctantly the good man consented ; he said the thing savoured of deception ; howbeit he remembered to what good account the Lord turned the

deception of Rebecca and her son Jacob and so was comforted.

It was at eleven, when the men stay work for bevors, that Tobiah and Virtue reached the harvest fields of Tall Trees. Marvell himself made them welcome, pressed drink upon them and invited them to rest beneath the witch elm. This they did nothing loth. The worthy Tobiah had much to say both wise and sober to all assembled there, but Virtue said little to any. At once she had perceived that Marvell did not know her ; he looked at her again and again, but not as one who is puzzling over a face he knows but covertly as at one he admires.

And lo ! the day did not seem long on her hands, she had thought it would, but it went both quick and pleasant. The men folk were busy most of the time, Marvell as well as others ; but the women also had a plenty to do, preparing over against the great company that would assemble there on the morrow. Virtue gave her help in the cooking and confecting and spreading forth and putting away that went on. With more than common feminine interest did she pass from the high raftered kitchen to the cool larder ; to the sweet smelling store room and dim brewing house and the cellars where the great ale casks stood. She was a stranger, a guest who lent her aid to Bet and Molly and Peg, and some good-wife who had the preparing in charge. But had things befallen a little other than they had, she might have passed to and fro with the jingling keys of mistress, have touched the piled linen with hands that owned, and poured the drink and the food with the abundance a good housewife likes to show. But if she gave a thought to these things, she did not give a sigh, for she knew that happiness does not bide in gear.

Later, when the heat was less fierce, she went with the gleaners, stooping among the sheaves with them. It made her feel passing rich to be able to give her handfuls to some girl whose store was small. More than once she felt Marvell's eye upon her, but it was never the eye of recognition ; more than once too, she found him near her, often and often as time went on. And in a while she discovered courage, as women do, and talked freely to him, just as if no such thing as a wedding had ever been. When darkness fell, all must to the house for supper ; and because there was no mistress, Virtue must have the place of honour. This was Marvell's doing, and though she was shy of it, she did not all disapprove. Nay, when she was shut within the fair chamber allotted to her for the night, she sat a while thinking on it. Thinking on Marvell too, and on many things ; and as she thought she smiled. But afterwards she sighed, and when she went to the window to take a last look at the night there were tears in her eyes.

"If he had loved me," she said, "if he had loved me as he loved her !"

On the morrow, the Sabbath, there was to be a great preaching in the barn. From far and near the folk came to it, some on foot and some on horseback ; many a stout dame riding pillion with her man, and many a mischievous lass set tantalizingly behind the lad who was fain to keep his head turned. Some of more condition, or weaker constitution, drove adown the white highway, and more than one hay wagon was there with the master and his men sitting a-row, and their wives and children on the straw within.

In they streamed to the great dim barn, where the shadows were brown and the air smelt good of grain,

and the sunbeams slanting through chinky places were all golden and dusty, and the birds twittered, peeping beneath the eaves even as if they, too, joined in prayer and praise. Down sat the folks on what they might of straw or of planks or old barrel heads. All in their Sunday best they were, such a creaking of boots and rustling of gowns, and mopping of heated brows, for Sunday clothes are sometimes hot wear in the harvest sun.

Ah, but it was a great meeting ! Stirring was the prayer and praise, and very eloquent the disquisition made by the worthy Tobiah ! The text on which he that day held forth was, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another." Very fine and moving was that discourse, Marvell said it was the best he had ever heard. Yet it seemed to leave him heavy, and sad at heart ; saddest perhaps when he looked at Virtue's blooming face, the which he did very often indeed. She, for her part, kept her eyes decorously down all the preaching time, inwardly glad, when Tobiah's forcible words brought the blood to her foolish cheeks, that she had chosen a corner where the moated sunbeams did not reach.

When the preaching was done, the folk came forth from the barn, strengthened in the inner man, and ready to regale the wants of the flesh. Some of the folk had brought food in baskets and bags, foregoing even the festival of Sunday dinner for the Word of the Lord. Others had brought but a knife and fork, and perhaps a horn cup ; others nothing at all, knowing full well that ample provision would be made. And ample provision there was, tables set forth on the clean bricks of the brewhouse floor, tables in the kitchen and the parlour, and even on the grass plat under the mul-

berry tree ; and a plenty of room among the sweet-smelling ricks, where the youngsters could run with their bit, like chickens with an extra fine worm. And the food ! The baked and the boiled and the roast ! All cold and prepared yesterday, so that no cooking should profane the Holy Day, and the bread, both currant and plain, and the sour harvest apples beloved of the young. It was a goodly feast and a goody company, that with sober pleasure and decorous joy, sat down thereto ; well worthy of the blessing that Tobiah asked, and the thanks that he returned when the last mug was empty, and the last knife still.

Later, and at a convenient season, there was another meeting in the barn. Even more folks were there, for some who could not come in the morning hours were present now. These joined with full heartiness in the Psalm, and profited by the exhortations of the Dissenter, which, as before noon, were both eloquent and long. In this goodly sort was the day spent.

In the cool of the evening the folks began to return to their homes. Tobiah, after talk with the sundry grave elders, set himself to keep an eye on the lads and lasses. He knew well that such, though prone enough "to love one another," are not so ready to regard the commandment of the Lord in the matter. So, he being busy and most others on the move, it came about that Marvell and Virtue were left to themselves ; to pass the time they wandered the lanes together. The world was very fair at that season. Some of the fields were cleared, so that the goodly curved shape of the land was seen ; on some the corn still stood in heavy shocks, speaking of plenty. On the hedges the white convolvulus hung in wreaths and purple pin cushions looked nodding over the top, while poppies blazed at

every corner and bit of waste, and the smell of the earth's fruitfulness was over all. Virtue found it passing pleasant, found many things pleasant. When that night she was shut within her chamber, her face again wore a smile. But when she looked out for the last there were no tears in her eyes, and she said nothing at all.

On the morrow Tobiah said they would return to the town, but not early, for a certain notorious sinner was repenting at death's door, and the Dissenter's ministrations were needed. Virtue had nothing to say against this. She passed the day well enough, helping in the house, and wandering in the fields; most principally, perhaps, wandering in the fields. Towards the tail of the afternoon it chanced that she was in a wheat field with Marvell; they stood together while he rested from his toil. Near to them was the hedge which bordered the road, so that they could be seen if any chanced to pass that way. As they stood there came the sound of wheels, and a travelling carriage passed below. In it was a lady, her face was tired and pettish, but passing pretty too, for it was the face of the fair Dulcina. Neither of the two by the hedge saw it, they looked round at the sound of wheels, but gave little heed to what passed; it would seem each was took up with the other.

Soon afterward there came to them Tobiah, with word that it was time for departing. At once Virtue declared herself ready, and without any sign of regret—which is the way of modest women folk who ever fear to be thought to invite the man. But Marvell did not fear to show regret at all, he let it be seen plainly as he bid his guests good-bye. To Tobiah he gave a proper farewell, with thanks for goodly counsel

and a profitable discourse. But to Virtue it was something spoken low about a soon to be paid visit to the town. And if one may judge by faces, there were at least two happy people above ground that night.

IV

THE SECOND HOME-COMING OF THE BRIDE

THE fair Dulcina was in a pet and felt herself much aggrieved. She had bestowed the promise of her hand on Sir Pomeroy Cassilis, and he, having sworn eternal adoration to her, had dared to toast the blue eyes of some dancer in company with no less than three gallants of his own sort. Dulcina was wrathful and aggrieved indeed, and when the recreant came to pay his daily homage she refused to see him. And to further mark her disfavour and because the letter he afterwards writ was not more than half penitent enough, she withdrew herself altogether from the neighbourhood of his company. Off to the old Manor she went to sulk with Miss Ann Twinger and maid Kate for company. They were delayed once on the journey nigh three hours. Dulcina was in a fever for the time lest Sir Pomeroy should have got wind of her intended route and overtake them. But when this did not occur she was very angry indeed and, finished the rest of the journey in black humour, feeling herself much neglected by him.

Seeing, then, the state of her mind when, late in the afternoon, the carriage passed near the wheat field where Marvell and Virtue stood, one cannot be surprised that she found the sight displeasing to her. Virtue

she did not recognize, she only perceived that she was a country girl whom some would call well favoured. But Marvell she knew at once, and knew, better than she did before in her less experience, that he was a handsome man, one of uncommon handsomeness. Straight she looked at him; she had by now a not unpleasing memory of his attentions, made the more pleasing when she saw how well his looks compared with those of the men who had courted her since. So, straight she looked, willing to bestow a smile upon him. But behold! He did not so much as look her way! He had eyes for nothing but the country wench who stood beside him!

In her amazement and anger she almost exclaimed; but recovered herself in time and bent down her head to conceal the angry flush on her face. Kate and Miss Twinger had not seen the man, having their heads turned the other way; she was glad of that, for she would not have them know the slight. He should know it, however, she would bring it home to him.

No sooner was she within the house than she set to work making careful inquiries about Marvell. In a short time she knew all that was commonly known; how all deemed him unwed and how none had even heard of the girl with whom she had saddled him. This news astonished her a good deal, and she puzzled as to what had befallen. Had he struck the girl and inadvertently slain her when he found with what he had been put off that wedding day? Had he turned her forth, refusing to acknowledge her, vowing to live and die true to his fair Dulcina? A dozen such explanations fluttered in the lady's head, all ingeniously turned to her own honour. But she must have more than fancies, she must have fact, confes-

sion. She must see Marvell, discover if he were still very angry with her, and, if so, try and see precisely how many tears and how many smiles it would need to win him back again. So down she sat and wrote him a letter praying his company on the morrow.

An answer came to her quick enough, and blunt enough too; briefly it said he was harvesting and could not come. As she read the words, amazement and anger again fought within her. That he should write like that to her! To her who picked and chose among gentlemen, who had found Sir Pomeroy's honeyed words and humble apologies not good enough! Oh, he should suffer for this by and by! But first it was needful that he should come; so, though she had stamped her foot as she read, down she sat and wrote again. This time she put it differently.

"It was for your own sake I bid you come," she said. "I may give you news of moment."

"That will bring him!" she thought, "No matter what he has done with the girl he will guess I have wind of it."

And it seemed she was right, for the next day at evening Marvell came. She was ready for him, most becomingly attired and set in a room well shaded, vastly becoming, too.

"What, Dick!" said she sweetly when he entered. "So you have come then? I began to think you had forgot me."

"No, lady," he answered, standing straight before her, "I am not like to do that, you gave me a memento whereby to have you in mind."

"You do not seem to have kept it," she pouted, "you rid yourself of it easily!" She eyed him shrewdly, though covertly, as she spoke, keen to know how he had

got rid of the girl. "The honeymoon must have been very brief," she said.

"That," he answered coldly, "was not of my doing." But further he did not enlighten her, only reminded her that she had written of some news to tell him.

She snapped her fan shut sharply, but she preserved her sweet manner: "I cannot tell it to one who stands like that," she said with gentle reproof.

He sat him stiffly down where she pointed and she sighed as she watched him wistfully: "It is clear you have not forgiven me," she said.

"That is not a matter to be talked of between you and me," he said.

She sighed again. "I have repented," she murmured, "times and enough, repented so much that I ever let myself be misled into that wicked jest. But what can that do? What undo?" she put her handkerchief to her eyes. "Ah, how have I grieved!—But grieving was of no use!"

She peeped at him through the lace to see how he took the words; but he made no sign whatever.

"Nights and nights," she said, "I have lain awake, wondering how much mischief was done. Tell me, tell me with your own lips, it was not the greatest of all? Something is left—something? Much surely, since you were able so easily to be rid of the girl?"

He hesitated, doubtful whether or no to let her hear that her trick had given him a wife and yet no wife. At last he spoke out and told her plainly how the girl had fled from him within an hour of the wedding and how he had never seen her since.

She did not show surprise at the news, she was rather willing he should think she knew this before. But he

hardly heeded her or her looks or her manners, he was too intent on his own matter.

"As for aught left," so he concluded bitterly, "I do not know what there is. All of happiness, all that was worth the having was shut from me that accursed day."

She nodded with a deep, deep sigh and looked upwards with eyes nearly tearful. In her vanity she could not think that he meant anything else than that on that day all happiness seemed lost to him because she herself was lost. For that, if it were his grief, she had much sympathy.

"I know, I know," she said quiveringly. "But do you not think I too have suffered? That in being persuaded by foolish advice to put this cruel jest upon you, I have unwittingly put it on myself too? I have shut happiness from your life, you say, do you fancy I have shut nothing from my own?"

Her tone had grown tenderly wistful, but he did not answer and she leaned forward and spoke softly. "Is everything gone?" she said. "Nay, surely something is left. Marriage is out of reach truly, but love—love still is left."

But alas for her coo and caress! While her mind was filled with the one woman she thought of—herself, his was filled with another against whom her words seemed the worst of insults.

"Lady," he said, springing to his feet with eyes ablaze. "You dare say that! Nay," he said, pulling his passion to order. "I know nought of the ways of the great, such things may be common parlance with them, but this I know, were you a man that spoke thus shamefully of May I would strike you to the ground!"

Then at last Dulcina understood not only that she had lost her power over him, but that he wanted the freedom she had tricked from him to wed another. The knowledge came to her a startling blow, and it hit her in her vanity—the one wound which makes a woman truly cruel. But being a lady of fashion she masked her wound skilfully and laughed at his indignation—a little tinkling laugh. “How virtuous you are, and how faithful!” she said mockingly, while her quick invention shaped a weapon of offence. “It will be a comfort to your wife—I will tell her when next I see her——”

She watched his face to see how the shaft told, and when it did but too plainly she went on. “The news I have for you is concerning your wife—did you know it? She is well, and grows stout, she is cook to a respectable parson, but wearies of it and so thinks to claim you soon.”

He stared at her blankly, then his lips seemed about to shape a question, but she waved him aside.

“That is all I have to say to you,” she said, “you need ask for no more; good-day.”

“Where is she?” he demanded. “Tell me where she is?”

“Tell you?” she said scornfully, looking at him under her lowered lids. “You command me to tell you! I tell nothing but of my own pleasure. It is only by favour of my kindness that you have heard so much; I shall tell no more to one who had to be twice bidden to come for this news. Oh, you were busy, you said, harvesting? I hope your harvest may be plentiful, you will want plenty to feed your fat wife.” And with another small laugh she swept from the room.

Thus fared matters with Richard Marvell of Tall Trees. With Virtue May in the town time did not pass in all ways agreeably either. It will be remembered she returned home with Tobiah carrying in her heart gladness by reason of Marvell's promise to come thither on a soon day. Quite what she hoped and expected of this coming she did not herself know; when she thought on this matter in her own mind she always shyly skipt just what should be said and done on his coming. Yet certainly she expected happiness, for she sang as she went about Tobiah's house the next day, and the next, aye, and for a week.

But in that time Marvell did not come. Virtue wondered a little, but said to herself "he is busy." But Tobiah, who knew nought of this, and took small account of whimsies, during these days importuned her about her duty to her husband, to the farm and others. He told her plainly that the hour had come for her to declare herself to Marvell. At last for peace' sake she made him a promise.

"If the man comes here of himself, I will tell him all," said she.

"Dost expect him?" asked Tobiah.

"I know not," she answered, "he said he would come, but men are not all truth speakers."

So she said and with that Tobiah was content for a little.

More days passed, and Virtue rehearsed in her mind how and in what manner she should give the promised news to Marvell when he did come. But still he came not. She grew tired of rehearsing—sick at heart—and at last fearful. Then by some chance word she heard how Dulcina had come again to the Manor House and her heart began to droop in good earnest.

He had gone back to his first love, he was caught again in the fine lady's silken toils.

News of Dulcina's return also came to Tobiah's ears and caused him to think it were time one were stirring. He said so much to Virtue, telling her she must disclose herself to Marvell without waiting for him to come. This, however, she refused to do, saying she would sooner go forth as a scullion or laundry maid ; and also at the same time reminding the good man of his former promise of secrecy. At which reminder he snapped her up and afterwards went forth.

It was a market day and, seeing that by now the harvest was for the most part gathered in, it was a likely occasion for Marvell to come to the town. Indeed, business was almost certain to bring him there, though it appeared more than doubtful if pleasure would bring him to the Dissenter's sober dwelling when the business should be discharged. Tobiah walked abroad where folks congregated, giving and receiving sundry decorous greetings. At length, as perhaps might have been foreseen, he fell in with Marvell.

"Well met, friend," said he, "you are doubtless coming my way ?"

But Marvell excused himself awkwardly enough.

"You do not come ?" Tobiah said, looking him squarely in the face. "Why not ? There is one who looks for you ?"

At this Marvell grew even more plainly distressed. "I—I know," he stammered. "I mean——"

"Come," said Tobiah, putting his hand on the young man's arm and leading him to a quiet by-street, "you had best walk with me a while—it would seem you have something on your mind."

Marvel suffered himself to be led, but when they

were half way up the quiet street, near to a retired graveyard, he stopped. "I cannot come with you, reverend sir," said he. "Not come to your home. Would that I could! Would that I might! I am in great straits."

"And desire a word with me?" the Dissenter suggested opening the gate which shut in the graveyard.

Marvell may or may not have thought of this himself, but certain it is, when the good man took his arm, he walked unresistingly into the quiet enclosure. There was a flat tombstone near, well screened by melancholy willows, on this he sat despondently down. Tobiah seated himself beside and began with discretion to encourage confidence, helped therein by knowing in what direction it was likely to lie.

After a little Marvell spoke and told of his folly, his duping; the wedding and the flight of the bride. To all of which Tobiah listened with nods. But thereafter there came intelligence to which he could not nod, for said Marvell—"For more than two years I had had no word of her, but lately I got news; she is a stout woman now, cook to a respectable parson and thinks to claim me soon."

"Tut, tut!" cried Tobiah, then stopped, pulled up by his promise: and there is little doubt, had he been a carnal man, he would have cursed it heartily. As he was righteous he committed no such wicked waste of breath, but instead looked about for some other way. After a little he turned to Marvel, asking, "How had you this news?"

"I have it on good authority," the young man told him.

"Her own?"

"Yes, brought me by—by the Lady Dulcina."

"Hum!" said Tobiah thoughtfully. "I had heard that she was again hereabouts:" after that he sat awhile in meditation.

Marvel, too, was silent in moody thought, picking lichen from cracks in the tombstone; at last he roused himself: "You see, reverend sir, how I am placed?" said he.

Tobiah nodded briefly, then rose to his feet; Marvell rose also. "May I——" he ventured. "Did you a while since bid me home with you?"

"Nay," returned Tobiah, there is a matter here to be cleared up first," and so saying he bade him good-bye and departed.

He said nothing of this meeting nor of what he had heard to Virtue; but in the afternoon, as early as might be, betook himself to the Manor House where Dulcina was.

The fair lady was that day expecting a visitor; no less a person than Sir Pomeroy Cassilis, who had by now discovered her whereabouts, professed penitence, and prayed pardon in the most elegant of epistles. And as the lady had found the Manor, owing to Marvell's ill-behaviour, even more exceedingly dull than the place she had left, she had been graciously pleased to accord forgiveness to Cassilis. She bade him come to make his peace in person and escort her away.

Tobiah arrived at the house awhile before the gallant was expected and with no credentials to the lady's favour. Nevertheless, he was admitted, for he would not be kept out. And when the town-bred lackey on the stairs cursed the one at the door for admitting him, he reproved them both sharply, telling them, since curses come home to roost, what would be their fate in the latter days, and for the present sending them about

their business with a flea in their ears. After that he stalked unannounced into the presence of Dulcina.

She was alone, sitting before a mirror trying jewels, and not yet decided what necklet sorted best with the gown she had donned in honour of Sir Pomoroy. Very ill-pleased was she with the intrusion of the Dissenter.

"Who are you?" she cried. "How came you here? Ann, who is this person?"

But Miss Ann was not within earshot and Tobiah was quite ready to answer for himself.

"I am here," said he curtly, "to ask you one question. Where is now to be found she whom you thrust as wife on Richard Marvell these two years gone?"

"Richard Marvell?" Dulcina flashed, then her manner changed swift to languid contempt: "Richard Marvell? Who is he? A rustic by the name; I have naught to do with your clods."

"Ah?" said Tobiah. "Then I take it you were lying when t'other day you said you brought message to him from the woman, his wife?"

Dulcina gave a gasp of sheer surprise: "I lying! I——" and words for a moment failed her even as did breath at such insult and impudence. "I will have you turned from the house!" she cried at last. "You impudent knave!"

Tobiah sat down: "Mistress," said he, "I perceive that you have been very ill-taught in the ways of righteousness, the respect for age, and other matters of common virtue, I will do my best to amend this."

And then and there he began with deliberation.

Dulcina was beside herself with indignation; yet she did not know how to stay him nor what to do. She called for Ann and her maid, but they did not come. She raised her voice for the men of her household, but

they were not here, and even if they had been it is likely they would have shown but poorly with the graily Dissenter. She made a movement to rise and leave him as she had left Marvell when she did not choose to speak to him any more ; but Tobiah had thoughtfully set his chair against the door. Hotly her rage boiled up, but there was something of fear with it, there was about the man something of moral power which abashed even while it angered her.

"Pray," said she sharply breaking in on his discourse, "do you hold commission from Dick Marvell in this matter ? A pretty man is he to fear to come himself !"

"Nay," Tobiah returned, "I do not take Marvell into consultation in my business, my commission is from on High."

"Then I shall tell you nothing," Dulcina snapped.

The good man nodded : "Possibly not yet," he said. "Conviction is not to be expected at once, I have not yet opened to you the mind of the Lord."

And he proceeded to do so with great force and plainness of speech. Dulcina grew more angry and even more afraid, fear almost dwarfing anger, for the words cut sharp, even if they brought small conviction of sin to her shallow soul. The Dissenter grew terrible to her, he towered grimly before her mind ; it is doubtful if, had she five strong men servants with her, she would have dared to order them, to force him from the room. Such is the power of the Spirit. In sheer terror she clasped her hands over her ears. But Tobiah raised his voice so that still she heard the exhortation and reproof and the picture of damnation to come ; this for one hour all but a quarter.

"Stop, stop," she screamed at last on the verge of hysterics. "What is it you want to know ?"

"I would desire in the first instance," the Dissenter made answer, "to know that your immortal soul is safe, that you have the pricking of conscience and the conviction of sin and a lively hope of amendment in view. That is my spiritual desire. Of mundane matters I wish to hear where dwells the woman who you say is wife to Master Marvell and from whom you brought message."

"Oh, dear!" cried Dulcina, and burst into tears, "I do not know, I cannot tell!"

Tobiah was not one to be moved by any she's tears. "You do not know?" said he; "this is strange, Mistress, and shows a lamentable lightness of mind," and he got him to discourse again, showing the brimstone end of light minds and untruthful tongues.

But Dulcina, sobbing in good earnest now, complained, "How can I know when she is not here? I have not so much as seen the back of the creature since he took her away from the church!"

Tobiah stayed his discourse: "Is that so?" said he, and when she nodded he rose. "Mistress," said he, "I blush for you; for your deceptions and lies, both small and great; your immodest conduct, your trickery and ill-doings. By the Lord's mercy the evil may yet turn out well for those you thought to cozen; but there is still a reckoning to be paid, and it is clear that there is none but you to pay it."

With that he took his departure.

On the way home he stayed at the farm of Tall Trees and left a message bidding Marvel to supper on the morrow.

"And mind you," he said to the maid who took the message, "he shall not come on his horse, he is to bring some shay."

This in due time was told to Marvell, and though it puzzled him some, he was quite ready to obey the order for the sake of the invitation and the glimmer of hope the hearing it gave him.

On the morning of the next day Tobiah said to Virtue, "I expect one to sup to-night," and he bade her make needful preparations.

She made them, but without any spirit or lightness of heart ; very sure was she now that Marvell had gone back to his old allegiance. When the hour of supper approached, Tobiah bade her dress herself ; she did so, donning the snuff-coloured gown the good man had given her at the last Christmas, by which time in her rapid growth she had outgrown the one he gave her before. She did not decorate herself that evening, she had no heart, only folded a white kerchief about her shoulders. But while she stood by her chamber window to fasten the folds she heard a voice in the street. At the sound of it the colour flushed up in her cheeks, and turning about she sighted the rose some child had given her that morning. She took it and put it in her breast, though the roses in her cheeks were pinker still when she came down the steep narrow stairs.

Supper would have been a quiet some meal had it not been for Tobiah, neither Virtue nor Marvell had much to say ; but the worthy Dissenter held suitable discourse. When all was done he said, "Before going further I have a word to say to you, concerning a matter whereof I have heard three several accounts. It is touching the affair of your wedding, Richard Marvell."

"Oh !" said Marvell, and "Ah !" said Virtue, and the one went red and the other white. But Tobiah continued without regarding them : "You told me a

tale of it, Marvell ; and this young woman previously told me another of it ; and a certain hussy, misnamed lady, likewise told me somewhat of it ; I will tell first what I heard from the last."

And he told it, not suffering himself to be interrupted. And great was the relief of Marvell when he heard how Dulcina had lied and really knew nothing of the lost wife at all ; but Virtue never looked up."

"Now," said Tobiah, "I will go on to what you, Richard Marvell, confessed." But there was little of that to tell, seeing that what Marvell feared was already dispersed by the first telling.

"As to what was told by the young woman Virtue May,"—said Tobiah.

"Virtue !" cried Marvell, "Virtue."

"Yes," said Tobiah, "that is her name ; at least so she declared to me on the night I first saw her, that was two years gone and more—a night in May—the date—let me consider——"

But Marvell did not heed, his eyes and his thoughts were all for Virtue's face. And she did not heed, for she never once looked up, though somehow she knew all about Dick's ardent looks.

"Ha !" cried Tobiah, "I bethink me ! I had promised not to tell that tale ! Well, Master Marvell, you cannot hear it from me, but maybe you will hear it from your wife."

And maybe he did, for they drove home together in the moonlight ; but the horse who took them only heard him say, "Can ever you forgive me that I sorrowed for such a thing as she when fate gave me you ?"

And she answered, "Forgive ? Why I loved you, and I love you now !"

But that is explaining enough after all ; for love

explains all and forgives all, both for men and for women, aye, and for God.

So Marvel and Virtue came together after all and lived in great happiness. But a reckoning had to be paid for the misdoings of that May day and, as Tobiah had warned her, the fair Dulcina had to pay it. It chanced that Sir Pomeroy, coming to her soon after the departure of Tobiah, heard of that good man's visit and the reason thereof, and was pleased to take high offence thereat. He cared nothing that Marvell should have been tricked or Virtue deceived, but he was mightily disgusted at the station of them both. Said he, "It is not fitting that a Lady Cassillis should take her pleasure with country clowns," and "I owe it to my name not to wed one whose tastes are so poor." So he gave Dulcina the go by and sought out a lady of more circumspection. And for Dulcina, thus left in the lurch, there was nothing better to do than to send Miss Twinger and maid Kate packing, declaring with rage that it was all their fault. But Tobiah the Dissenter knew better, he saw the hand of the Lord in the matter.

This affair of Richard Marvell and Virtue May was the last connubial matter in which Tobiah the Dissenter took a hand. Therein, as in all previous ones here recorded, his working tended, not only to the benefit of those concerned, but also to the advancement of righteousness. But this will not always be the case when a man, even a godly one, interests himself in the affairs of others, notably those in the married state. The which Tobiah knew right well ; so, having his efforts crowned with success in all these affairs, he afterwards held his hand, contenting himself with the legitimate work of the preacher. To wit—the discovery of the wicked, the punishing of the wrong-doer, the encouraging of the good, the exhorting all and sundry to the paths of righteousness, and compelling them to walk in the same. Bringing the Word of the Lord, in season and out of season into all places—the kitchen and the shop, the home and the highway, the hostel and the hall, so that by all means some of we poor worms of earth may be forcibly persuaded to mount Jacob's ladder which reached unto Heaven.

THE END

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